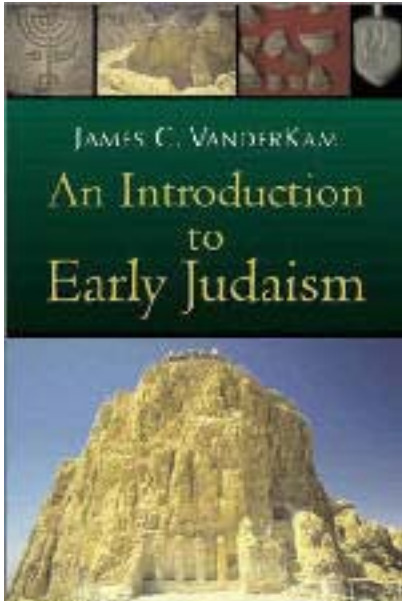


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VanderKam, James C.

An Introduction to Early Judaism

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Pp. xii + 234.
Paper. \$18.00. ISBN 0802846416.

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Professor VanderKam has written an introductory book that follows the format of his previous introduction to the Qumran writings, published also by Eerdmans. The present work focuses almost completely on the complex world of early Judaism, ranging from the return from exile to the great revolt of 70 C.E. and the subsequent destruction of the temple, although there is also a small excursus on the Bar Kokhba revolt.

The book is divided in three main sections. The first (“The Time of the Second Temple”) gives a general view of the history of the period, mainly on the basis of the writings of Flavius Josephus. Three temporal divisions are presented—Persian period, Hellenistic period, and Roman period—which makes the book useful in the classroom but also misleads a bit, since the historical transition between the Persian and the Hellenistic periods seems to have been much smoother than previously thought. The new Macedonian overlords apparently continued many of the institutions of the Persian Empire. Moreover, the hellenization of the East had begun before the effective arrival of Alexander and his generals. Despite these small points, the overview that the book provides is quite clear and instructive for both the nonspecialist scholar and the college student.

The second section of the book deals with the literature of the period. It gives a valuable survey of Jewish literature and some descriptions of the archaeological findings of

Elephantine, Qumran, and Masada. The list of works included is by no means complete and somewhat controversial, because the reasons for such a selection are not discussed. The epitomes that VanderKam makes of each of the works studied are very well done, since they convey the main ideas of each of the texts, making easier the transition to the texts themselves. The discussion about the ideas of the text is brief but clear and illuminative.

The third section deals with the main civil and religious leaders, groups, and institutions of Judaism of the period as they are attested in the sources. This last part is extremely useful, since it works as a thematic background of the historical facts and the literary works that constitute the two other sections of the books.

The book is quite useful and reliable, and it is well written in an engaging style that makes the difficult easy. It is completely suitable for classroom use, although the specialist will also profit from reading it. I will, however, dare to make two small criticisms: the bibliography supplied at the end of the book is too short even for an introductory work, and some books of the same introductory character (e.g., Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*), are not mentioned in it. Undoubtedly the absence of footnotes facilitates the reading, but didactically speaking it would have been adequate to provide a fuller bibliography at the end of each heading or section. In the same way, I miss some sort of excursus about the history and importance of the eastern Diaspora, much in the same line as VanderKam does with his appendix on Egyptian Judaism.

Besides these two small details, however, this introduction is, without doubt, one of the best buys of its genre. Anyone interested in the period of early Judaism will profit greatly from reading it.