

John H. Walton & Craig S. Keener (eds.)
NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. Pp. 2408.

Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible was available with NIV (2016) and NKJV versions (2017) but in 2019 a publishing house Zondervan published *NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* (Protestant Canon). NRSV is considered ecumenical translation because the translation committee consists of men and women who are among the top scholars in America which come from Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and includes a Jewish scholar. For this reason, this translation was vetted by Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Jewish scholars.

Authors are both renowned scholars: John H. Walton (Old Testament editor) and Craig S. Keener (New Testament editor) and in the section *Quick Start Guide* (p. iii) they both point similar thing: “Even though the Bible was written *for* us it is not written *to* us” (Walton); “Everything in the Bible was written in particular times and cultures. So even though everything in it is for all time, not everything in it is for all circumstances. The better we understand the circumstances a passage originally addressed, the more confidently we can reapply its message to appropriate circumstances today” (Keener).

Down these lines, NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible brings us features such as:

- Targeted book introductions that explain the context in which each book of the Bible was written.
- Insightful and informative verse-by-verse study notes that reveal new dimensions of insight to even the most familiar passages.
- Key Old Testament (Hebrew) and New Testament (Greek) terms are explained and expanded upon in two helpful reference features.
- Over 300 in-depth articles on key contextual topics.
- 375 full-color photos, illustrations, and images from around the world.
- Dozens of charts, maps, and diagrams in vivid color.
- Additional study Bible tools: cross-references, NRSV Authorized Concise Glossary and Concordance, indexes, and other help.

So before one step into the Old Testament, a reader is introduced to the “Description of the meaning of Hebrew words that have no exact equivalent in English” (pp. xx-xxviii), “Ancient texts relating to the Old Testament” (pp. xxix-xxxi), “Old Testament chronology” (pp. xxxiii-xxxvii), and “Major Background Issues

from the Ancient Near East” (pp. xli–xliii). After the Old Testament and before the New Testament, a reader is introduced to the “The Time Between the Testaments” (pp. 1591–1597) that explains socio-political and religious events in the intertestamental period, “Key New Testament Terms” (pp. 1598–1605) and “New Testament chronology” (pp. 1607–1608). After one finishes reading the New Testament, a reader is introduced to the “Index of Articles in Canonical Order” (pp. 2293–2298), “Index of Articles in Alphabetical Order” (pp. 2299–2304), “NRSV Authorized Concise Glossary and Concordance” (pp. 2305–2389) as well as “Index to Maps” (pp. 2390–2392) and “Maps” (pp. 2393–2408).

NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible is a product in which “academia” and “church” or scholarly theology and average Christians are joint together. Average Christian maybe will not be eager to read “The Lost World Series” by John Walton or some book or commentary by Craig S. Keener, but study Bibles such as these are valuable tools where Christians can access the best of scholarship in the form that is not to complex or threatening for them, especially if they are suspicious about theology as an academic discipline.

But studying the Bible from a cultural perspective is likewise important and even crucial for biblical literacy. The Bible is both a divine and human book because God spoke through people. Hence, if we want to properly and fully understand what God said, we have to know “people” through whom he spoke. Otherwise, this original human element will inevitably be replaced with contemporary “human,” and start to read and interpret the Bible through the lenses of our contemporary culture, contexts, worldviews, questions, experiences, etc. This then results in misunderstanding or distortion of God’s message in the worst case, or a shallow understanding of God’s word in the best case.

NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible is a study Bible that should be part of private and church libraries. It is a valuable tool for biblical literacy especially because this Bible seeks to understand the space and time in which biblical events happened. Walton’s knowledge of ANE (Ancient Near East) and Keener’s understanding of Jewish culture but also the Greco-Roman world in which New Testament events occurs are insightful resources for all those who love the Scripture.

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