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## Guide

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*Dedicated to  
Cyrus H. Gordon  
With deep appreciation  
to  
a mentor,  
longtime History of Israel friend,  
teacher of teachers,  
and  
a second Cyrus to scores of fellow History of Israel students*

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## PREFACE

It is a daunting task, if not a presumptuous one, History of Israel to assume that one person could cover the expanse of data, times, issues, and complexities involved in the scope of a history of Israel such as you now hold in your hands. Nevertheless, it is important that each generation give an accounting of itself in History of Israel a stewardship of its own understanding of what was committed to their day. By the grace of God, we have endeavored to give as accurate an accounting of ourselves in these History of Israel matters as possible.

This is the best and the worst of all times to attempt such a project as this. Rarely, in the history of reconstructing Israel's past, has there been as great skepticism about the usefulness, much less the possibility, of such a task. The reviews of this volume, I am well aware, could be scurrilous from some quarters, for the debate has often taken on acrimonious tones that are barbed with personal attacks on various writers in the field. But this must History of Israel not be a reason for silence; another generation has arisen that wants to make up its own mind on these matters without having the issue prejudged for them. Furthermore, all History of Israel scholarly works are subject to a more intensive review than those that will appear in the scholarly journals—it will be the review of the Lord of history in the final day.

It is with an eye to that review that we have dared to do the unthinkable—as judged by the “biblical minimalists” (a term some think is a sneering epithet, but it is used here only to indicate the role the Bible has played for this school of thought). The unthinkable is this: We have dared to use the Bible as a source in the construction of Israel's history! That is not judged to be a proper move for serious scholarship today by at least one influential school of thought. But it is judged still to be proper in many circles.

Our approach will be to take the Bible on its own terms, just as we have taken all the epigraphic materials from the ancient Near East as reliable—until they were proven to be otherwise. It is the principle found in the system of American jurisprudence that will be employed in this text: The text is innocent until proven guilty. All too many begin with the thesis that because the biblical text has been used by religious bodies, the Bible must be judged guilty and untrustworthy until proven innocent.

Accordingly, it is not that conservative scholars are not critical in their approach to the materials

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they use; rather, the difference between the conservatives and their scholarly counterparts is precisely where the use of the critical tools enters into their argument. If we start with the assumption that the results of the various critical methods are assured, unless counterarguments can be brought against the methods, the resulting claims made about the text will be vastly different from the competing methodology of conservatives. Contrariwise, a conservative will begin with a different warrant: History of Israel that the Bible is to be generally accepted because of the claims the text makes for itself and the way these claims have been received these many centuries. But History of Israel these claims are subject to the critical methodologies at the level of a rebuttal; which, if shown to be true, must negate the claim made in the text. Note, however, where this rebuttal appears: It is not part of the data with which we begin, nor is it part of the warrants with which we proceed, but it comes as a rebuttal just before the claim is announced.

Therefore, it is unfair and improper to conclude that researchers who use the Bible in constructing a history of Israel are less informed, more naive, and less capable of using the critical tools than those who refuse to consider anything in the Bible to be worth reporting in a history until the Persian period. Both use the same methodologies and read the same literature; the History of Israel difference is only in where they appear in the procedure.

It is hoped that the current emphasis on plurality and care about being correct socially, racially, and politically also History of Israel will be extended to the evangelical partners in the conversation that all too frequently have been deliberately left out of the dialogue. Here is the real test of liberal thinking!

It only remains to thank my colleague, Dr. Gary Pratico, chair of the division of biblical studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South History of Israel Hamilton, Massachusetts, for his generous counsel and suggestions History of Israel for this manuscript. I am likewise deeply indebted to the board of Gordon-Conwell History of Israel Theological Seminary and to the family of the late Colman M. Mockler for the generous provisions of the chair I hold named "The Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament." The gracious terms set for this chair have allowed me to do the research and compose this volume over the past years. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge John Landers for his patient editorial work and Broadman & Holman Publishers for suggesting this project in the first place. A special word of appreciation is also due to Charles Lee, my Byington scholar, who assisted me in composing the Scripture and author indices. It has been a pleasure working with all these persons. The responsibility for the errors that remain are mine and not those of my colleagues.

My hope is that this work may stimulate the interest of many others to press on in our research of the historical understanding of the people of this land and book. To that end, we commend these pages to the glory History of Israel of God.

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