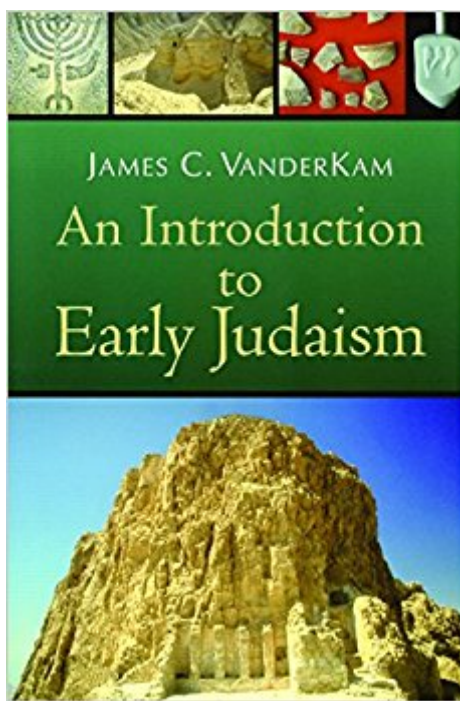


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An Introduction To Early Judaism



Synopsis

One of today's most respected scholars of biblical history and the Dead Sea Scrolls, James C. VanderKam here offers a superb new introduction to early Judaism. Based on the best, most recent archaeological research, this illustrated volume explores the history of Judaism during the Second Temple period (516 B.C.E. - 70 C.E.), describing the body of Jewish literature written during these centuries and the most important groups, institutions, and practices of the time. Particularly interesting are VanderKam's depiction of events associated with Masada and the Kokhba revolt, and his commentary on texts unearthed in places like Elephantine, Egypt, and Qumran. Written in the same accessible style as VanderKam's widely praised Dead Sea Scrolls Today, this volume provides the finest classroom introduction to early Judaism available.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

James VanderKam has proven himself one of the foremost authorities on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the vast literature of Second Temple Judaism - two areas which typically overwhelm the average research student and biblical scholar. Here in this accessible volume (easy to follow, 234 pages), VanderKam provides a succinct overview of the sea of literature and lays the foundation to eliminate the enormous task of getting a hold of the literature from the Second Temple period. It is helpful (especially trying to cut through for the specific task of research) to have a resource which provides a simple and straightforward explanation of the whos, whats and wheres of documents which are filled with people, places and symbols quite foreign to most everything else you learn in church and

typical coursework for New Testament studies. But it remains difficult to overestimate the importance of this literature, as it provides the closest and clearest information of how Judaism interpreted their own Scriptures at the time when the Christian movement emerged. This book is a wonderful introduction and would be a great addition to an introduction or survey course.

I have about 300 books on Near East and Jewish history and Professor VanderKam's book is among my most favorites. Professor VanderKam is a highly respected historian and authority on Jewish history and he has a wonderful way of writing in an enjoyable and understandable way. Others like to impress themselves with unnecessarily complicated prose, but, Professor VanderKam clearly places a priority on conveying his vast knowledge in a sophisticated yet accessible manner. I cannot recommend this book too highly.

This book is very useful as a history of Judaism as it markedly evolved from the Biblical to the Talmudic era. VanderKam is highly conversant with the Dead Sea Scrolls and other recently un-earthed archeological material and integrates their evidence into his historical narrative. Conversely, he gives little indication of being aware of Talmudic aggadot that pertain to this historical era of Judaism's transition. For example there is not even a reference to the Mishna Avot, which is concerned with the rabbinical sages during this period of the development of Judaism.

James Vanderkam's AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY JUDAISM is a good overview of certain aspects of Second Temple Judaism. By far the largest portion of the book is an introduction to the literature of the period (Qumran, the apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, etc.). There is also a fairly long section on history from Persia to Bar Kokhba. Unfortunately the practices, theology and social structures of Judaism are largely ignored.

There is excellence and scholarship to this text. The historical is treated with specifics, succinctly. This was a required textbook, I felt a friend who may not have known of its existence and wished an overview might want. It covered the subject very well. My professor is referred to in the Introduction because he suggested VanderKam would be perfect for the task and authoritative. I recommend it to any beginning student unknowing of the breadth of this topic. It's a springboard to comprehensive study with the original text translations as a companion. It stands as an outline to the subject for a beginner. Great source!

Initially, I was worried that the book would be too broad. Fortunately, as I allowed Vanderkam to speak to my mind, I began to hear wisdom. Unlike some introductions, Vanderkam presents a broad spectrum of summaries and thoughts from the Second Temple Period. He does it in such a way that does not demand extreme smarts of the reader. At the same time, he doesn't assume his reader is stupid. He writes fluidly and to the point. Based on his writing, I would assume that he is a fantastic professor. So, that said, I may just have to apply to a Masters program at Notre Dame in Ancient Judaism. If you are looking for a basic book and introduction to early Judaism, this is perfect. It deals with the primary sources and is not tainted with theological goals, as that is not the purpose of the book. I hope this helps you out!

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