



Köstenberger, Andreas J., et al.

The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament

Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009. Pp. xxi + 954. Hardcover. \$59.99. ISBN 9780805443653.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

As I look at my bookcases I see no less than 5 proper New Testament introductions. In addition to these I have another 2 volumes in digital format. And all of this is to say nothing of the introductory works I have on specific parts of the NT, such as the Gospels or Paul's letters. So with such a proliferation of material introducing readers to the NT what makes one volume stand out above another? For some it will be a mere matter of preference. Do you prefer a volume that is written from a fairly conservative evangelical position or do you want something a little to the left of that? Are you looking for something that's heavily focused on background material or something geared more towards the theology of each book? Do you want something very detailed or something more general? Whatever your preference there is a NT intro to suit your fancy.

So back to the initial question: what makes *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles stand out above other NT intros? It's written from a conservative evangelical perspective but so is D. A. Carson and Doug Moo's excellent *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. Both volumes proceed along the lines that Scripture is inspired, inerrant, and supremely authoritative. It provides a plethora of sociological and historical background material but Burge, Cohick, & Green's *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament Within Its Cultural*

Contexts does this as well, and it does it extremely well. It devotes a lot of time and space to the issues of canonization, but Bruce Metzger's *The New Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content* covers the same ground, as does McDonald & Porter's *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature*. So once more, what commends this volume above the others?

There are a few things. To start this volume does everything that all the other volumes do. They all cover the history, literature, and background of the NT but this volume does it just as well, if not better than the others, and it does so in light of and in reference to previous intros. This brings us to the second feature that makes this volume worthy of our time and attention; it's up to date. One thing I've come to greatly appreciate and respect about Köstenberger is that he does his homework and it seems that his partners do as well. This volume is heavily footnoted and contains a plethora of bibliographies for suggested further reading and the material spans the theological spectrum and references major works in the fields being addressed. I've come to find that conservative writers often reference their less conservative counterparts while the reverse is not always the case.

Perhaps the most important thing, from a Christian perspective, is that it's Christocentric. The book's title *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* is a pithy summary of the central focus of the NT: Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and return. There is a constant focus on what the text says about Christ especially with reference to redemptive history. The authors view Christ as they argue he viewed himself, i.e., as the "fulfillment of God's purposes for and promises to Israel." (45) And that's another thing that I appreciate about this volume; it doesn't shy away from theology. It doesn't purport to be some disinterested and objective source presenting nothing but brute facts. It discusses the theology of the NT writers, the theology of the early Christians, and what this means for modern believers.

The layout of this intro is exquisite. Each chapter begins with a brief section called "Core Knowledge," in which the reader is told what they should know with a basic, intermediate, or advanced knowledge of the subject matter. Then we're given a table of "key facts" (author, date, provenance, destination, purpose, theme, key verses) for the book under discussion (the key facts are omitted in chapters 1, 2, and 21 since these chapters address different subject matter). These key facts are then detailed as subsections of the section on "History." This is followed by a "Literature" section that discusses the literary plan and provides an outline of the book under consideration; after this is the "Unit-by-Unit Discussion," which functions as a miniature commentary. A section on "Theology" comes next where major theological themes are discussed, and this is followed by a section on the book's "Contribution to the Canon." Each chapter is

rounded out with a series of “Study Questions” and a bibliography “For Further Reading.” Amidst all of this are a number of sidebars, tables, and maps with a helpful glossary as well as detailed name, subject, and Scripture indices in the back.

And that’s really the strength of this volume—the thing that commends its use over others—it’s a pedagogical masterpiece. This intro can be used to teach courses at the undergraduate or graduate level. It can be used to lead church or family Bible studies. It can be followed to the letter or adapted as necessary. For example, if one disagrees with the authors’ stance on the authorship of the Gospels they can simply skip over it and substitute their own findings while making use of the rest of the material. Or they can ask whatever study questions they deem most important and supplement them with some of their own. Its layout and content make this an extremely versatile resource. I can’t imagine that any teacher or student wouldn’t benefit from it, unless of course they’re fundamentally opposed to the presuppositions of the authors, in which case using this book would still be beneficial in providing an alternative viewpoint.

If there’s one area that the authors could have improved on then it would have been the chapter on “The Political and Religious Background of the New Testament” (58-99). I understand that this is an introduction and it is supposed to cover the broad scope of things, but the information provided in this chapter does not seem to be enough to get the student to the level of advanced knowledge detailed in the beginning of the chapter. Sketch summaries are fine as far as they go, but when it came to the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Dead Sea Scrolls we’re really told very little other than the most basic information. The suggestions for further reading will certainly supplement this but more could have been said in this volume without being overly detailed or cumbersome. This shortcoming aside, I would gladly recommend this volume to students at varying levels of study and teachers in academic or church settings.