



**The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical
Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian
Periods (The Anchor Yale Bible Reference
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Susan Niditch

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Works created in the period from the Babylonian conquest of Judea through the takeover and rule of Judea and Samaria by imperial Persia reveal a profound interest in the religious responses of individuals and an intimate engagement with the nature of personal experience. Using the rich and varied body of literature preserved in the Hebrew Bible, Susan Niditch examines ways in which followers of Yahweh, participating in long-standing traditions, are shown to privatize and personalize religion. Their experiences remain relevant to many of the questions we still ask today: Why do bad things happen to good people? Does God hear me when I call out in trouble? How do I define myself? Do I have a personal relationship with a divine being? How do I cope with chaos and make sense of my experience? What roles do material objects and private practices play within my religious life? These questions deeply engaged the ancient writers of the Bible, and they continue to intrigue contemporary people who try to find meaning in life and to make sense of the world.

The Responsive Self studies a variety of phenomena, including the use of first-person speech, seemingly autobiographic forms and orientations, the emphasis on individual responsibility for sin, interest in the emotional dimensions of biblical characters, and descriptions of self-imposed ritual. This set of interests lends itself to exciting approaches in the contemporary study of religion, including the concept of “lived religion,” and involves understanding and describing what people actually do and believe in cultures of religion.

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