



# Studying the Ancient Israelites: A Guide to Sources and Methods

*Victor H. Matthews*

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The Old Testament was not written in a vacuum. It was written by and to a specific people who lived within specific social, historical, political, and literary contexts not only of their own culture but also of the surrounding peoples. Clearly, an understanding of ancient Israel and the ancient Near East is essential for proper interpretation of the Bible.

Unfortunately, as readers seek this kind of understanding, they are confronted with a variety of competing opinions and methods regarding the culture, history, sociology, and geography of the biblical story. Does archaeology "prove" the Bible? Is the Bible history, and if so, what kind? How should the Old Testament be approached as literature? These and other questions are addressed in *Studying the Ancient Israelites*, which provides a guide to the tools, methods, and goals of the study of ancient Israel. The book also examines the insights that can be gained from geography, archaeology, literary study, sociology, and historiography as well as the limitations of each of these disciplines. Here is an excellent text for Old Testament study.

"Not only does Matthews write with the authority of a scholar with years of experience in the cultures of Israel and the ancient Near East, he also writes to bring the material to the educated layperson. This is an excellent background work, thus I would encourage all to read it as a prelude to any study of Israel. *Studying the Ancient Israelites* is full of practical, sensible help in understanding ancient Israel. The work contains specific examples concerning the various disciplines that have been used to study ancient Israel: archaeology, sociology, historical geography, historiography, and literary approaches."

--**Mark W. Chavalas**, professor of history, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

"Matthews is a sure-footed guide for students looking for help in sorting out the claims and counterclaims of scholars. This concise volume clearly introduces readers to the various issues surrounding the study of the ancient Israelites, offering insightful comments on the methods used in the investigation and why they are important."--**J. Andrew Dearman**, professor of Old Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

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