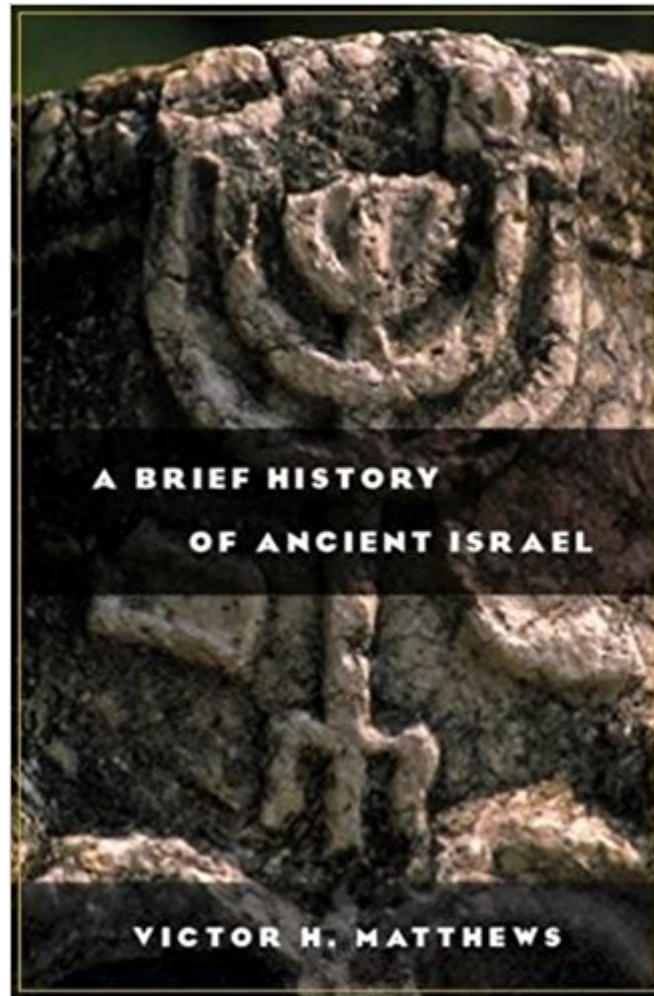




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# A Brief History Of Ancient Israel



## Synopsis

Grounded in the latest archeological developments, Victor Matthews's *A Brief History of Ancient Israel* presents a concise history of Israel covering the ancestral period, conquest and settlement, the monarchy, and both the exilic and postexilic periods. Using supplemental figures and insets, the author concentrates on providing a cogent and condensed discussion of events. He examines historical geography, archaeological data, and, where relevant, comparative cultural materials from other ancient Near Eastern civilizations. With an accessible yet high-quality introduction, *A Brief History of Ancient Israel* will be of immense value to both students of the Old Testament and the scholars who teach them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Victor H. Matthews is Professor of Religious Studies at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. He is the author of *Untold Stories of the Bible*, *The Old Testament: Text and Context*, and *The Social World of Ancient Israel*.

Excellent graduate level coverage and analysis. Really puts historical texts in context in light of extra-biblical information or lack thereof. Great tables showing events and key figures in chronological order.

Text to be used in the Old Testament Class for a group of deacons in academic training.

If you like historical critical method, this book is for you, but it is a disappointment that assumes the bible is historically inaccurate.

I am a History buff and any info that I can get on ancient Israel is like candy to me. Very Good Information

ok

This is a short, concise and readable introduction to the history of Jews, from Genesis to Alexander. I want to emphasize that the organization directly considers Israelite history in relation to the content of the Bible. However, Matthews also makes extensive use of recent archaeology data and scholarly papers. This is meant to be an 'up-to-date' history, and in this aspect it succeeds. Reading is aided by several tables to simplify information. I dare say this is the perfect textbook for an impatient student.

I read this book because I thought it would help me understand the Bible. Boy was I wrong! The author sets out to provide a fair, balanced, and brief overview of the current views of professional scholars of the time. All I can say is, so much the worse for professional scholars! Graduate students may find it helpful. The history recorded in the Old Testament provides the general framework for the discussion, and the author is by no means hostile to scripture, but the general premise for the book is that the OT is political propaganda written hundreds of years after events. The OT authors, according to contemporary academics, were not concerned with recording the actual history of their people, but rather taking sides in political debates of the post-exile period. What's ironic is that while the OT is treated, as a historical source, with contempt, the many other texts and documents from the area are treated with uncritical credulity. Again and again we hear how the OT must be wrong because it contradicts such and such fragment from somewhere else. Why are the other available sources assumed to be true while the OT is assumed to be false? Much is made of archeological research in the area, but given that the vast majority of the evidence has long since turned to dust, I'm skeptical about the conclusions which are drawn from such fragmentary evidence. Just because no archeological evidence has yet turned up for a particular event recorded in the Bible (e.g. the Sinai wanderings) proves nothing; as I said, the evidence is mostly gone, and in situations where there is evidence, the archeologists rarely know where to search. Place names have mostly changed, and exact locations are unknown. We learn that "a

number of historians currently dismiss even the possibility of the existence of a kingdom ruled by David and Solomon during the tenth century" (47). But the author generously allows that David and Solomon were probably powerful local chieftains. Matthews apparently doesn't recognize the formative role of monotheism and the Mosaic revelation played in Israelite history. He repeatedly refers to the ancient Hebrews' "national god," as if Yahweh was simply another god in the ancient pantheons, and ignoring the existence of the Biblical injunctions against idolatry, and especially the burning bush revelation. Monotheism, for him, was just a late invention of the post-exilic period. The burden for any history of ancient Israel should be to explain how and why this nation, and their book, came to play such a formative role in the evolution of Western culture, arguably greater even than the ancient Greeks. To read this book, one would think that the ancient Hebrews were just some ancient people with no particular claim to fame.

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