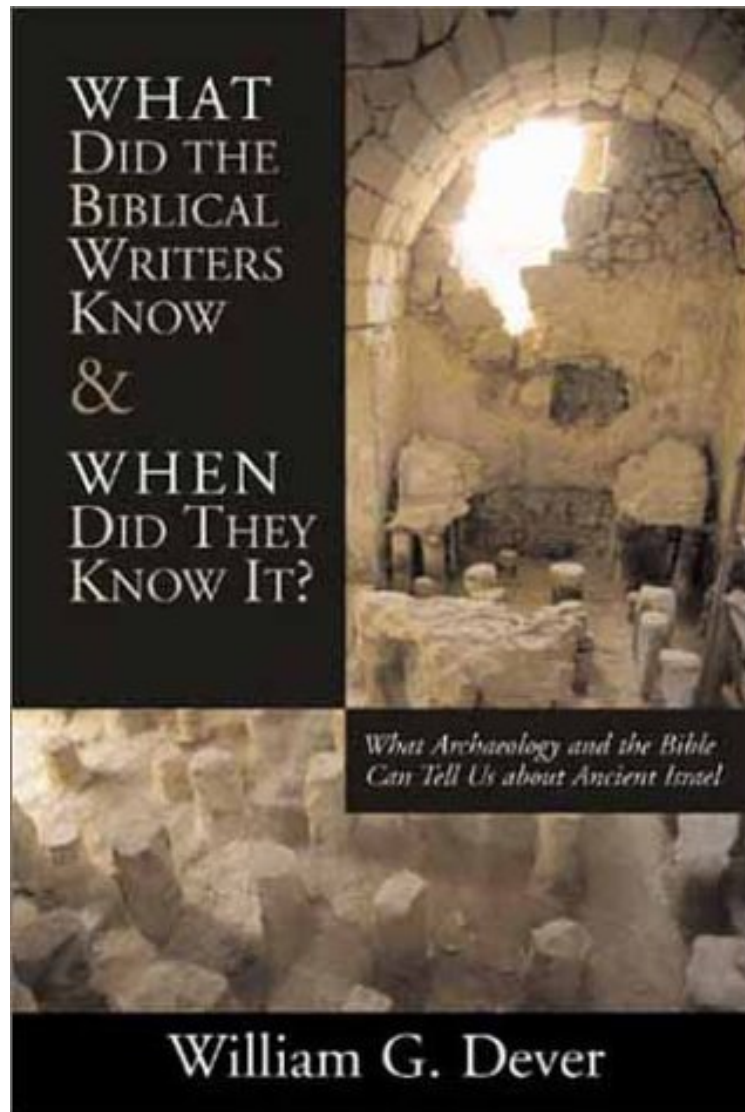


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## What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?: What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel

William G. Dever

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For centuries the Hebrew Bible has been the fountainhead of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Today, however, the entire biblical tradition, including its historical veracity, is being challenged. In this fascinating book noted Syro-Palestinian archaeologist William Dever attacks the minimalist position head-on. Assembling a wealth of archaeological evidence, Dever builds the clearest, most complete picture yet of the real Israel that existed during the Iron Age of ancient Palestine (1200-600 B.C.).

From Publishers Weekly Dever, professor of Near Eastern archaeology and anthropology at the University of Arizona, has excavated in the Near East for the past 35 years. In this book, he gives readers a cross-section of the world of Syro-Palestinian archaeology. As in an archaeological dig, there are some items here that nonexperts will find fascinating, but much of little interest. The book's title and subtitle are misleading: while the text does contain a helpful survey of the ways in which archaeology can (and cannot) illuminate the historicity of the Bible, this amounts to less than half of the total content. Most of the book is a lengthy argument with a group of scholars Dever calls "the Revisionists," who dismiss the idea that archaeological investigation of the Near East can provide any objectively useful data for reconstructing a history of the region. Dever is understandably opposed to such a view. This book therefore contains two different works: one is a helpful introduction to the world of Syro-Palestinian archaeology and its possible interaction with biblical studies, while the other is a diatribe against a certain cadre of scholars and the philosophical background they represent. It will be rare to find a nonspecialist reader who has interest in the former but is also willing to dig through the latter. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Dever (archaeology and anthropology, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson) rigorously challenges revisionists who deny any historical basis for an "ancient Israel" as portrayed in the Old Testament. This minimalist school of thought, which Dever sees as an outgrowth of various postmodern social agendas, has swelled over the past decade, and Dever here compares its pseudo "quest for the historical Israel" to similar reductionist approaches found in the search for the historical Jesus. In contrast to such revisionists, who discredit even the most reliable archaeological evidence such as the ninth-century inscription from northern Israel mentioning the "house of David" and a "king of Israel" Dever provides a judicious analysis of archaeological data and shows how it squares with what much of the biblical text tells us. For instance, a comparison of texts from Judges and Samuel with archaeological remains from highland villages in the Iron Age are found to coincide remarkably. Highly polemical (and for good reason), this book attempts to correct various recent assertions based more on feelings for the modern Israeli-Palestinian question than on any concern for honest history. Alongside the magisterial collection of essays edited by Hershel Shanks, *Ancient Israel* (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1999), Dever's accessible book offers a sound critical examination of Israel's origins. An advisable purchase for all academic and most public libraries. Loren Rosson III, Nashua P.L., NH Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. David Noel Freedman "Dever is one of the very best archaeologists of the Near East, and everything he writes needs to be taken with the utmost seriousness. . . . Required reading." *Library Journal* "Dever provides a judicious analysis of archaeological data and shows how it squares with what much of the biblical text tells us. . . . Highly polemical (and for good reason), this book attempts to correct various recent assertions based more on feelings for the modern Israeli-Palestinian question than on any concern for honest history. . . . Dever's accessible book offers a sound critical examination of Israel's origins. An advisable purchase for all academic and most public libraries." *Publishers Weekly* "A helpful introduction to the world of Syro-Palestinian archaeology and its possible interaction with biblical studies." *The Jerusalem Report* "Meticulously detailed . . . very illuminating, well-informed and surprisingly balanced." Lawrence E. Stager "William Dever, a master of the world of Syro-Palestinian archaeology and history, has written a masterpiece."