



# Transformations in Ancient Judaism: Textual Evidence for Creative Responses to Crisis

*Professor of Religion Jacob Neusner PhD*

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The Jewish people endured three crises during the formation of what would become the Jewish canon, which significantly shaped their religion. The destruction of Solomon's Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E., the destruction of Herod's Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., and the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion of Rome in 363 C.E. each signaled the apparent end of Jewish religion. Instead of succumbing to defeat and despair, Judaism arose from each crisis as a result of its religious leaders reinterpretation of its sacred texts.

In "Transformations," Jacob Neusner reasons that the Jewish canonical writings the Hebrew Bible, Mishnah, Talmuds, and the Midrash illustrate Judaism's response to those three social, cultural, and political crises. Faced with these catastrophic events, the rabbinic sages explored anew the paradigms of piety and practice that they had received from previous generations. The result was that they discovered a truth both continuous with the past and responsive to the unanticipated crisis a truth that carved out a path for the future. This process, represented in the Jewish canon, continues to define modern Judaism."

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