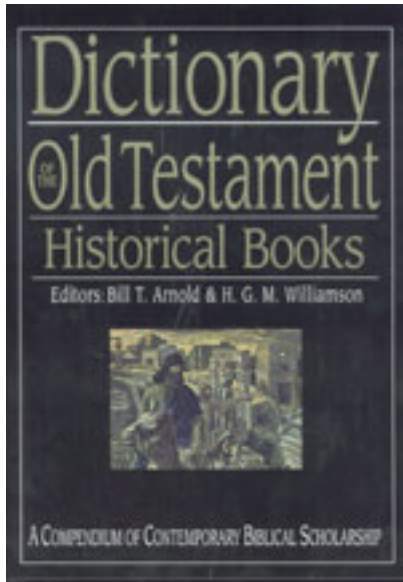


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Arnold, Bill T., and H. G. M. Williamson, eds.

Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books

Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005. Pp. xxiii + 1060. Hardcover. \$50.00. ISBN 0830817824.

Bruce A. Power

William and Catherine Booth College
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada M1K 4W8

No reference volume quite like this one has been available in the past—a substantial dictionary devoted to the historical books. As such, this work related to the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah stakes out new ground. This is the second volume to appear in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, published by InterVarsity Press, a series that, with its counterpart on the New Testament, seeks to provide reliable and affordable biblical reference works for readers at all levels, from the beginning student of the Bible to the professional scholar. Previous volumes have been acclaimed for the level of scholarship and usefulness attained, and the current volume certainly maintains, if not exceeds, the standard set in the earlier works. In a series of major interpretive articles, a broad range of significant topics from “Agriculture and Animal Husbandry” to “Zion Traditions” are provided with carefully researched and thoughtfully articulated entries. Given the increasing complexity of serious study in the historical books, it is a welcome discovery to find that a reliable and up-to-date guide at an affordable price is no longer merely a desideratum. While such reference books are not typically “read,” such an exercise would provide the reader with a solid and scholarly overview of the state of affairs in the field today. One might even consider using selections from the volume to provide a “textbook” for a course concerned with historical Israel and Judah.

The scope of topics considered cover literary and theological concerns as well as archaeological and historical matters. As would be anticipated, articles on the individual biblical books as well as on the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's Histories are included. Other entries consider the significant political entities Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia, and there are also articles pertaining to the smaller surrounding states. Particularly valuable is a series of extended discussions of the history of Israel from the settlement to the postexilic period in which the problems faced by the historian in considering the biblical presentations of these eras are thoroughly considered. In all areas of discussion, while scholars have developed their own considered opinions on particular matters of historicity and interpretation, care has been given that alternative viewpoints are presented and considered. As such, the treatment is sufficiently broad-based to encourage readers to think through and formulate their own opinions about the matters considered in the text and to consider the exploration of alternative points of view. The editors have ensured the consistency of this approach in both the contents of the articles and the provision of wide-ranging bibliographical references. This methodological approach should make the volume of particular value to students and to those whose areas of research may not have allowed them to remain current in the debates about historicity that have been so much a part of recent discussion in the historical books.

By design, the volumes in this series contain no brief entries. Instead, headings between the articles and the indices are intended to be used by the reader to locate discussions of many items that might have a brief entry of its own in a traditional Bible dictionary, but here are considered within more substantial articles. For example, Jonathan, Ishbaal, and Michal do not have separate entries but are considered as part of larger topics such as "Saul and Saul's family." Rather than individual articles on Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram, discussion of these characters is included in an entry on the Omride Dynasty, while members of the Jehu Dynasty are considered under that heading. This approach limits the number of entries by grouping subjects together, a procedure that also allows for a larger context to be provided to topics under discussion.

As scholars working in these texts are well aware, the problem of distinguishing between what actually happened in the past and history as a written record has become a matter of great debate in recent years. Wading through areas of scholarship awash in controversy, cognizant of competing viewpoints, and working to find sound methodological approaches to history and history writing, the contributors to this volume are to be commended for the fair and balanced manner with which they have presented their own views while reviewing alternative evaluations of their topics. While having to contend with many contentious areas within biblical studies, the articles are consistently well organized and readable and reward the effort to consult them. Many topics catch your attention as you thumb your way to the article you want to consult, and one can readily

find such distraction rewarding. In sum, the volume covers a series of engaging topics that will reward both casual reading and specific consultation.

There is much to learn from this volume. Its use as a resource will provide both reliable information for review and new information to consider. It is unlikely that many readers have been able to remain current with all the varied areas of scholarship represented in the articles in this volume. The editors, Arnold and Williamson, are to be commended for their choice of contributors, an international assemblage of excellence in biblical scholarship. Many of the entries are authored by individuals who have distinguished themselves as significant contributors to the discussion in the areas they discuss. And the organization and range of topics selected by the editors appears most judicious. In sum, the *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* is an excellent resource that should provide a valued resource for years to come. Sound scholarship in an affordable, well-indexed volume, this is a work that will prove its value as a resource. It is highly recommended.