

Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It? (T&t Clark)

By Lester L. Grabbe

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A number of 'histories of <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 />Israel' have been written over the past few decades yet the basic methodological questions are not always addressed: how do we write such a history and how can we know anything about the history of Israel?

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In *Ancient Israel* Lester L. Grabbe sets out to summarize what we know through a survey of sources and how we know it by a discussion of methodology and by evaluating the evidence. Grabbe's aim is not to offer a history as such but rather to collect together and analyze the materials necessary for writing such a history. His approach therefore allows the reader the freedom, and equips them with the essential methodological tools, to use the valuable and wide-ranging evidence presented in this volume to draw their own conclusions.

The most basic question about the history of ancient Israel, how do we know what we know, leads to the fundamental questions of the study: What are the sources for the history of Israel and how do we evaluate them? How do we make them 'speak' to us through the fog of centuries?

Grabbe focuses on original sources, including inscriptions, papyri, and archaeology. He examines the problems involved in historical methodology and deals with the major issues surrounding the use of the biblical text when writing a history of this period. *Ancient Israel* makes an original contribution to the field but also provides an enlightening overview and critique of current scholarly debate. It can therefore serve as a 'handbook' or reference-point for those wanting a catalog of original sources, scholarship, and secondary studies.

Its user-friendly structure and Grabbe's clarity of style make this book eminently accessible not only to students of biblical studies and ancient history but also to the interested lay reader.

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- Sales Rank: #1245884 in Books
- Published on: 2008-02-25
- Released on: 2008-02-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1

- Dimensions: 233.93" h x 17.40" w x 6.14" l, 1.12 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 328 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Equally well oriented in the historical and archaeological basis for Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern studies and in current theoretical and methodological debates, not many are as qualified as Professor Grabbe to write a volume like this.
Combining a multitude of insights, Professor Grabbe is able to show that robust history is not "just another story". Rather, it must contain positivistic truth in some form. This important new book points out the way for future historians of ancient Israel as situated somewhere in the middle between "postmodernism" and "naïve empiricism""—Hans M. Barstad, University of Edinburgh
(Hans M. Barstad, University of Edinburgh)

'The study of the history of ancient Israel has become in recent years a difficult and confusing arena, full of loud and discordant voices and yet crying out for a serious and substantial guide to all the noise. Lester Grabbe, one of the most prolific scholars in the field, offers in *Ancient Israel* a clear and tightly packed review of all the essential issues in reconstructing Israelite history. Particularly striking is his detailed appreciation of the archaeological data, without which, as he demonstrates, a history of ancient <?xml:namespace prefix = st1 ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:smarttags" />Israel would suffer gross distortion and incompleteness. At the same time, Grabbe remains acutely aware of the Hebrew Bible and the challenge of using it as a source on ancient Israel. His summary lists of what, in the light of critical analysis and comparison of the non-Biblical evidence, may be historically accurate, or probable, or inaccurate in the Biblical accounts is only one of the many pluses in this valuable book.'
Peter Machinist, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages, Harvard University, USA

"There can be no better guide to the subject than **Professor Grabbe**, both for the thoroughness of his discussions and for the convincing nature of his conclusions."
Reviewed in *Church Times,* 2008

"Professor Grabbe has once again admirably served the community of scholars in ancient Israelite history with his newest volume, Ancient Israel...Ancient Israel is a tremendously informed and useful book that readers will find very helpful in a variety of contexts, whether for general pedagogical purposes or as a reader in the seminar context or as a reference tool in the research environment. It is a welcome change of course, given that progress in the field otherwise had all but become stagnant in the rather polarized, late twentieth-century world of minimalism versus maximalism (although one might aver that such a polarizing stage constitutes a predictable [and necessary?] one in the process of intellectual advancement). Readers will be immensely indebted to Professor Grabbe for Ancient Israel. It invited extensive and detailed engagement." - Brian B. Schmidt, *Review of Biblical Literature,* August 2008 (Brian B. Schmidt)

"Grabbe's methodology is firmly emphasized: all potential sources should be considered; preference should be given to original sources; the *longue durée* must always be kept in mind; each episode or event has to be judged on its own merits; all reconstructions are provisional; all reconstructions must be argued for. Grabbe notes that writing a history of ancient Israel and Judah is no different than writing any other history and "the most fruitful method is the multiple-source approach." An excellent current 55-page bibliography is a

significant strength. Summing up: Recommended. Upper-level undergraduates through faculty/researchers." - H. M. Szpek, *CHOICE*, August 2008 (H. M. Szpek *CHOICE*)

'Few areas of recent scholarly investigation have been conductedas vigorously, vehmently, and at times even viciously, as the history of ancient Israel. This volume provides a clear and balanced introduction to the issues at the forefront of this debate and Grabbe is well place to offer such an advanced introduction'.
Charlotte Hempel, University of Birmingham
Journal of Jewish Studies, LIX No 2, Autumn 2008
(Charlotte Hempel)

"A most valuable addition to all existing handbooks on the history of ancient Israel."
International Review of Biblical Studies, vol. 54:2007/08

"The book contains much that the evangelical reader will appreciate ... I am happy to have Grabbe's *Ancient Israel* on my bookshelf."
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, December 2008

"The amount of material amassed by Grabbe will prove useful studying Israelite history, and his comments on it are always intelligent and interesting, even where opinions may differ."
(J.A. Emerton *Journal for The Study of the Old Testament*)

"Grabbe's method of presentation ensures that readers have enough information to form their own conclusions about ancient Israel, or at least to locate and evaluate the relevant sources themselves....the book is a valuable addition to the shelf of the biblical scholar. Pastors and lay readers will likely find it surprising in many ways, including the information it provides about what ancient historical sources recorded about 'ancient Israel,' how this information cannot help confirm or refute many biblical stories, and how little written evidence (outside the Bible) ancient Israel left of itself." - *Interpretation* (*Interpretation*)

"This book is not a history as such but an attempt to discuss the issues relating to writing a history of Israel. Grabbe guides the reader through this thickest of questions, giving the pros and cons on each question, but tending toward the so-called minimalist position although he avoids the *ad hominen* arguments that are common in this field today... The bibliography is first rate, with forty items by the author himself." — *Currents in Theology and Mission* (*Currents In Theology and Mission*)

"This book admirably fills a gap in the scholarly discussion of the history of Ancient Israel. Lester Grabbe brings forward all of the relevant evidence—structures, epigraphy, inscriptions, material remains, literary records—and walks the reader carefully through all the aspects of them. The vast bibliography—running 54 pages!—identifies the *in situ* origins of the material and the subsequent scholarly discussions. The book, then, serves as a *vademecum* for historical analysis, and it can serve as a model for illustrating how historical inquiry of any subject should be conducted."
-Leo Madden, *Catholic Books Review*

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Combining a multitude of insights, Professor Grabbe is able to show that robust history is not "just another story". Rather, it must contain positivistic truth in some form. This important new book points out the way for future historians of ancient Israel as situated somewhere in the middle between "postmodernism" and

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About the Author
Lester L. Grabbe is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism at the University of Hull.He is founder and convenor of the European Seminar in Historical Methodology.A recent book is *Ancient Israel:What Do We Know and How Do We Know it?*

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