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This collection of essays examines the phenomenon of crisis in Israelite and Jewish history. The articles of this interdisciplinary volume grew out of a lecture series and a conference at Vienna University’s Institute for Jewish Studies (2005-2008). They bridge a broad timeframe, from the Assyrian crisis in the eighth century BCE up to William Shakespeare, Moses Mendelsohn and Neo-Hasidic movements in modern times. The editors’ introduction provides a thorough and helpful overview of all contributions. The questioned aspects of crisis or crises are historical, political, social, philosophical, religious and cultural.

The first part of the book addresses crises in pre-Exilic and Exilic times, and in Second Temple Judaism. Heinz-Josef Fabry’s study on the Assyrian crisis in Israel and Judah argues for a combined reading of sources from the Hebrew Bible and the Assyrian and Babylonian remains. His text-hermeneutical approach is sound, and he provides an excellent overview of the Assyrian impact in Palestine through the Iron Ages. Rainer Kessler discusses the social crisis in the eighth century BCE. Both Fabry and Kessler opine that the processes of scribal activity and “canonization” resulted as a reaction to the Assyrian crisis. Eric Meyers discusses crisis in the Babylonian exile. The task of his essay is to point out how the change of demography in Judah since the exile, influenced the shape and direction of the future canon of the Hebrew Bible. Meyers’ diagnosis finds in Cyrus the Great (538 BCE) and the Persians the “radically new” that led to a tremendous literary productivity (Deuteronomistic editing, Book of the Twelve, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Ezra, Nehemiah and 1/2 Chronicles). This observation coincides with archaeological insights about demographic data in Exilic and early post-Exilic Yehud (the myth of the “empty land”).

Beate Ego discusses the Hellenistic crisis, as conceptualized in the Animal Apocalypse (1 En. 85-90), in the wake of Antiochus IV’s desecration of the Jerusalem Temple. Ego emphasizes that sin appears as a cosmic item, comparable to the Book of Watchers (1 En. 1-36). As in Dan 7-12, the retrospect on history in the Animal Apocalypse is linked to the *eschaton* that embraces a transcendent “reality.” George Brooke discusses “crisis without” and “crisis within” the Qumran community. The “crises without” refer to the Maccabean and the Herodian-Roman times. The view from within the Qumran community points to the death of the “Teacher of Righteousness” toward the end of the...
second century BCE. The criteria are: purity regulations, modes of expectations of the end-time and the calendar. Leo Perdue examines anti-Judaism in Greek and Roman Alexandria. Perdue provides a comprehensible overview of anti-Judaism and Jewish defenders in the Hellenistic diaspora in Egypt. Géza Xeravits and Katell Berthelot refer to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) as a catalyst for crises in Judaism. While Xeravits discusses 2 Bar. 4 and 6, Berthelot explains 4 Ezra. Both sources date after 70 BC and show close interrelationship. In 2 Baruch future but still hidden visions (2 Bar. 4), and the “actual temple” (2 Bar. 6), closely related to the pre-existent temple in paradise, conceptualize a theodicy and reflect on the connection of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE with “Israel’s sin.” The setting of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra as audition and vision is apocalyptic. 4 Ezra also deals with theodicy. The seven visions emphasize the obedience to God's will and, therefore, promulgate a solution for theodicy that was, rather unexpectedly, characterized by its originality in ancient Judaism. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple can be explained as an exacerbation that led to new theological insights in 4 Ezra.

William Horbury and Roland Deines discuss the Jewish uprisings under Trajan in the diaspora and under Hadrian in Palestine (Bar Kokhba). In his learned and perspicacious contribution, William Horbury starts with an overview of Jewish History in the late first and early second century, from the ancient sources to modern times. Roland Deines opines that the Jewish hope for the rebuilding of the Temple caused the Bar Kokhba revolt. In support of his position Deines collects a massive number of sources and data, especially with regards to coinage.

The second part of the book discusses later phenomena of crises in Jewish history. Carol Meyers asks for the social role of women in Palestine of the Roman era. She refers to archaeological data in the context of technological innovations that pertain to cultural changes—from grinding to milling—in flour production. With regards to peculiar archaeological sites, Nabratein and Sepphoris in Galilee, Meyers argues that the technical innovations were factors contributing to misogynist views in Jewish society in Roman times. Felicia Waldman explains the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria and Sabbateanism as results of the Spanish expulsion in 1492. Darryl Gless observes how Shakespeare reconstructs circumstances of conversion in Elizabethan England. Referring to the intellectual biography of Moses Mendelssohn, David Davidowicz explains the tensions between traditional Jewish life and the Enlightenment. Frank Stern questions visualizations of Jewishness in German movies after the holocaust. The concluding essay of the volume, by Yaakov Ariel, analyzes the decline of Hasidism since the turn of the nineteenth century. Ariel focuses further on the