

New Moody Atlas of the Bible, Crossway ESV Bible Atlas, and Zondervan Atlas of the Bible

Barry J. Beitzel. *New Moody Atlas of the Bible*. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 2009. 304 pp. \$49.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780802404411.

John D. Currid and David P. Barrett. *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. 352 pp. \$55.00 (Introductory price: \$49.99). Hardcover. ISBN: 9781433501920.

Carl G. Rasmussen. *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. 304 pp. \$39.99. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780310270508.

This review compares three recent Bible atlases, focusing on physical characteristics, contents, and ease of use. The atlases come in a range of sizes; the *New Moody Atlas of the Bible* measures 11.2 x 8.6 in., the *Crossway ESV Bible Atlas* is 11.9 x 9.3 in., and the *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* measures 10.9 x 8.4 in. The difference is noticeable when one looks for items on maps, as the larger sizes allow for more detail and larger type. The Moody and ESV atlases are bound so that they can lie flat on a table or desk, while the Zondervan is bound more like a typical book, which makes it more difficult to use.

The Moody atlas covers geographical features and locations relevant to the Bible. Beitzel begins with a description of why geography is relevant to understanding the Bible. Readers will find the presentation to be “contemporary,” both in the sense that contemporary examples are used (the preface begins with a reference to Starbucks) and that geographical features are often described in terms of modern location names (e.g., the Atlantic-Himalayan mountain range that forms the northern border of the ancient Near East and extends to Nepal). The Moody atlas, in addition to providing the information expected in an atlas, addresses both geographical questions, such as the location of sites not known with certainty like Ai, and historical matters like what sort of place the *kataluma* (inn) was at which there was no room for Mary and Joseph in Luke 2:7. The book is written for an educated audience and assumes some knowledge of the Bible, though Beitzel often summarizes events in enough detail that even without knowing a given story, a reader will be able to follow the text.

Chapter One describes the “Physical Geography of the Land,” which includes not only the physical features but also treats travel by land and sea and the methods for identifying biblical sites. Next the *Atlas* describes the world of Palestine as a component of the Fertile Crescent, as “a Land Prepared by God,” historical terminology, and geopolitical districts. Beitzel also describes the geology, hydrology, climate, and forestation of Palestine, making it clear that the “Promised Land” left much to be desired. Issues related to locating ancient cities are also described. The discussion of the difficulties of ancient travel includes information on the importance of caravans. Chapter Two covers the historical geography of the biblical world. This goes from linguistic and geographical evaluation of the probable location of the Garden of Eden through to the spread of Christianity in the Roman world. Beitzel makes use of place names in cognate languages, such as Akkadian and Sumerian, makes regular reference to texts from antiquity, and interacts with other views. For example, he notes the “fanciful” locations suggested for the Garden of Eden (e.g., Australia, India, and the North Pole), John Calvin’s analysis of the location of Eden, and

prior attempts to dismiss a possible Sumerian location by an incorrect assessment of the northern extent of the Persian Gulf in antiquity in other Bible atlases. The Zondervan and Crossway atlases also treat this topic, but in less detail. In general, Beitzel presents more of the details regarding disagreements over site identification.

Chapter Two of the Moody atlas is divided into several small sections, each accompanied by at least one map to illustrate the topic. For example, in the section “Egypt Campaigns into Canaan,” the accompanying map indicates the routes of Egyptian armies into Canaan. There are maps for many biblical narratives, not only those one would expect, like the possible route of the Exodus, but also less-expected items, such as a map for the encounter between David and Goliath (Map 57). Each map has a legend with several icons, such as “City,” “City (location unknown),” “City of Philistine pentapolis,” “Philistine camp,” “Israelite camp,” and “clash of forces” (150). Beitzel interacts with many works, and these are listed as notes at the end of the work. The Moody atlas contains many large maps with numerous annotations and icons that provide much more information than mere place names. Beitzel’s accompanying descriptions help make biblical narratives that may seem like little more than a list of where someone went into much more meaningful narratives. For example, Beitzel’s description of the way the geography of the land made Judah somewhat isolated from the rest of Israel offers helpful insights that one would not gain from studying the biblical text or even a map on its own. In addition to a list of general works for further reading, there is a general index, a map citation index, and an index of Scripture citations. The printing on maps in the Moody atlas is very readable. The author states that he opted for the largest map scale possible that allowed any given map to fit on only one page as the best compromise between making maps readable and preventing maps from referring to places “off the edge” of the map. There are, however, several two-page maps. This issue is not explicitly addressed in the other two atlases, though, except for some icons, the other atlases have fairly readable maps as well.

Compared to the previous edition of this atlas (Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* [Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1985]), the new edition has over seventy pages’ more material, has larger dimensions (which makes reading the names on the map easier), has a far more detailed table of contents, has more topics, and is designed to lie flat on a table. However, the earlier edition is worth keeping even if a library purchases the new edition. The old edition has a section at the back on “The History of Biblical Mapmaking” and four pages of “Time Line” that are not in the newer edition.

The Crossway atlas, which incorporates and expands the maps and resources in the *ESV Study Bible*, has three main parts, besides the appendices and indexes. The “Introduction and Overview of the Biblical World” covers topics such as climate, vegetation, and the nature and relationship of archaeology to biblical studies. Noteworthy are two pages of six maps that show average rainfall across the Near East, and two pages of six maps that show average temperatures in the Near East. In general, this atlas uses maps more than text to present information as compared to the other two atlases. Part 2 treats the historical geography of the biblical world. This covers the time span from “Before Abraham,” which describes the settlements and developments from the Paleolithic period to Middle Bronze I in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Palestine, to the “Roman Era.” The authors argue that, based upon archaeological evidence, the patriarchs should be connected initially with Middle Bronze II (unlike the position taken by Rasmussen). Part 3 presents the “Regional Geography of the Biblical World.” This consists of approximately forty pages of maps of specific areas. For example, there is a two-page map of Moab, a one-page map of Philistia, and a two-page map of Jerusalem after the exile. In addition, the Crossway atlas includes a CD-ROM that contains grayscale and color digital images of the historical maps with searchable indexes. The preface explains

how both Windows and Mac users can access and use the search capability, which is helpful in not excluding many readers who might have the “other” kind of computer.

The table of contents of the Crossway atlas is followed by a list of “Special Articles,” maps, and “3-D Maps.” This atlas, like the Zondervan atlas, has “3-D reconstructions of biblical objects.” The Crossway atlas, more than the other two, defines important terms as they appear in the text, such as “stela” and “ostraca.” The special articles cover both topics that are part of the main text in the other two atlases, such as the location of the Garden in Eden, as well as topics not covered explicitly in the other two atlases, such as a short piece on pottery, which describes how pottery is used in dating layers of sites. The Crossway atlas, like the other two, relates place names in the English translation to their other names as used by archaeologists and scholars, so the English translation used by any of the atlases does not affect its usefulness. Drawings are interspersed throughout the atlas, such as three pages of drawings of the tabernacle in the wilderness (both outside and inside views), a circular diagram that shows what crops were grown in each month of the year, and the layout of the temple in Ezekiel 40-48. Unlike the Moody atlas, but like the Zondervan atlas, there are no footnotes or endnotes that indicate works to consult for other opinions or information. This atlas does not have a section devoted to the history of Jerusalem but spaces out that information throughout the atlas. The spread of Christianity after Paul’s missionary journeys is treated very briefly and with scant attention paid to the location of the seven churches of Revelation, which seems like an odd omission. The Crossway atlas concludes with a three-page timeline of biblical history, a chart comparing the kings of Israel and Judah, a chart showing the Herodian dynasty, indexes for place names, and Scripture references.

The Zondervan atlas, which appears to be a significantly expanded edition of Rasmussen’s *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), has two main parts, “Geographical Section” and “Historical Section.” The geography section covers the geography of Israel and Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, and Mesopotamia. The geography of Israel and Jordan is by far the most detailed, describing its five longitudinal zones, weather patterns, major routes, and regions. The historical section begins with the pre-patriarchal period, including a description of archaeological evidence from the Early Bronze Age of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the southern Levant. The author weaves many geographical and historical details into the recounting of the biblical stories. These details provide useful insight and fill in gaps in the biblical narratives, with helpful citations of primary non-biblical texts, from Babylonian foundation cylinders to Herodotus. Rasmussen discusses problems, such as the location of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Red/Reed Sea, Mount Sinai, and Bethsaida. After describing current theories, he states that we do not have enough information at present to identify any of these with certainty.

The Zondervan atlas has several “3-D” topographical maps, which are helpful in getting a sense of what a given territory was like. Rasmussen goes into great detail on many things, such as the progress of the Maccabean Revolt. Like the Moody atlas, there is a special section on Jerusalem. The Zondervan atlas offers descriptions of the cities named in the seven letters of Revelation, which are mentioned briefly and shown on a map in the Moody atlas. Rasmussen follows this with a chapter on the “Disciplines of Historical Geography,” which describes the use of philology, toponymy, and archaeology in historical geography. The atlas concludes with a bibliography (but no footnotes or citations of secondary literature), a glossary (quite short), a two-page “Timeline of Biblical History,” indexes of Scripture references and persons, and a dictionary and index of places.

All three atlases are well done, including both maps and photographs. The Zondervan atlas also has various charts, such as one that compares biblical figures and events in Canaan with events and rulers in Egypt from the Late Bronze II A period to Iron I period. The Zondervan atlas has many photographs, with more breadth than the

Moody atlas. It is not always apparent, however, why some photographs, though interesting, are present, such as that of the Parthenon (176), Qumran Cave IV, or a sixth-century A.D. map of Jerusalem (also present in the Crossway atlas). These topics are not specifically addressed in the atlas. The Crossway atlas is distinctive in that many maps have lengthy captions. These make each map sufficient by itself, apart from the text of the atlas, but it consequently creates a fair amount of repetition between the atlas' text and the captions.

The Zondervan atlas offers more detail on topics than do the Moody or Crossway atlases, while the Moody atlas describes the significance of places and events in more detail. The Zondervan atlas mentions the battle of QarQar, while the Moody atlas tells readers why it is important to know about it. While the Moody and Crossway atlases have many icons on most maps and a legend for every map, the Zondervan atlas has many maps without a legend (except for scale) and few symbols beyond beige dots for cities. Both the Moody and Zondervan atlases often note the way the geographical features of a given place contributed to its ease of defense, control of a trade route, or suitability for agriculture.

For maps alone, without detailed information alongside them, the Crossway atlas would be the atlas to use. Since each atlas has its own distinctive maps, photographs, and information, all three would be excellent additions to a library. For providing good integration between maps, photographs, and text, along with good descriptions of the significance of geographical features and events, and documentation for interaction with other scholars, the Moody atlas seems best. For the most detailed information, the Zondervan atlas provides the best choice of the three. If forced to choose, this reviewer would select the Moody atlas as the best choice of the three atlases for a theological or academic library.

Kenneth D. Litwak
Azusa Pacific University

