

American Bible Society: Bible sales show steep rise during pandemic, but “Scripture engagement” doesn’t follow

PHILADELPHIA, Penn. (BP and local reports) – Americans bought more Bibles in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread, but a major study shows Scripture engagement during the pandemic was no greater than the prior year.

Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention and Thomas Nelson Bibles, both headquartered in Nashville, saw increases in Bible sales which a Thomas Nelson executive described as industry-wide.

However, the American Bible Society (ABS) in Philadelphia, in conducting its tenth annual State of the Bible research in early 2020 followed by a special COVID-19 study months later, found that Scripture engagement slacked after the pandemic began.

There is no formal or generally-accepted definition of Scripture engagement. The *Forum of Bible Agencies International in New York City* describes it as “encountering God’s Word in a life-changing way.”

ABS stated, “While State of the Bible data show that Scripture engagement was up significantly in January [2020], compared to the same time in 2019, by June Scripture engagement had fallen to below 2019 levels.”

January 2020’s Scripture engagement of 70.9 million adults, or 27.8%, marked the highest level since 2011 but by the first week of June, engagement had fallen to 22.6%, ABS reported. The decrease means 13.1 million Americans were no longer

consistently interacting with Scripture, a change ABS contributed to the “significant pressure” of the COVID-19 crisis.

Women were previously more scripturally engaged than men, but engagement during the pandemic appeared equal between the two genders, according to ABS.

The two industry leaders didn’t reveal the percentage increase in sales, but Lifeway sold 2.5 million Bibles in 2020 and Thomas Nelson said it saw its best sales in eight to 10 years. Lifeway’s Bible sales remained strong as the pandemic began.



Mandrell

“We believe the growth in Bible sales during those early months of the pandemic was no accident, as people often go to the Bible as a source of hope in times of crisis and uncertainty,” said Lifeway President and CEO Ben Mandrell. “People draw hope from Scripture because in it they see a God who is with us during our suffering.

“The Bible, as God’s words to us, is a reminder that He doesn’t leave us to walk through difficult times alone. Scripture has a way of bringing hope and healing in times of difficulties.”

The Tony Evans Study Bible and the She Reads Truth Bible drove sales, with the Holy Land Illustrated Bible, the Ancient Faith Study Bible, and the CSB Scripture Notebooks recording strong showings. The Heroes Bible did well during the pandemic, with editions specifically designed for doctors, nurses, emergency medical personnel, military members, firefighters, and law

enforcement personnel.

Philip Nation, vice president and publisher at Thomas Nelson Bibles, described the company's sales as "one of the best years in many years in terms of the number of Bibles that we've seen produced and purchased by what we assume to be a clear mix of established Bible readers and new Bible readers. Most Bible publishers have seen an increase in Bible sales just across the board during the pandemic."

Thomas Nelson is focusing on Bible engagement through its Abide Bible and complementary Abide Bible book journals, Nation said. "Now we see a greater need in the marketplace for people to have editions of the Bible that focus on personal engagement with the Scripture and not just simply informing them of the scholarship."

ABS conducted its initial 2020 State of the Bible study in January and early February, including 2,010 interviews with adults in all states and Washington, D.C. ABS followed the initial research with a special COVID-19 study May 28-June 10, surveying 3,020 adults from across the nation.

For information and a free e-book on the ABS State of the Bible report, visit <https://sotb.research.bible/>.