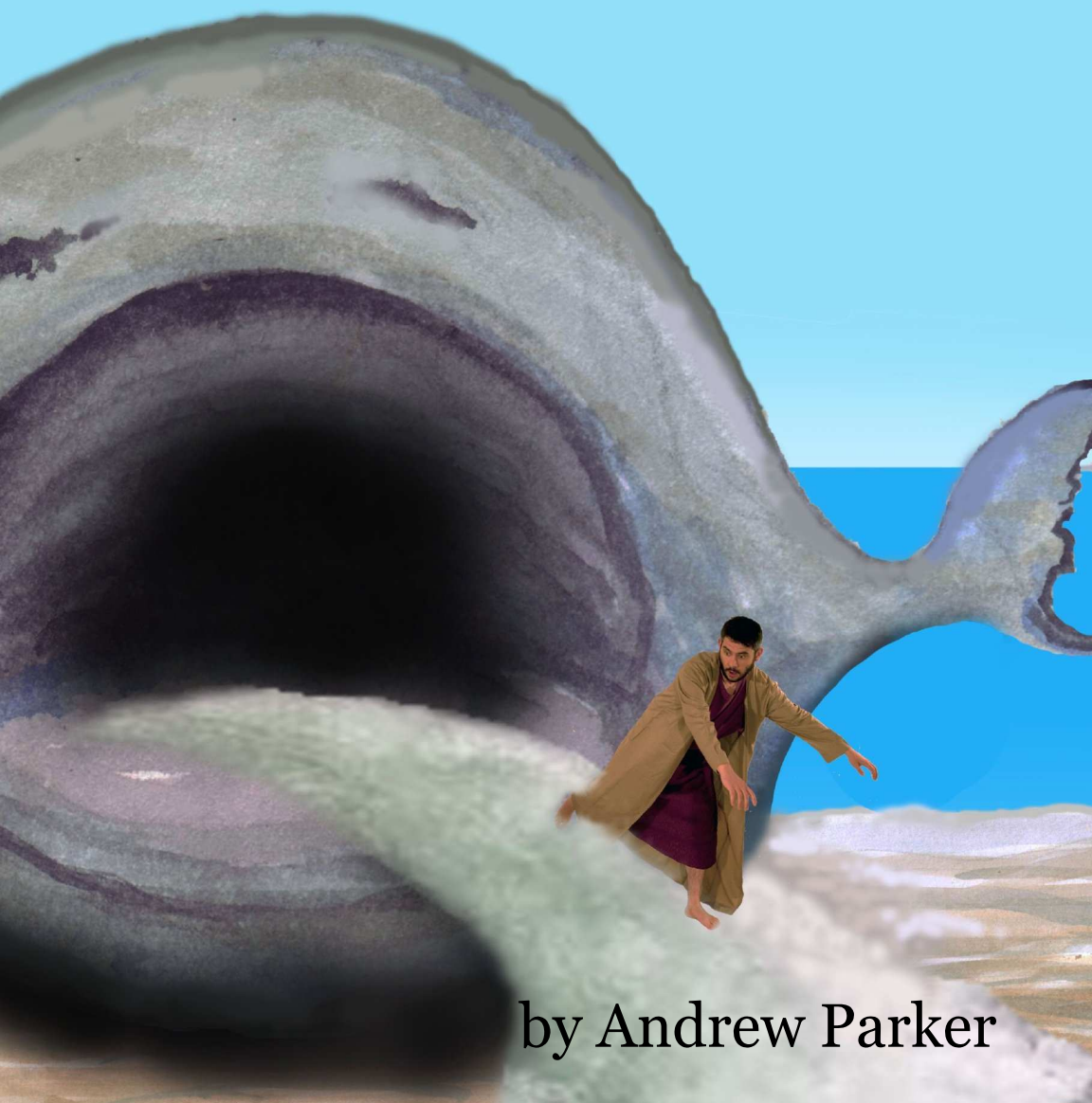


Politics Before and After the Exile

Part 2. Revolutionary Prophets
and Revisionist Priests



by Andrew Parker

Politics Before and After the Exile

Part 2. Revolutionary Prophets and Revisionist Priests

Hard copies of *Politics Before and After the Exile* can be purchased on <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore>.

Politics Before and After the Exile is Volume 3 in the Bible in Cartoons series. Volume 1 *Thinking About the Bible* (Parts 1 & 2) and Volume 2 *God of the Marginals* (Parts 1 & 2) can also be found on this website.



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INTRODUCTION

This book is from my 'Bible in Cartoons' series.* It constitutes Part 2 of Volume 3 which is entitled 'Politics Before and After the Exile'.

Volume 1 'Thinking About the Bible' examined the mythical texts from the ancient Near East which the Bible itself mirrors and found that, though couched in religious language, these texts are in fact political works designed to sell the conservative and authoritarian world-views of their priestly authors.

Volume 2 'God of the Marginals' then examined the Genesis and Exodus stories with a view to ascertaining their political perspectives. It found them to be revolutionary anti status-quo texts that put forward the world-view of a bunch of losers or 'Hebrews' (as the civilisation-bureaucrats had disparagingly labelled them). Unfortunately, it also found evidence that conservative priests from within the community had later edited these marginal texts using a blanket of religion to try and hide their unsettling marginal perspective.

In Part 1 of 'Politics Before and After the Exile' we examined some pre-exilic texts (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Jeremiah) and found them to be basically revolutionary Hebrew texts though they also exhibit signs of priestly revisionist editing.

In this book, Part 2, we now examine some post-exilic texts (Ezekiel, Isaiah, Ruth, Jonah, Job and Daniel to determine whether they are also revolutionary marginal works or, alternatively, conservative revisionist contributions.

The central feature of all of my cartoon books is an extended 'Socratic' dialogue with my old friend John Rowe. He consistently puts forward a religious interpretation of the Bible, whilst I myself argue for a down-to-earth political understanding.

In order to make this central dialogue stand out I have coloured it in pink thereby distinguishing it from the biblical citations which are in brown, the notes which are in blue and other casual utterances which are presented against a normal white background.

Further to this, the reader will note that a few biblical characters are presented in black and white whilst the majority are in full colour. This is simply to distinguish individuals meant to be understood as representations from those intended to be seen as regular historical personalities whether they ever actually existed or not.

*All of the cartoon books in this series can be found on my website at: <http://bibleincartoons.co.uk>

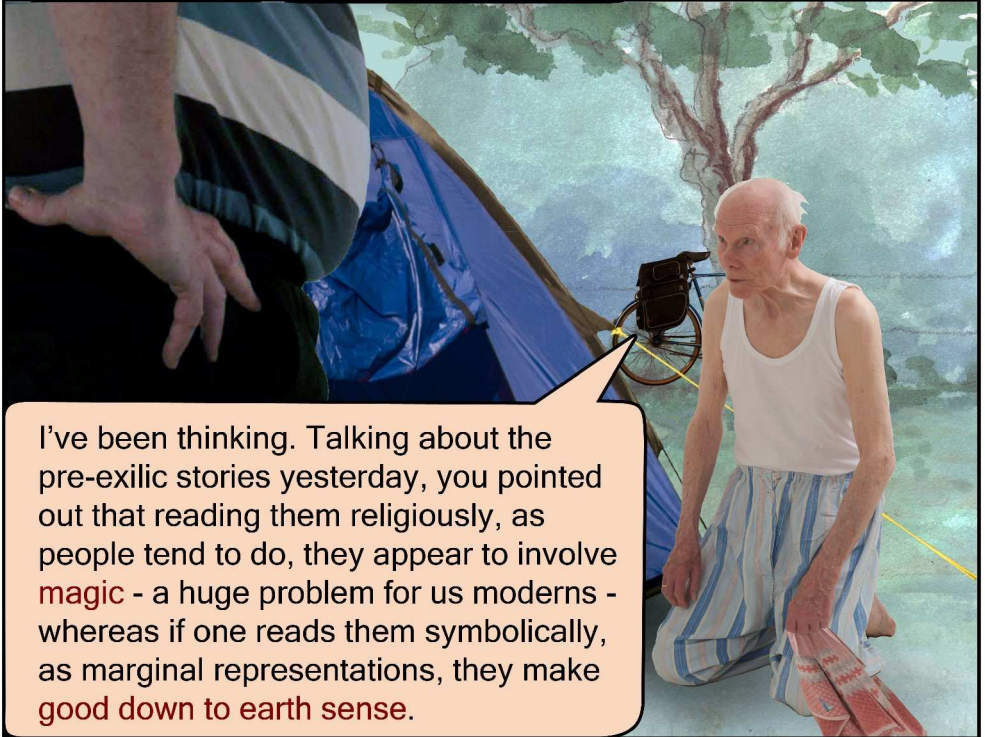
1

A NEW PARADIGM

A paradigm is the general hypothesis currently in vogue regarding a particular scientific matter: in the present instance, how and why religious ideas arose.



Good morning! Are you ready to discuss the post-exilic works?



I've been thinking. Talking about the pre-exilic stories yesterday, you pointed out that reading them religiously, as people tend to do, they appear to involve **magic** - a huge problem for us moderns - whereas if one reads them symbolically, as marginal representations, they make **good down to earth sense**.



Couldn't have put it better myself!

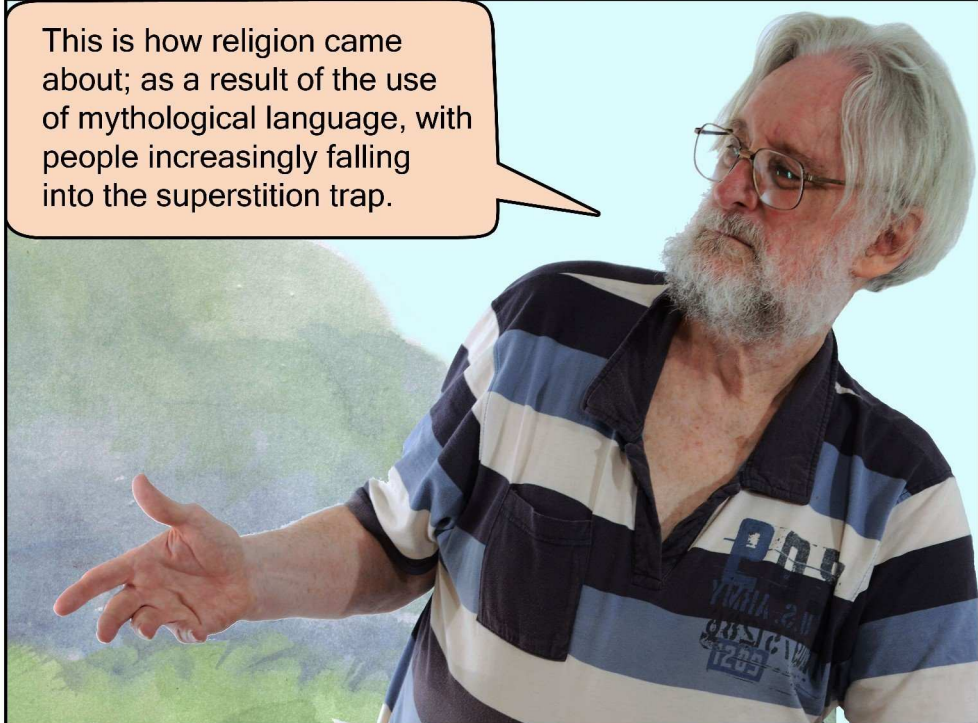
Yes but just a minute. If a religious reading robs the stories of their down-to-earth sense, why on earth did everyone start doing it... and go on doing it till the present day?

Good question! What you must bear in mind is that though the invention of mythological language was a tremendous boon, making it possible for the ancients to discuss how the powers they experienced in the universe affected them, it had one enormous drawback: the superstition trap!

For it was all too easy for people to misread a myth by taking the symbols used (gods, goddesses and the like) at face value and so start thinking that spirits, who could be cajoled by offering them sacrifices, actually existed.



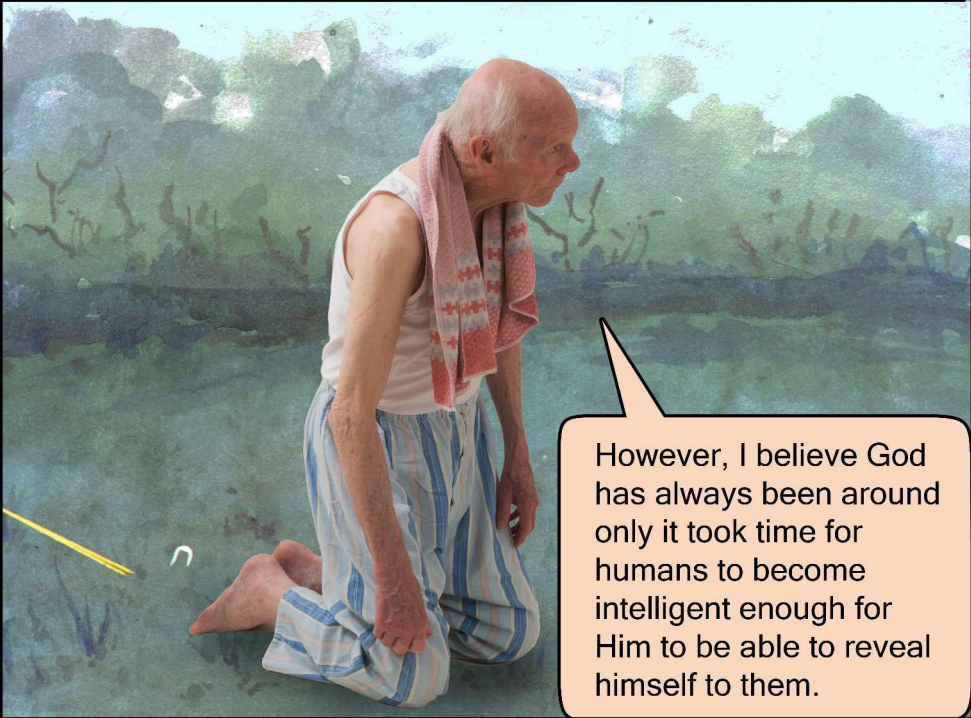
This is how religion came about; as a result of the use of mythological language, with people increasingly falling into the superstition trap.



I can see that for you religion is a unfortunate misunderstanding which arose when humans became intelligent enough to invent a language to communicate with each other about the world.

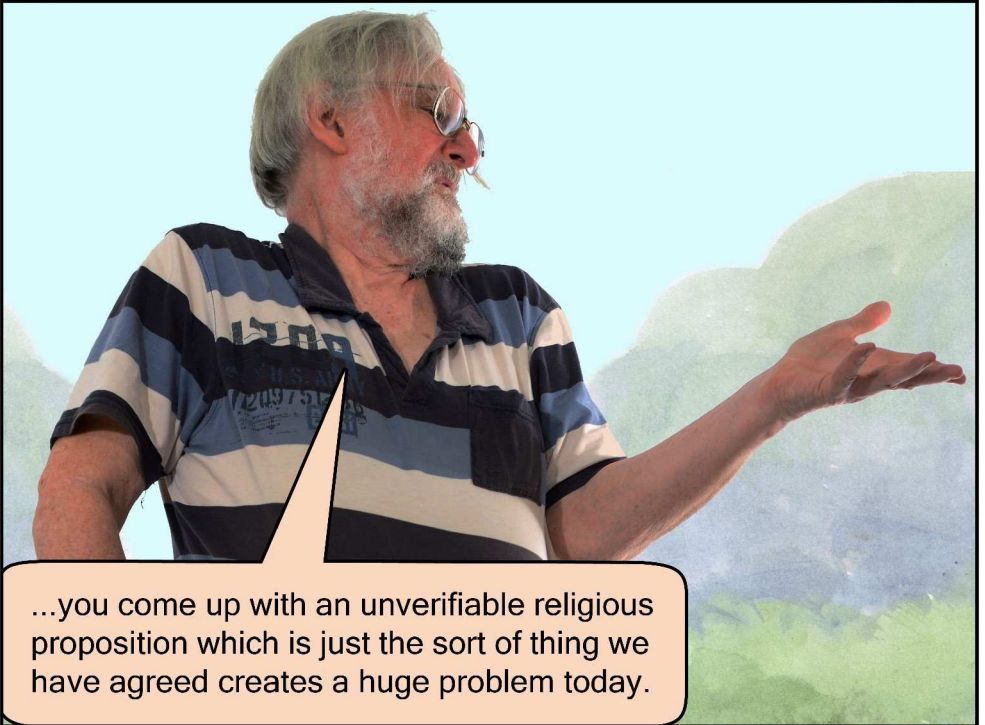


However, I believe God has always been around only it took time for humans to become intelligent enough for Him to be able to reveal himself to them.







Yes, we both see religion arising at around the same time as a result of the growth of human intelligence but whereas I explain its appearance by offering a scientific paradigm based solely on evidence and so open to disproof...



...you come up with an unverifiable religious proposition which is just the sort of thing we have agreed creates a huge problem today.



For who's to say what God revealed ... for pity's sake? Anyone can claim that anything's from God and we have no way of testing it!



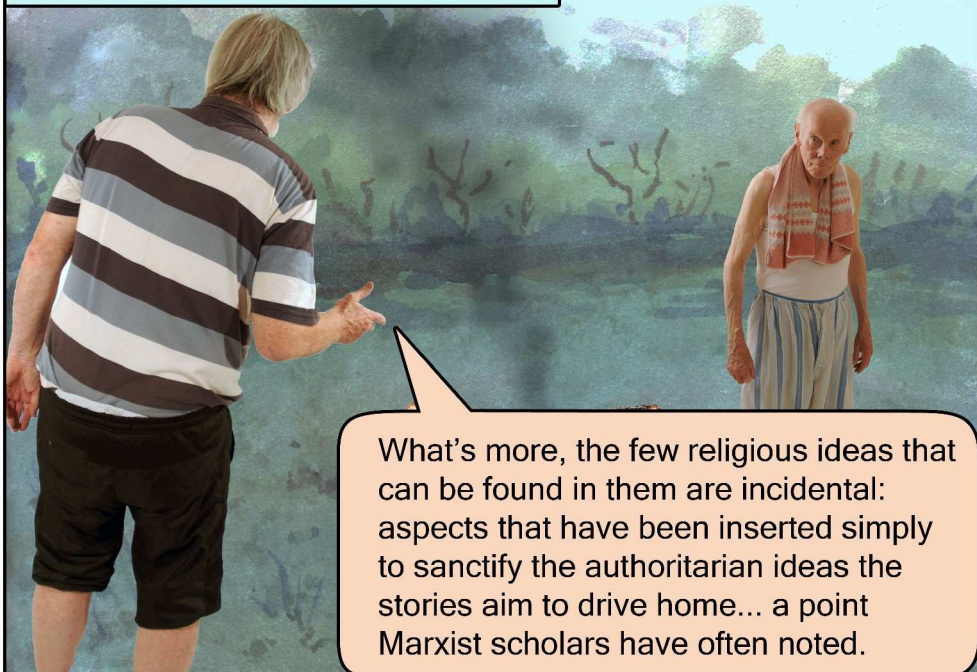
That may be so but you still haven't explained why everyone who has read the Bible - including Darwin - has fallen into the same trap by seeing it as a religious work.





Well what's interesting is that Darwin was demonstrably wrong if he believed the myths from the ancient Near East too were religious, for as we have seen*, there is very little that is specifically religious in any of them.

* See Thinking About the Bible Part 1 and Part 2



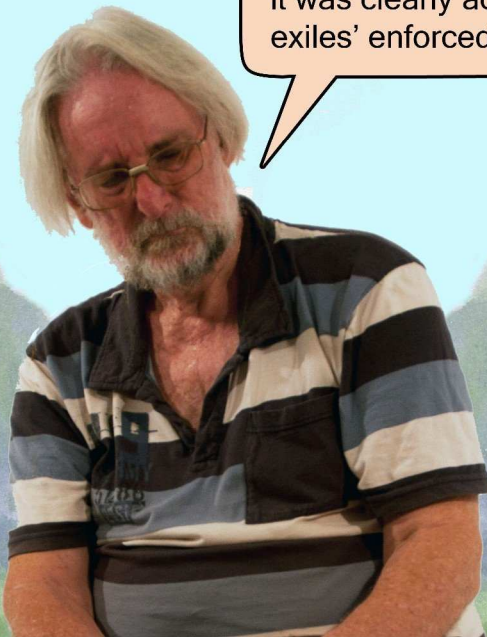
What's more, the few religious ideas that can be found in them are incidental: aspects that have been inserted simply to sanctify the authoritarian ideas the stories aim to drive home... a point Marxist scholars have often noted.

As we have seen, this trick of using religion to buttress authoritarian ideas was employed to great effect by the priestly author of Genesis 1 *...



* See *God of the Marginals*
pp 18-20

...and there's no mystery about where he picked up the habit since it was clearly acquired during the exiles' enforced stay in Babylon.



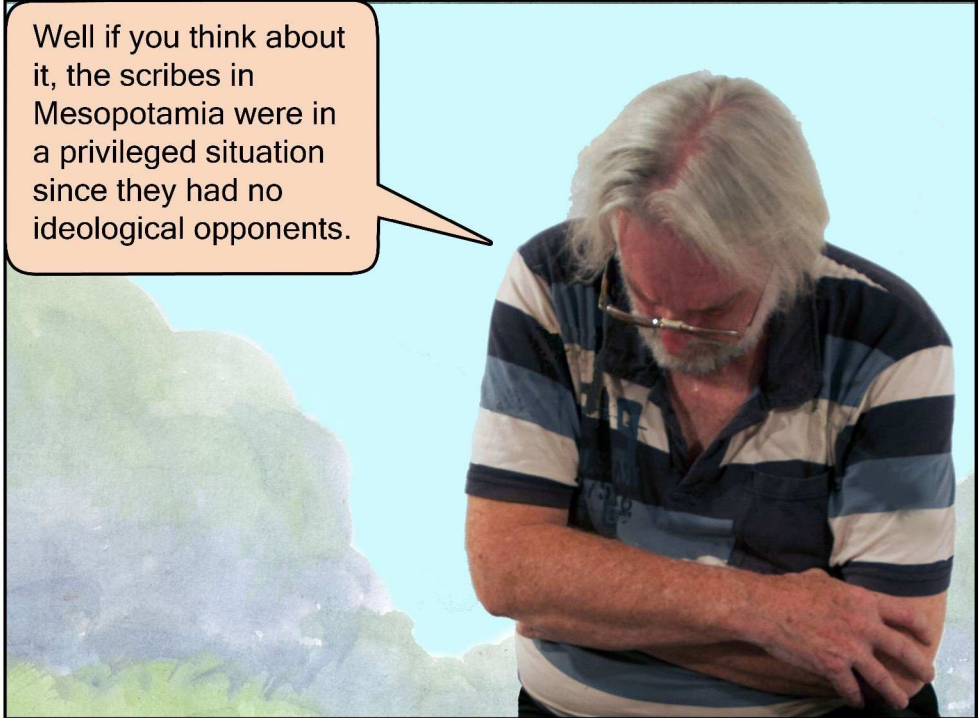
However, what's noteworthy is that whereas the Mesopotamian scribes employed religious ideas with the lightest of touches...



...we find the biblical editors (including the writer of Genesis 1) using them in a widescale, heavyhanded manner which the Mesopotamians would never have countenanced.



Tell him to tone down the religious comments and let the politics speak for itself.



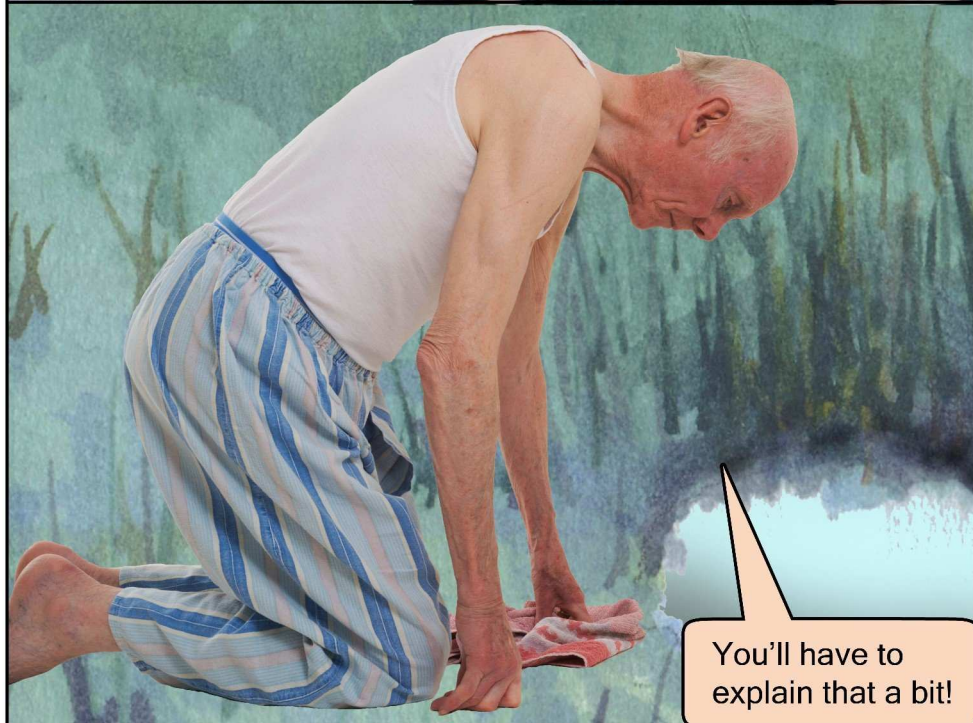
Their superiors, the military rulers, had plenty of competitors, of course, but they themselves had none because they were conservatives and the whole world was governed by conservatives.



So they had no need to be defensive or to bolster their political arguments by providing bogus religious props.

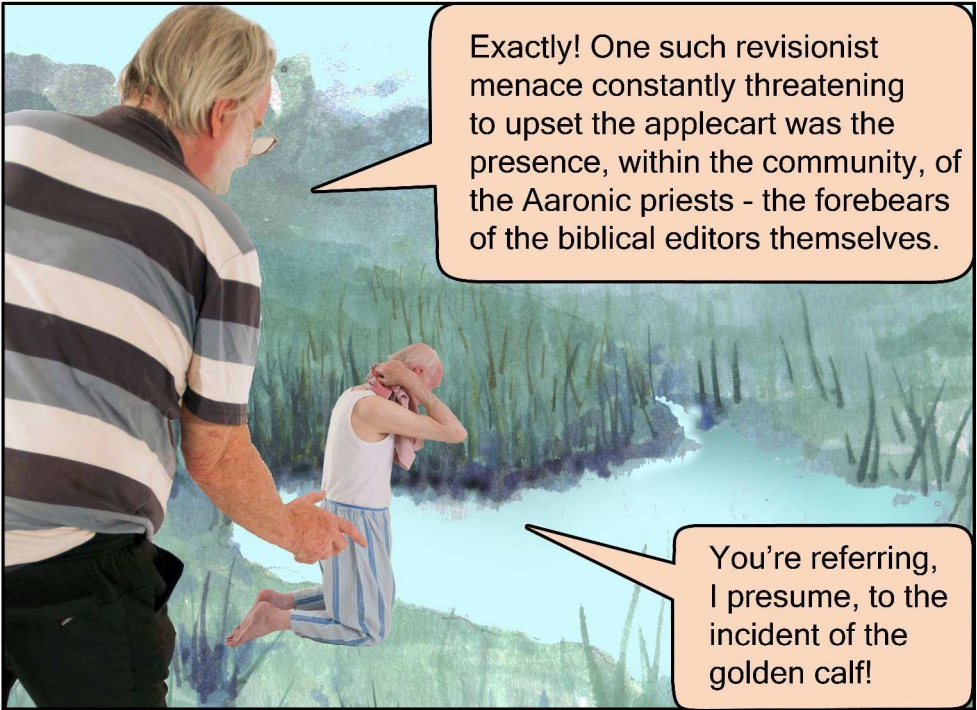


But the bilical editors were not in such a happy position for, as we are about to see, in the post-exilic period they found themselves involved in a ferocious ideological struggle in which they needed all the religious cover they could get.



You'll have to explain that a bit!





Exactly! One such revisionist menace constantly threatening to upset the applecart was the presence, within the community, of the Aaronic priests - the forebears of the biblical editors themselves.

You're referring, I presume, to the incident of the golden calf!

Precisely! Experience had shown that whenever the revolutionary leaders had their backs turned, these Aaronic priests were only too ready to revert to civilisation's authoritarian ways with which they, as budding hierarchs, were far more comfortable.

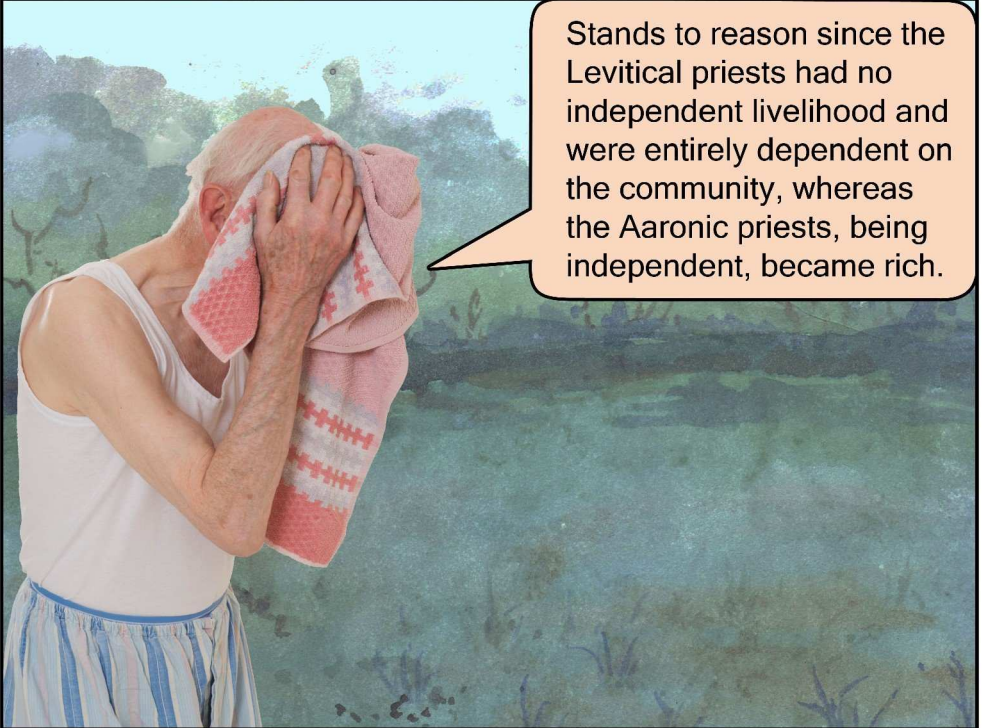


I'm happy with that!

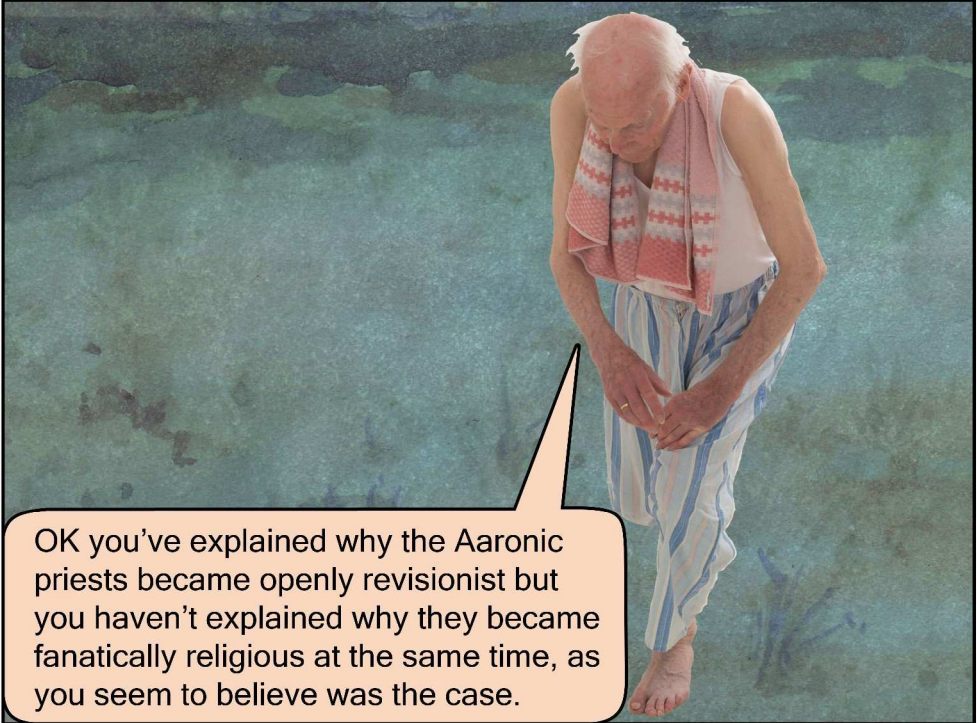
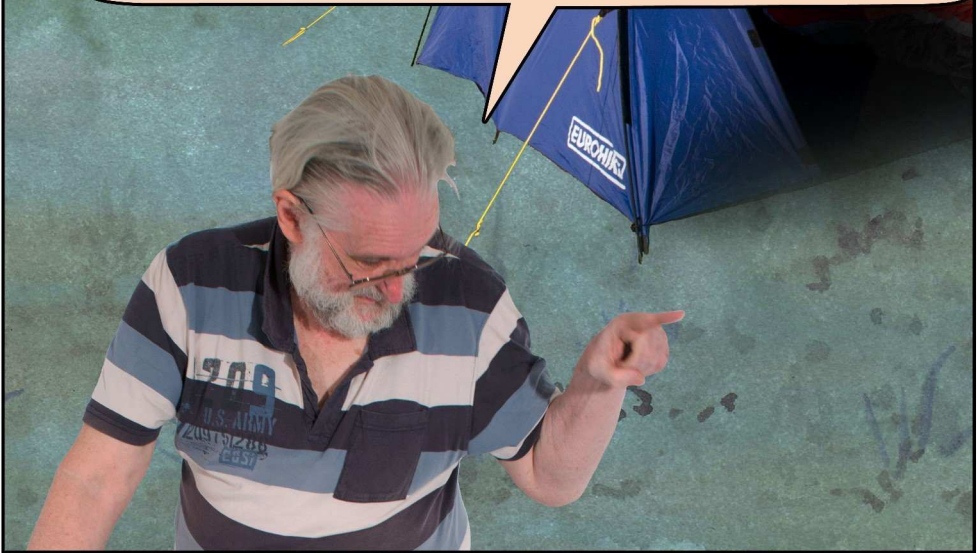
In fact, this menace had only been kept in check by the constant vigilance of the Hebrew prophets backed up by the Levitical priests and their militant zeal.



Stands to reason since the Levitical priests had no independent livelihood and were entirely dependent on the community, whereas the Aaronic priests, being independent, became rich.

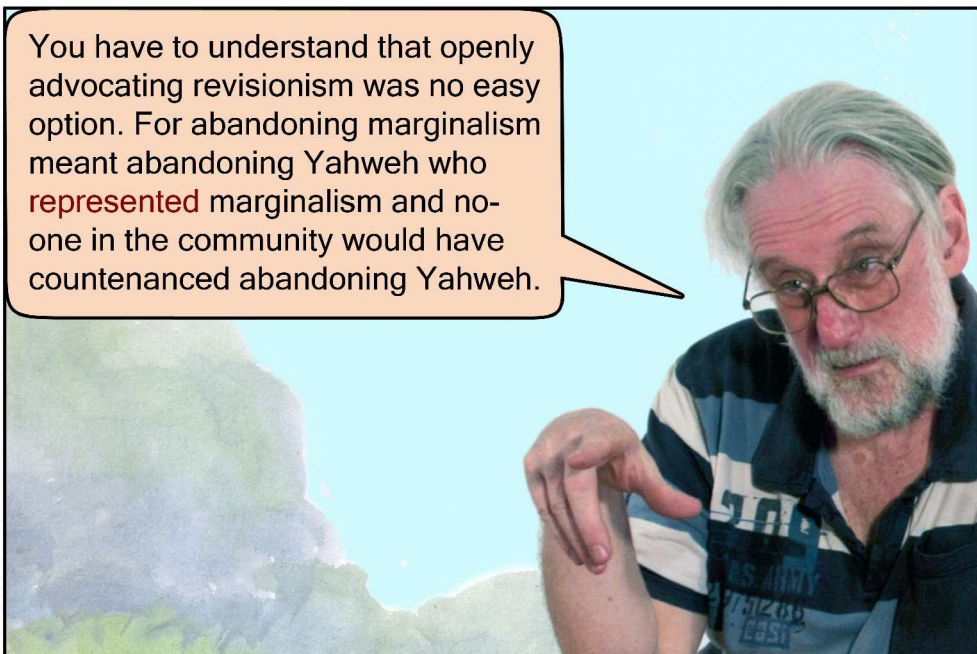


Given this situation it's hardly surprising, when the kingship experiment finally failed, that these Aaronic priests decided it was time to jettison the marginal ideology altogether.



OK you've explained why the Aaronic priests became openly revisionist but you haven't explained why they became fanatically religious at the same time, as you seem to believe was the case.

You have to understand that openly advocating revisionism was no easy option. For abandoning marginalism meant abandoning Yahweh who **represented** marginalism and no-one in the community would have countenanced abandoning Yahweh.



So some way had to be found of jettisoning marginalism without appearing to abandon Yahweh... but how was it to be done?

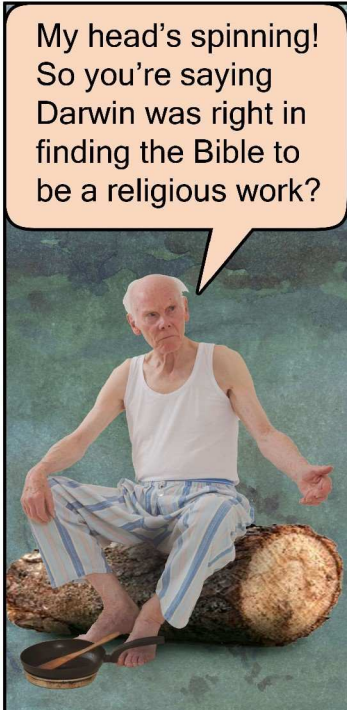
Don't ask me!



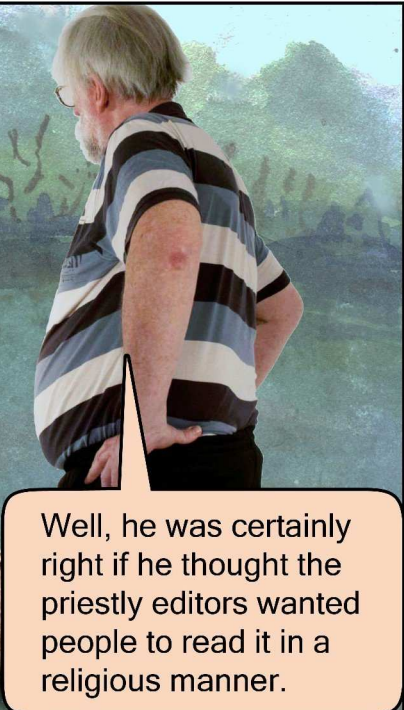
Well the priestly editors' solution, when getting rid of the **ideological** Yahweh, was to cover their tracks by substituting a **religious** alternative of the same name who just happened to be authoritarian... like all the other gods!

And this is what you claim we find in Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 3?

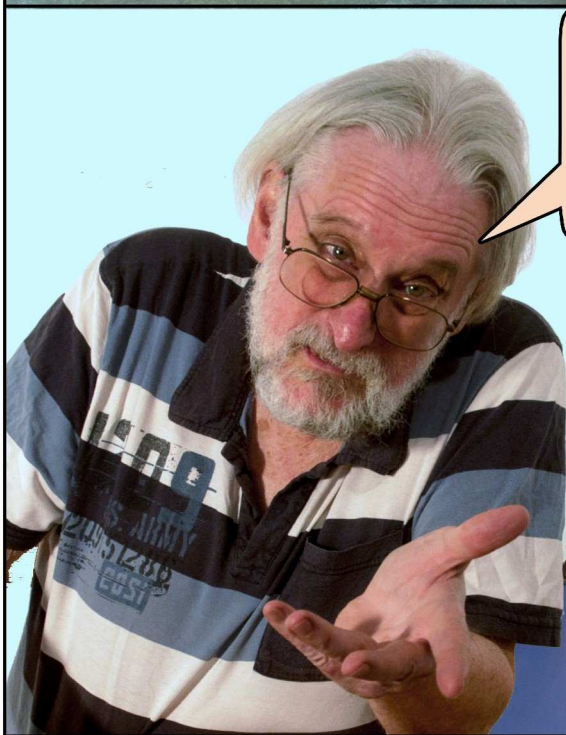
Well, isn't it?



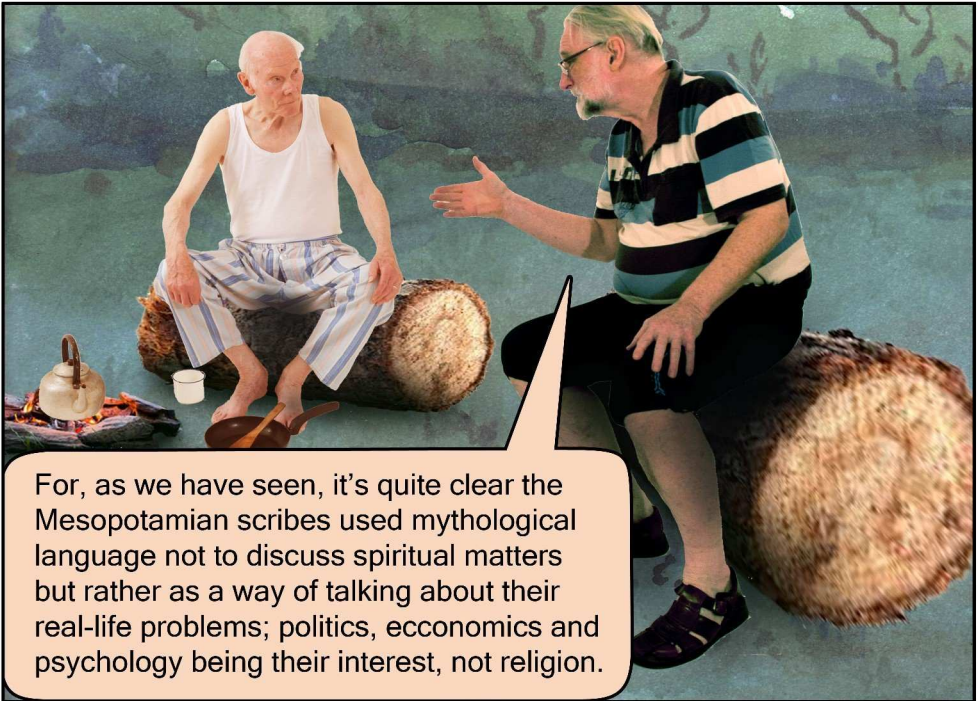
My head's spinning!
So you're saying
Darwin was right in
finding the Bible to
be a religious work?



Well, he was certainly
right if he thought the
priestly editors wanted
people to read it in a
religious manner.



But he was quite wrong
in believing that was how
people in the ancient
world generally read
mythological texts.



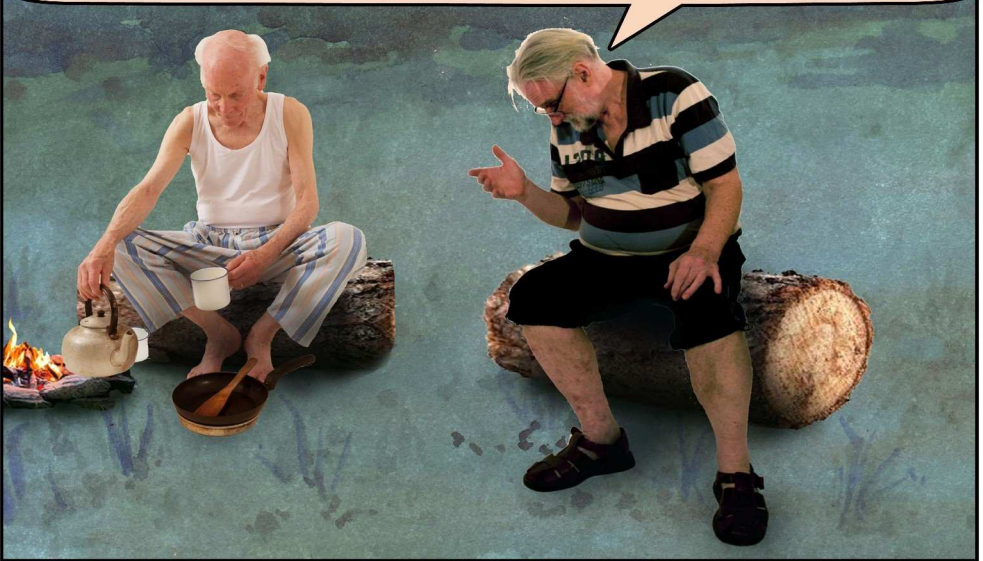
For, as we have seen, it's quite clear the Mesopotamian scribes used mythological language not to discuss spiritual matters but rather as a way of talking about their real-life problems; politics, economics and psychology being their interest, not religion.



So why did Darwin make this mistake. He was a first-rate scientist after all!

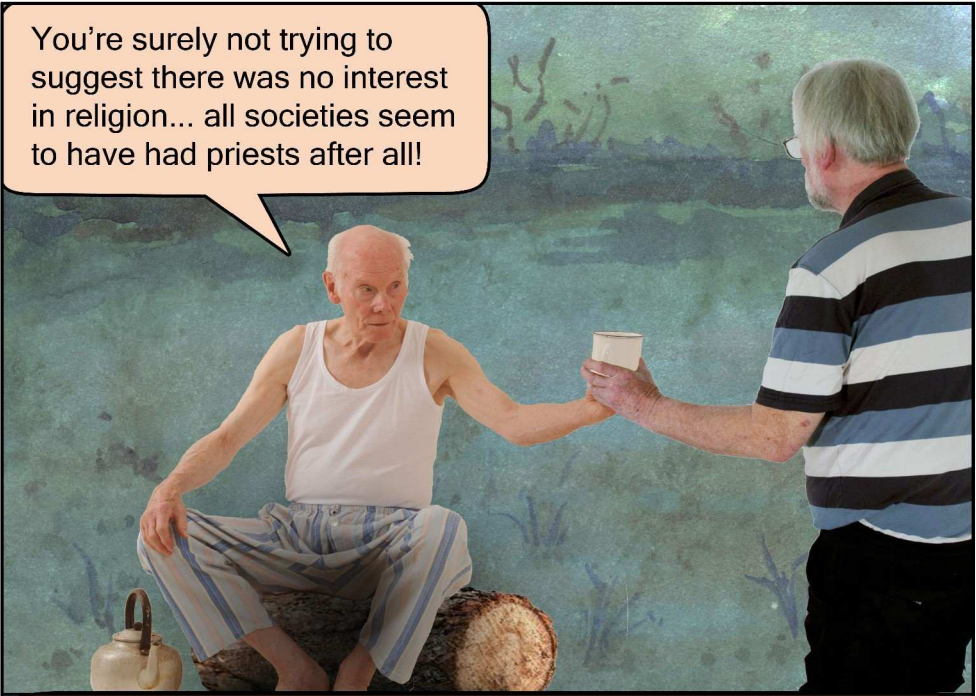
Well, in his day the Mesopotamian myths had only just been discovered so it's unlikely he knew much about them...

...but in any case, Christian tradition, in obsessively preaching the Bible as a religious work for over a thousand years, had deeply buried its marginal politics - as remains all too true even today.



Consequently, you might say it was natural - albeit wrong - for Darwin to blithely assume that primitive people who talked of gods and spirits were thereby demonstrating an interest in religious matters.

You're surely not trying to suggest there was no interest in religion... all societies seem to have had priests after all!



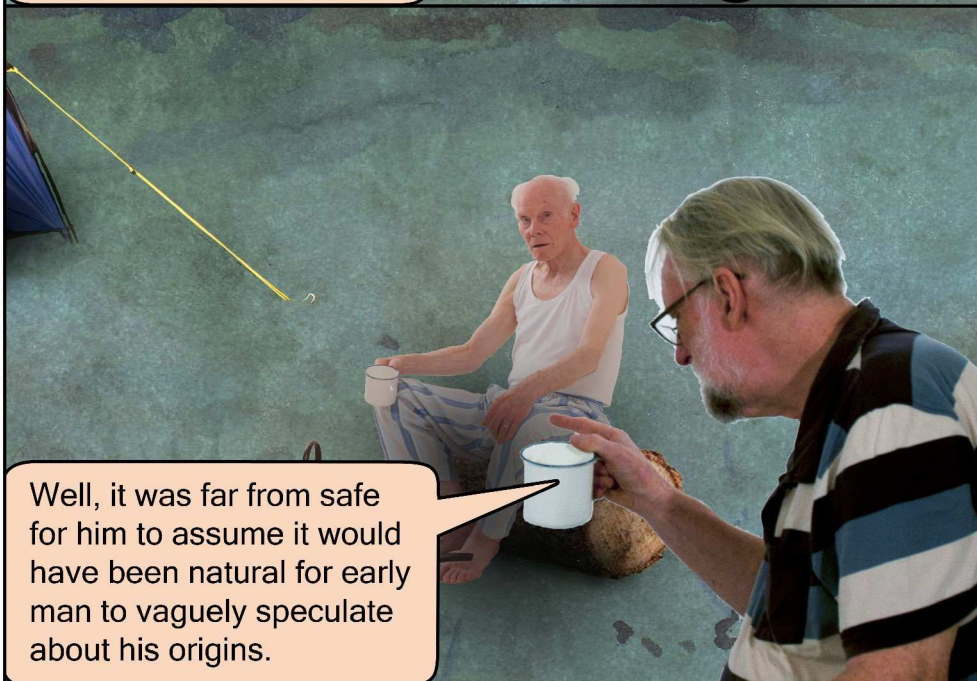
No, all human societies had a secondary interest in religion but the main focus of attention was always down-to-earth matters like politics and economics but, apparently, Darwin was blind to this.



It was an error that lead him to mistakenly think his job was to explain how a primary interest in religion arose. Consequently, he suggested it was natural for early man to vaguely speculate about his own existence and so produce all of the creation stories.

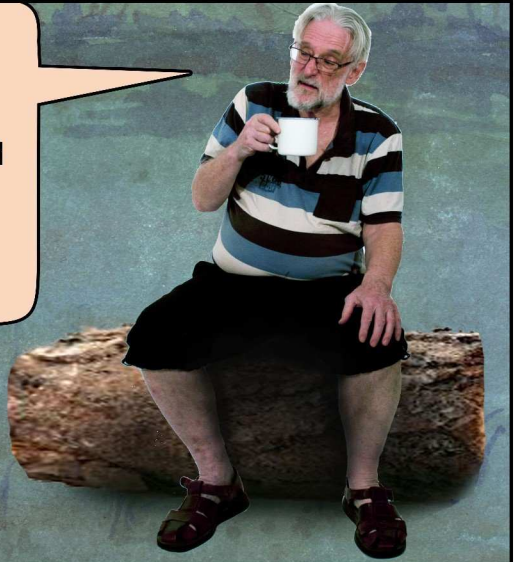


Seems fair enough to me!
Why are you so scornful?



Well, it was far from safe
for him to assume it would
have been natural for early
man to vaguely speculate
about his origins.

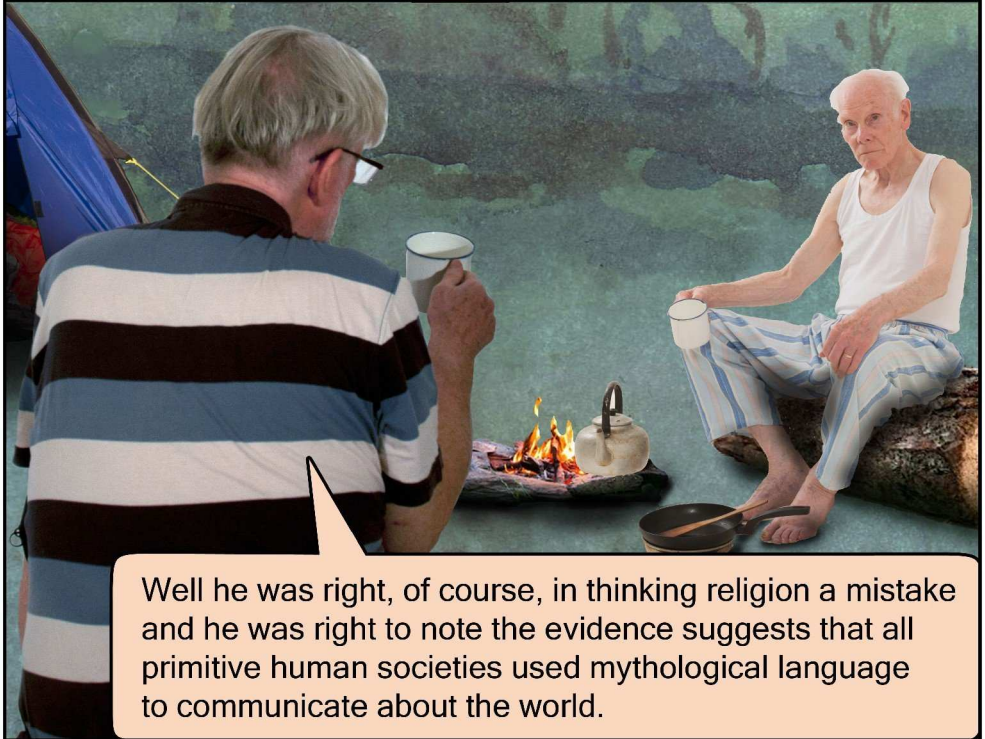
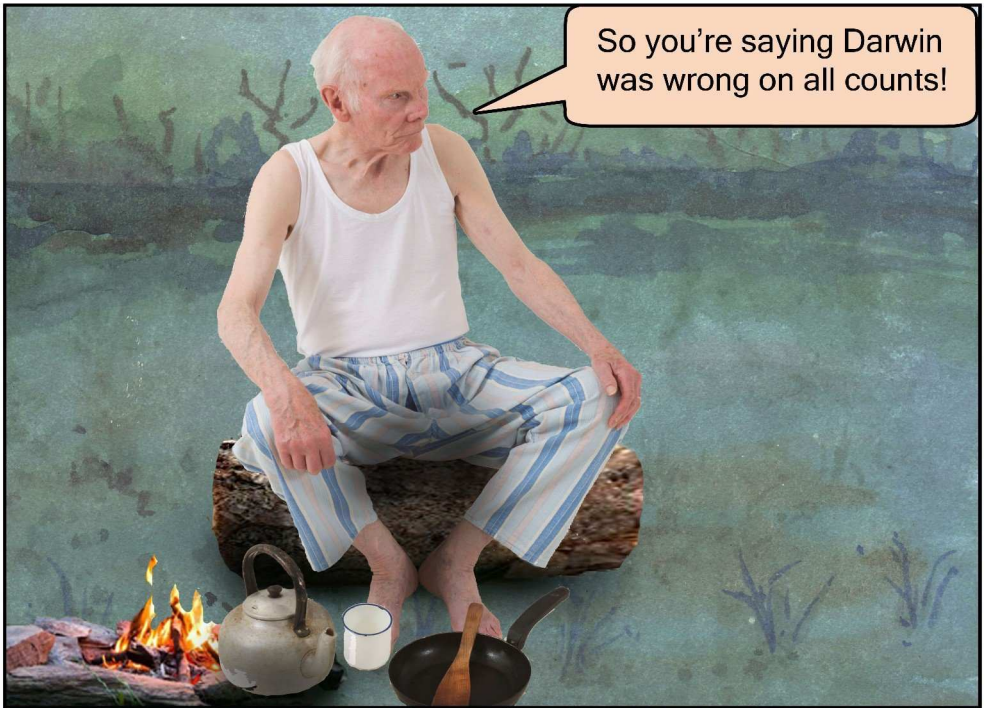
It's true nowadays we all speculate about how things have developed but that's only because we have learned to think **developmentally** as a consequence of the scientific revolution.



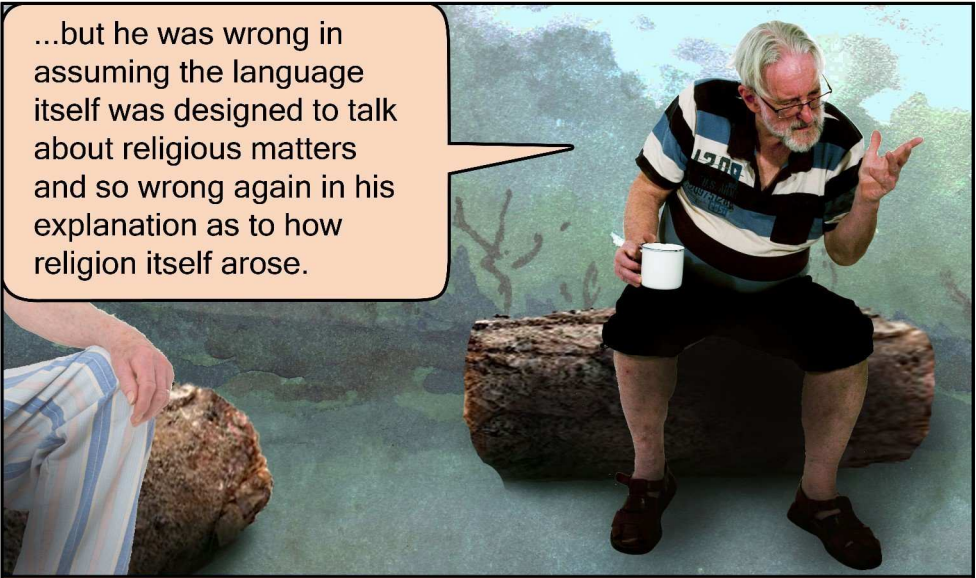
But this was not true of the ancients who didn't as a matter of fact speculate on how things had developed as Darwin presumed.



Today, scholars are constantly reminding us that the ancients saw themselves as inhabiting **a static universe** where change was only seasonal with empires arising only to fall, leaving the general situation unchanged for the next generation to take their turn.



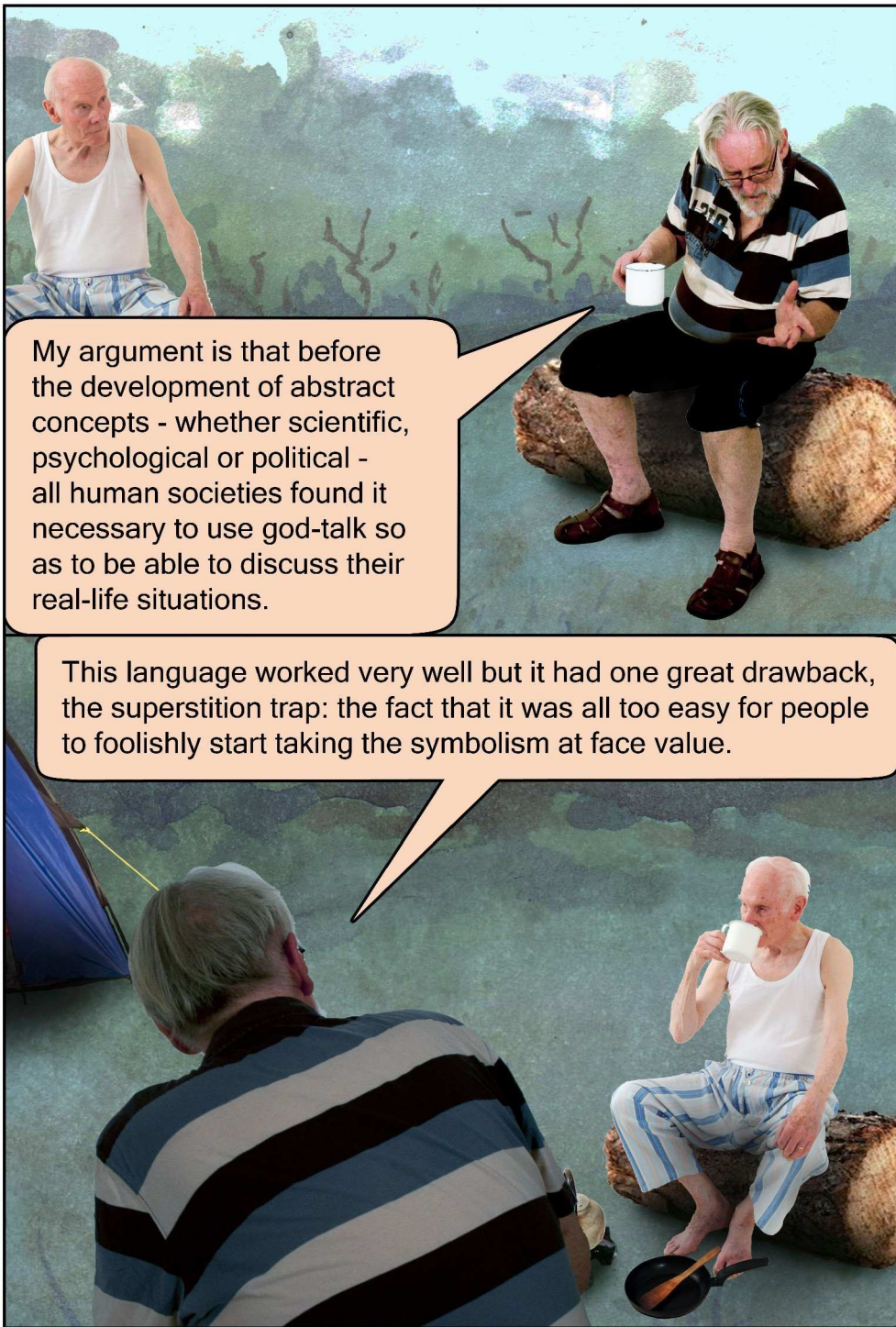
...but he was wrong in assuming the language itself was designed to talk about religious matters and so wrong again in his explanation as to how religion itself arose.



That said, he did write in a scientific manner which meant his ideas could later be challenged and corrected when more evidence became available, which is what I have tried to do.

OK so remind me again about your new paradigm.





My argument is that before the development of abstract concepts - whether scientific, psychological or political - all human societies found it necessary to use god-talk so as to be able to discuss their real-life situations.

This language worked very well but it had one great drawback, the superstition trap: the fact that it was all too easy for people to foolishly start taking the symbolism at face value.

This is how religion arose as people at first inadvertently started falling into the superstition trap... like Jeremiah, for example, with his talk about Yahweh as an angry God.

And I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, says the Lord: the sword to kill, the dogs to drag away, and the birds of the air and the wild animals of the earth to devour and destroy. I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth...

Jer 15: 3-4

Later however people in authority began to deliberately employ the superstition trap for their own political ends... such as the priestly writer of Genesis 1 who used monotheistic religion to justify the introduction of authoritarian politics.

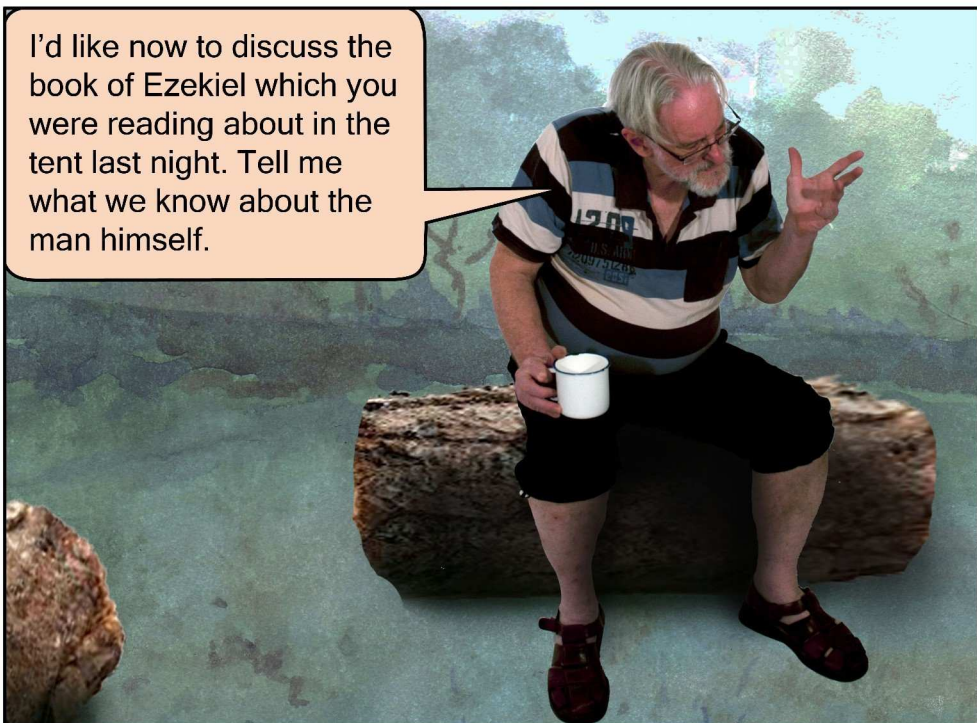
And God blessed them, and God said to them. 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'.

Gen 1: 28

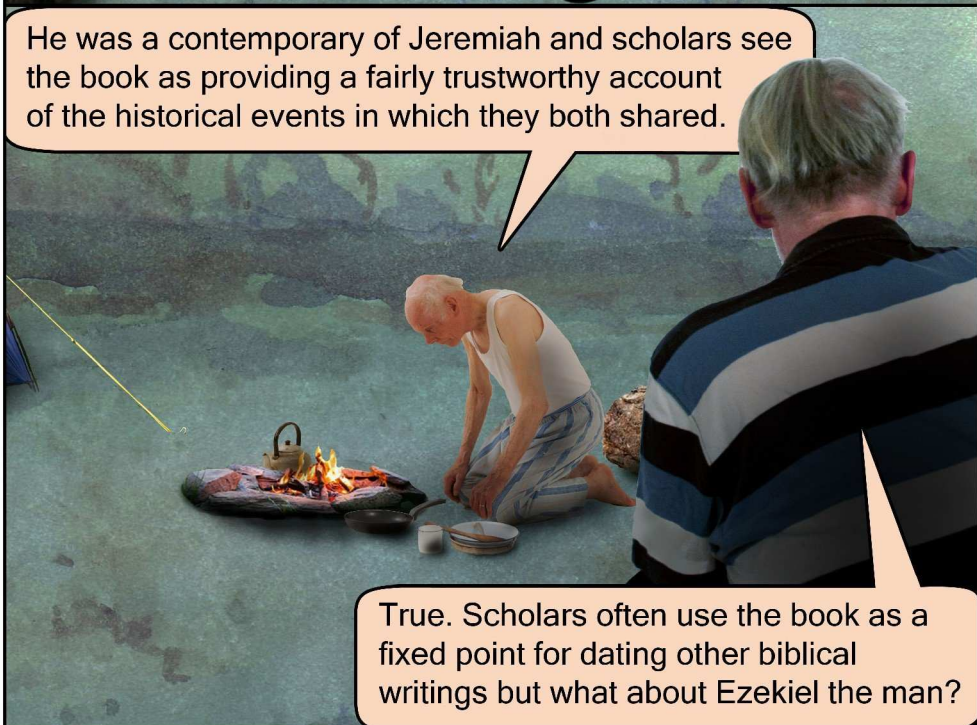
2

EZEKIEL

I'd like now to discuss the book of Ezekiel which you were reading about in the tent last night. Tell me what we know about the man himself.



He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and scholars see the book as providing a fairly trustworthy account of the historical events in which they both shared.



True. Scholars often use the book as a fixed point for dating other biblical writings but what about Ezekiel the man?

Well, he was a priest, the son of a priest and unlike Jeremiah, a man of wealth and standing. Being of the cream of Judean society he was carted off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE.



See Politics Before the Exile Part 1. p 357

There he set up house with his wife, becoming a person of some importance amongst the exiles.



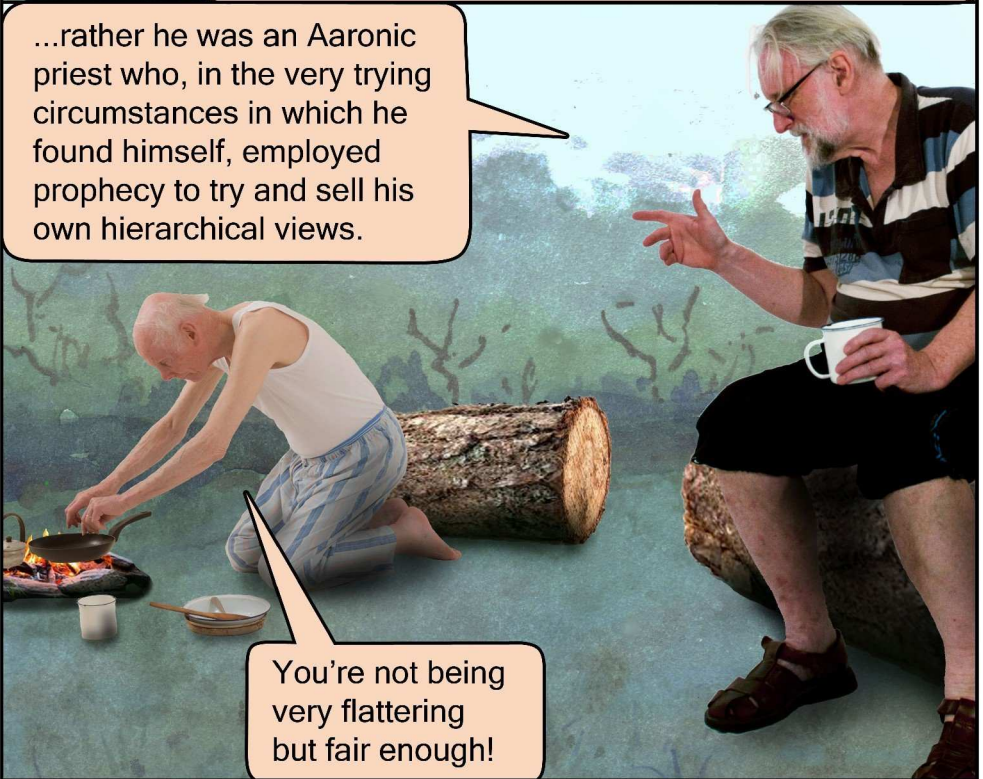
.. as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell there upon me.

Ezek 8.1

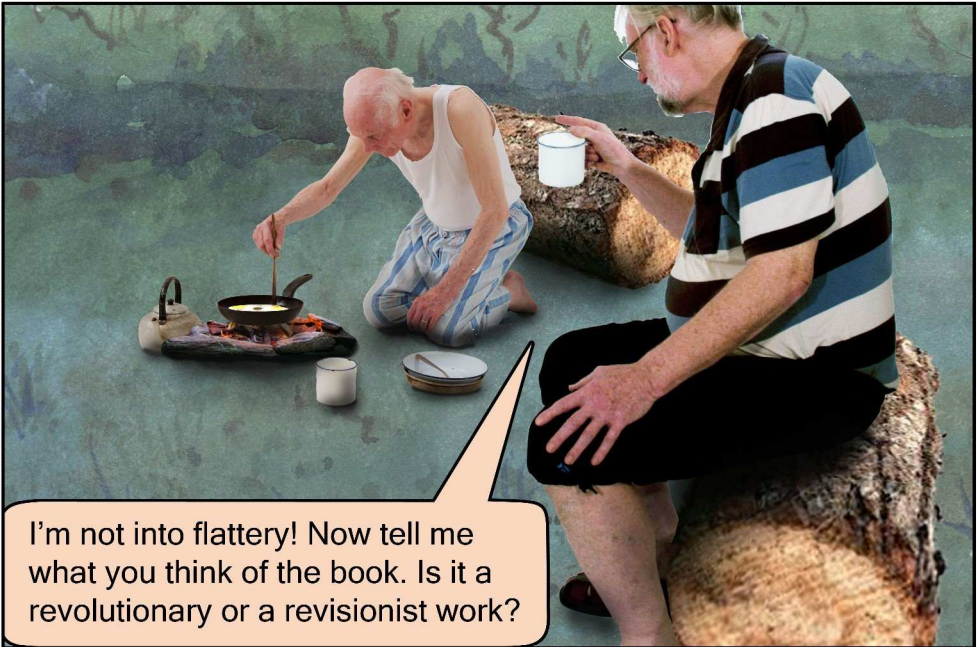


So, unlike Jeremiah and the rest, Ezekiel was not a prophet in the sense of a free agent who felt called upon to advocate Yahweh's marginal perspective...

...rather he was an Aaronic priest who, in the very trying circumstances in which he found himself, employed prophecy to try and sell his own hierarchical views.



You're not being very flattering but fair enough!



I'm not into flattery! Now tell me what you think of the book. Is it a revolutionary or a revisionist work?

Well, the first few chapters are a weird vision of what Ezekiel calls 'the glory of Yahweh' which you couldn't make more terrifyingly authoritarian and hierarchical if you tried.

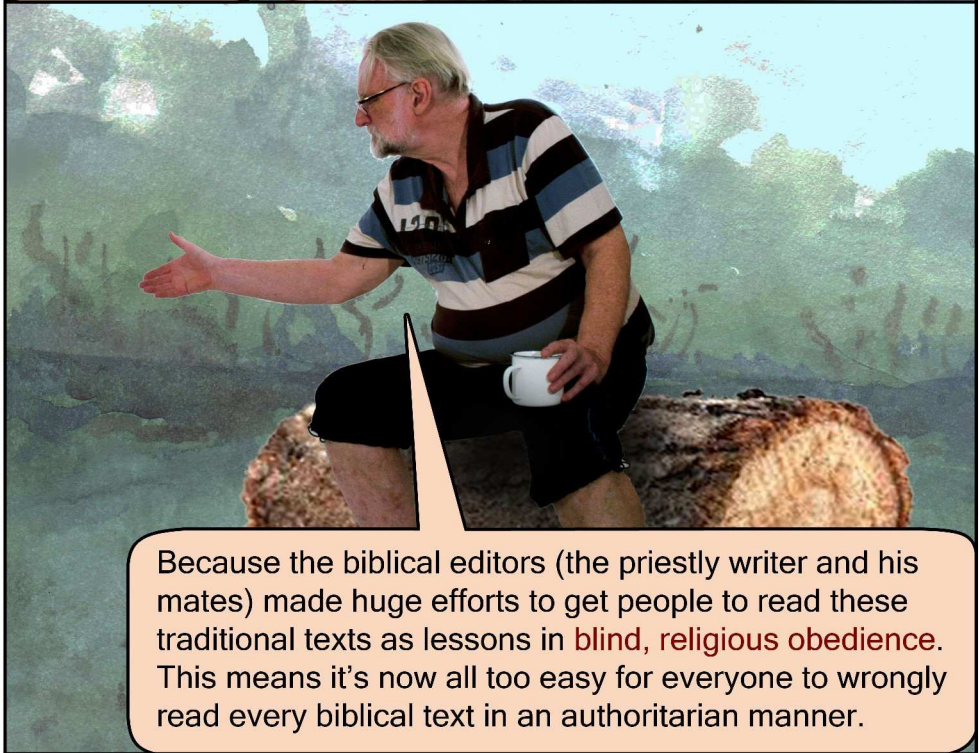
As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness round about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming bronze... And above the firmament there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about.

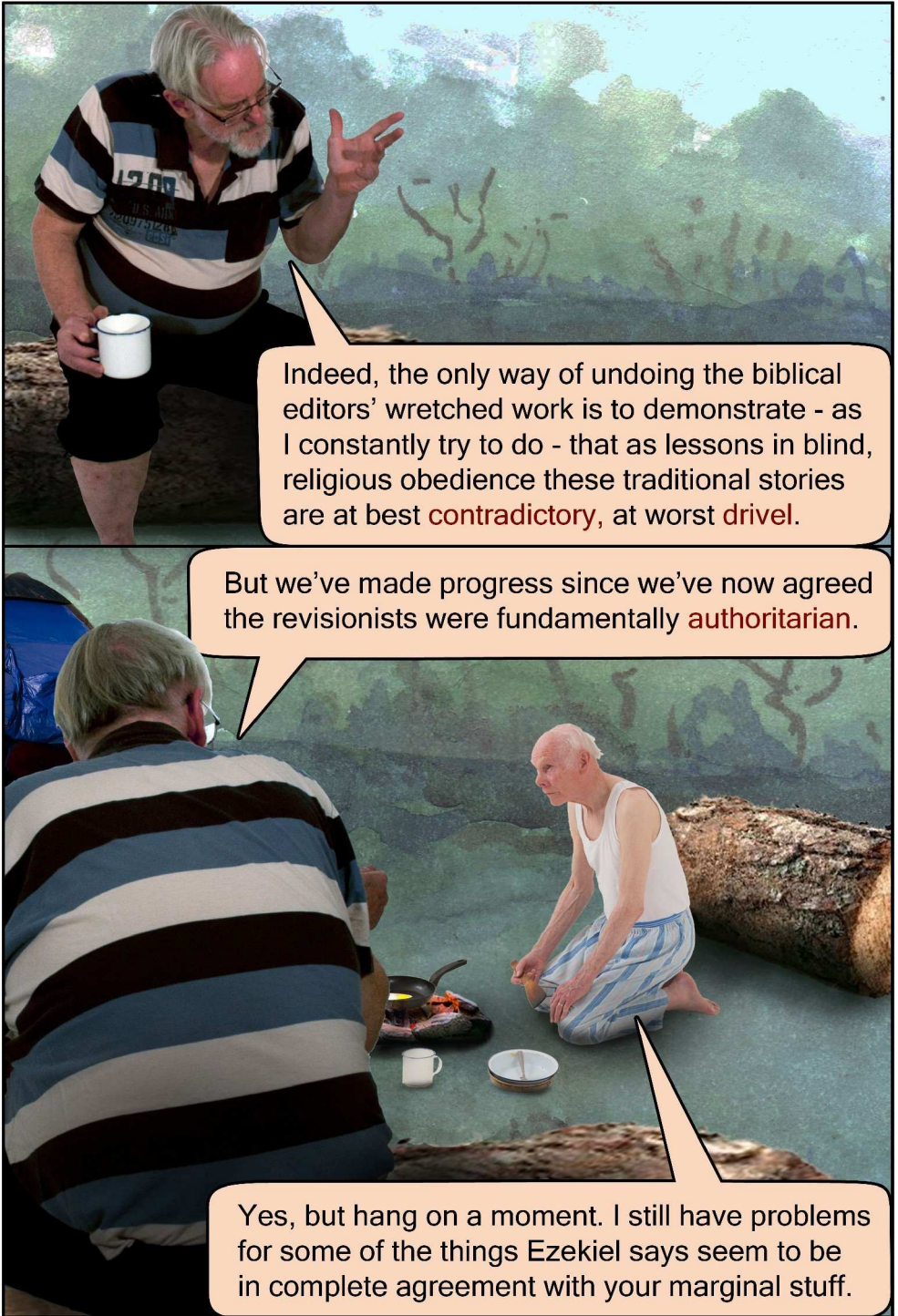
Ezek 1. 4 & 26-28

Yes, very different from what we find in Exodus where Yahweh is a fire which doesn't even singe the bush it inhabits.

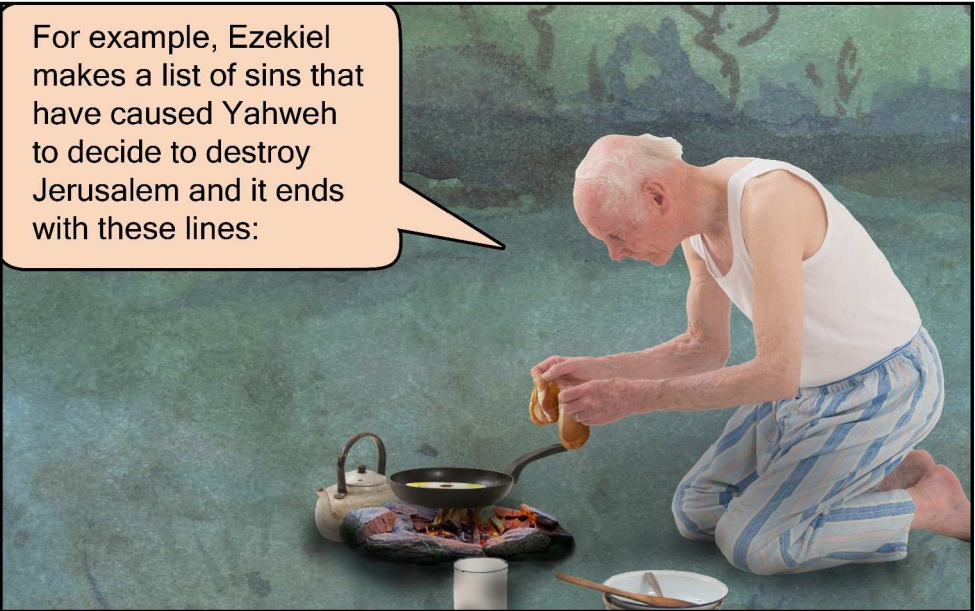
As you say... and the rest of the book is overtly authoritarian so, using your terms, I'm obliged to describe it as revisionist.

Well noted... but I can't give you any points since it's easy to see that the revisionist writers were authoritarian...





For example, Ezekiel makes a list of sins that have caused Yahweh to decide to destroy Jerusalem and it ends with these lines:



The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without redress.

Ezek 22.29

Surely what we have here is Hebrew marginal talk not authoritarianism.



Yes, you're quite right but you have to keep your eye on what Ezekiel is doing.

He knows very well that introducing authoritarianism into the community will bring him into conflict with Hebrew marginalism and its advocates.*

*See Ezek 3.4-11

But he's not looking for such a fight and tries to avoid it if he can since he doesn't wish to appear a troublemaker.



So he's happy to include the marginal facets you have noted, just so long as they don't interfere with his overall objective, since he knows they will help him get a hearing.

Are you saying that Ezekiel, as an authoritarian, was concerned about the condition of foreigners? Few authoritarians these days are.

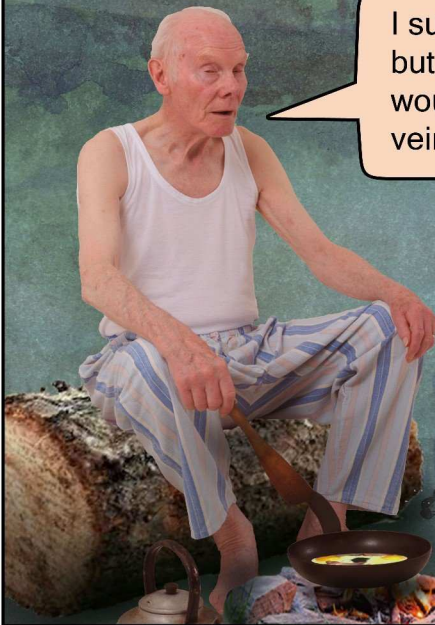


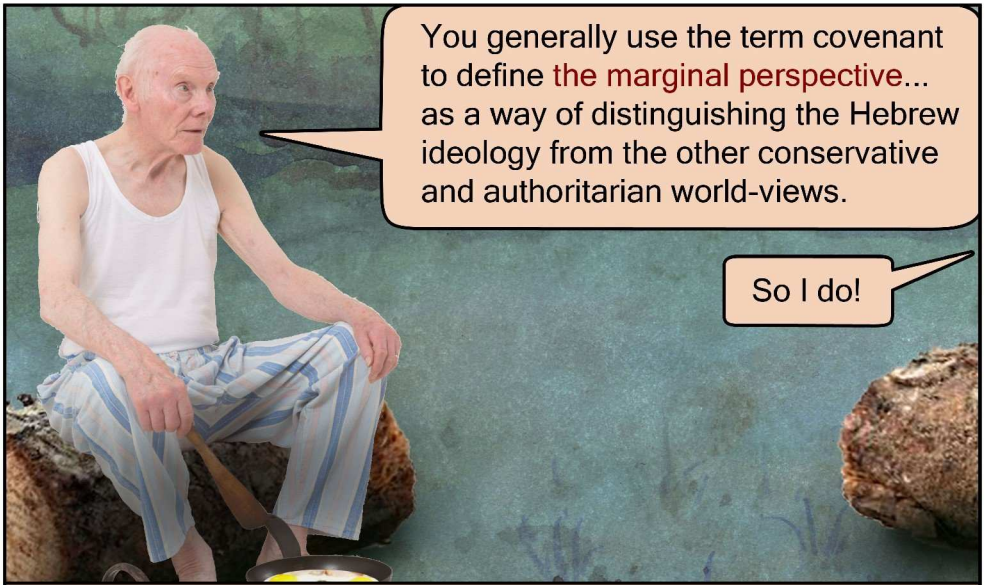
Well, for Ezekiel, in Babylon it was the Israelites who were the foreigners. It was only when the exiles returned to Palestine that sojourners became an issue.



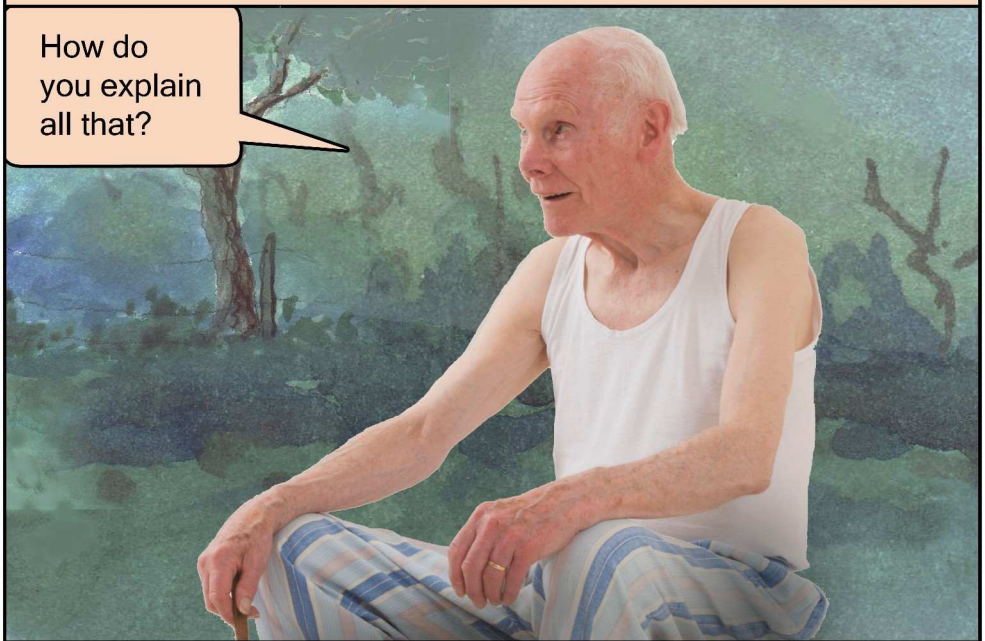
So there was nothing to be lost and all to gain by including them in his list. Furthermore, all authoritarian rulers saw the deserving poor (widows and orphans) as their responsibility so there was no problem in including them also.

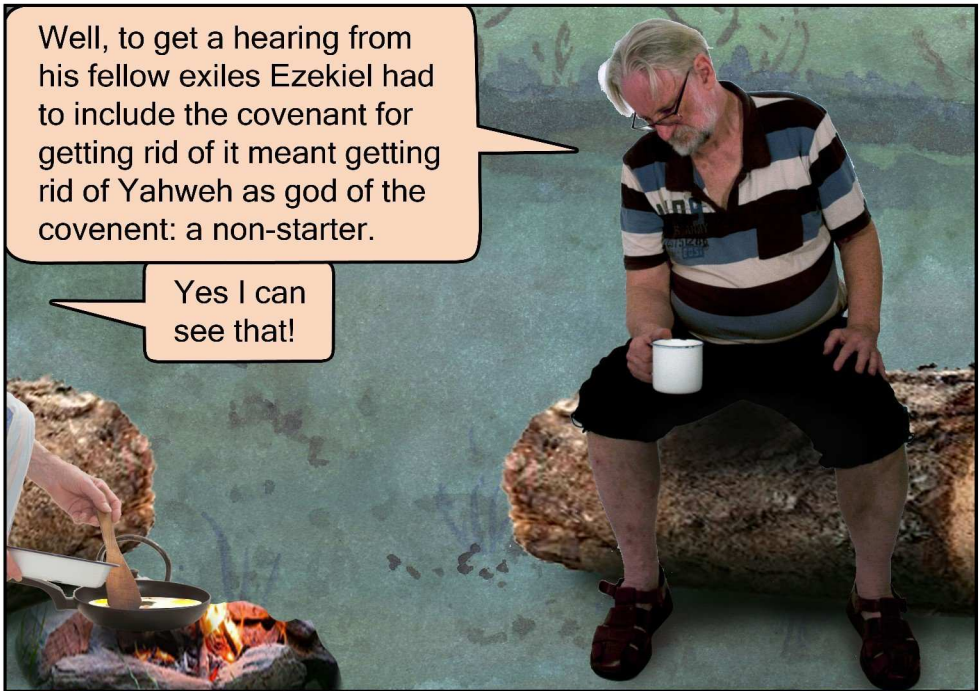
I suppose that's fair enough but I have another matter I would like to raise in the same vein concerning the covenant.





Yes but Ezekiel also talks a lot about the covenant. He speaks of Yahweh establishing his covenant [Ezek 16.8](#) ...of Israel and Judah breaking it and being punished [Ezek 16. 15-52; 22.23-31](#) ... and of Yahweh promising to re-establish an everlasting covenant in the future [Ezek 16.53-63; 34.25-27; 37.26-28](#) .





Well, to get a hearing from his fellow exiles Ezekiel had to include the covenant for getting rid of it meant getting rid of Yahweh as god of the covenant: a non-starter.

Yes I can see that!

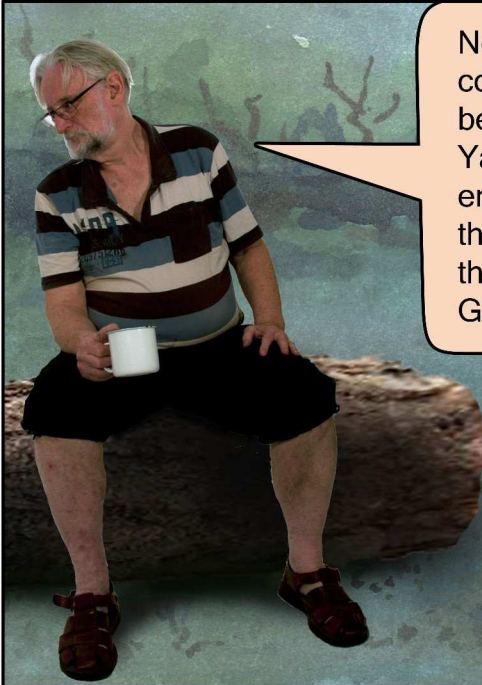


So it wasn't a question of whether or not he should include the covenant but rather how to include it without sabotaging his plan to introduce an authoritarian ideology.

OK how did he go about this?

It was easy. He simply went on talking about the covenant only now in **authoritarian** terms, as a one-sided relationship in which Yahweh makes all the running, leaving humans with nothing to do but blindly obey.

I'm afraid you're going to have to explain that more fully. What was different? The covenant in both Ezekiel and Exodus remains an agreement between unequal partners.



Not really. In Exodus the Hebrew covenant wasn't an agreement between partners because Yahweh **did nothing**. He simply ensured the outcome guaranteeing that if the Hebrews carried out their shaming exercise the Gentiles would be shamed.

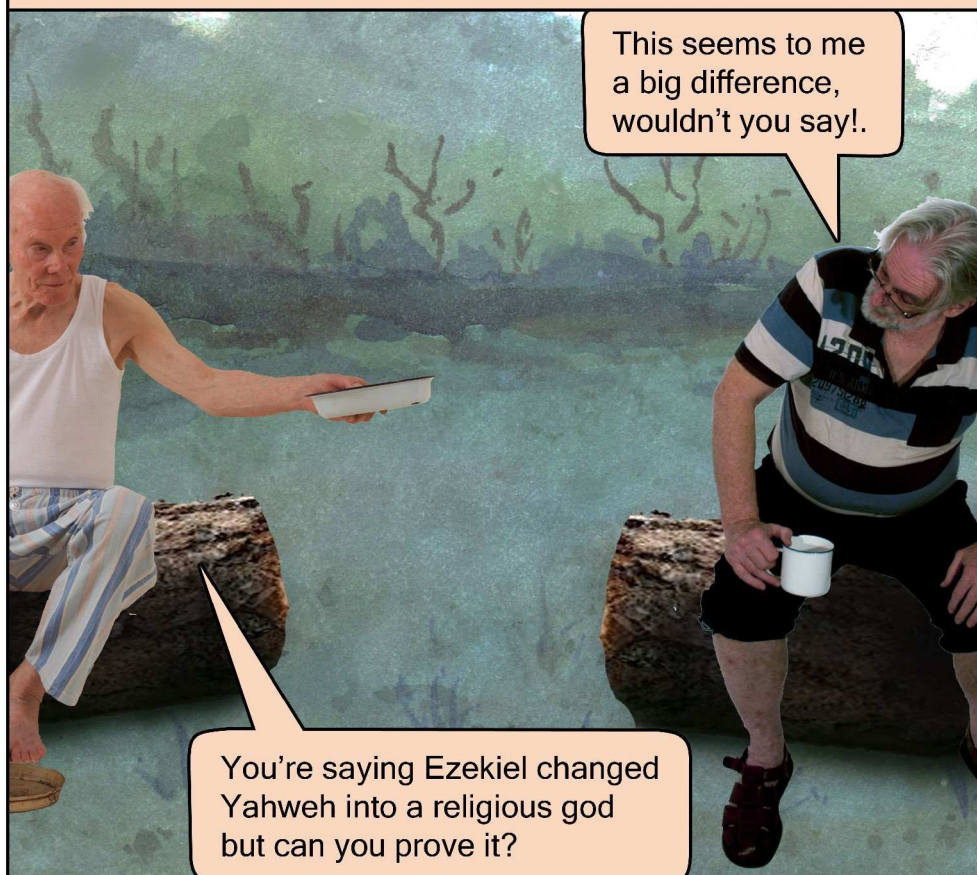
Paul called this '**hope against hope**' and we see it in Exodus where Moses has to make all the running **with no real hope of success**. It's also what we see Jeremiah doing. Only here the prophet's job is to shame his own community so that they pull themselves together and do their shaming job properly.



So in the Hebrew covenant Yahweh, in representing the marginal ideology, is no partner for **he does nothing**. In the authoritarian set-up in Ezekiel - in which Yahweh is a religious god with magical powers - things are very different. Here **Yahweh does everything**.

- He gets rid of stony hearts substituting hearts of flesh. Ezek 11.20
- He gives a new spirit. Ezek 11.19
- He installs a new everlasting covenant. Ezek 16.60
- He does this by himself providing a proper ruler. Ezek 34.23
- He defeats Israel's enemies on a permanent basis. Ezek 34.28
- He cleanses the land providing a permanent supply of rain Ezek 34.25-27 and the rainbow to go with it. Ezek 1.28 cf Gen 9.13

The list of unfulfillable bogus blessings is endless!



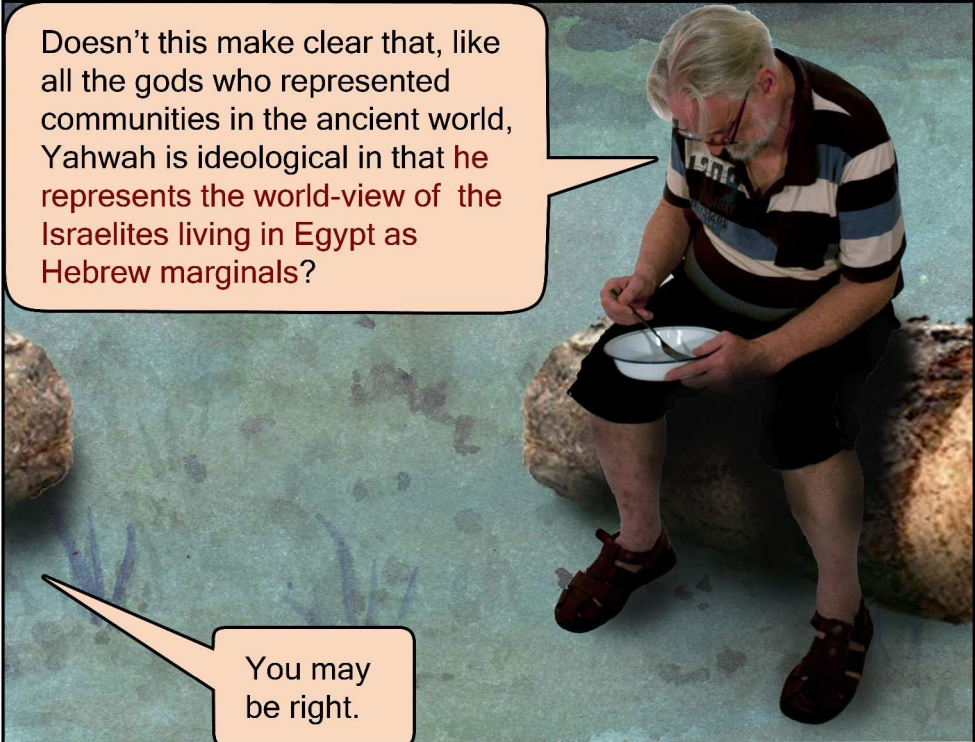
Easy. You'd agree, wouldn't you, there's a heavy insistence in Exodus that Yahweh's not some strange new god? He's the god of their fathers: the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac and the god of Jacob... only now in a new guise?

Ex3.6 & 13-16



Yes that's fair enough!

Doesn't this make clear that, like all the gods who represented communities in the ancient world, Yahweh is ideological in that **he represents the world-view of the Israelites living in Egypt as Hebrew marginals?**



You may be right.

Of course I'm right! So in Exodus we're talking down-to-earth politics not fanciful religion. Now let's look at Ezekiel 16. I saw you reading it last night so what's it all about?



The story describes Jerusalem (Israel) as an unwanted female baby abandoned at birth and left to die in the fields by her Canaanite parents.

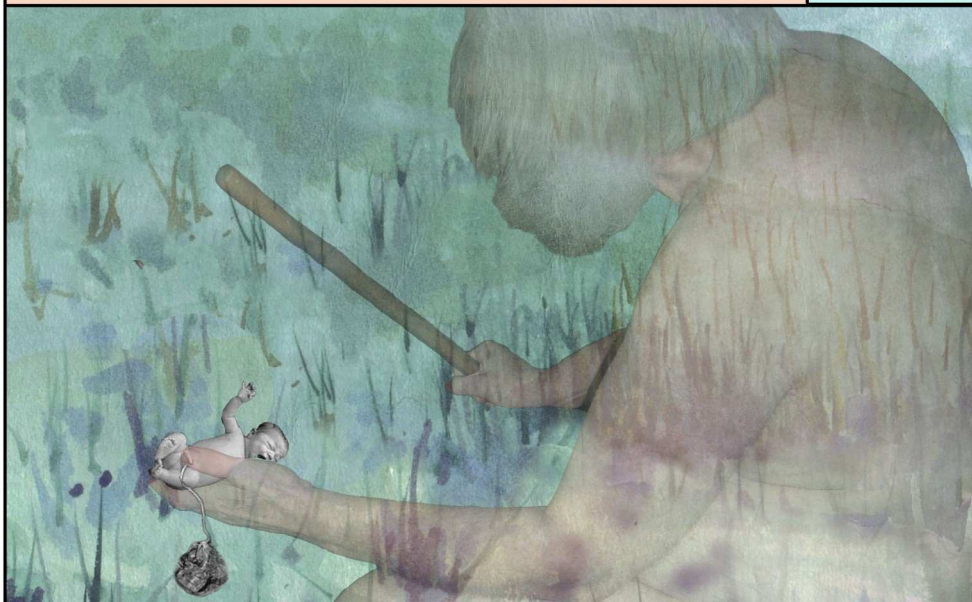
Ezek 16. 3-5

Sadly this baby girl is in black and white because she is a representation.



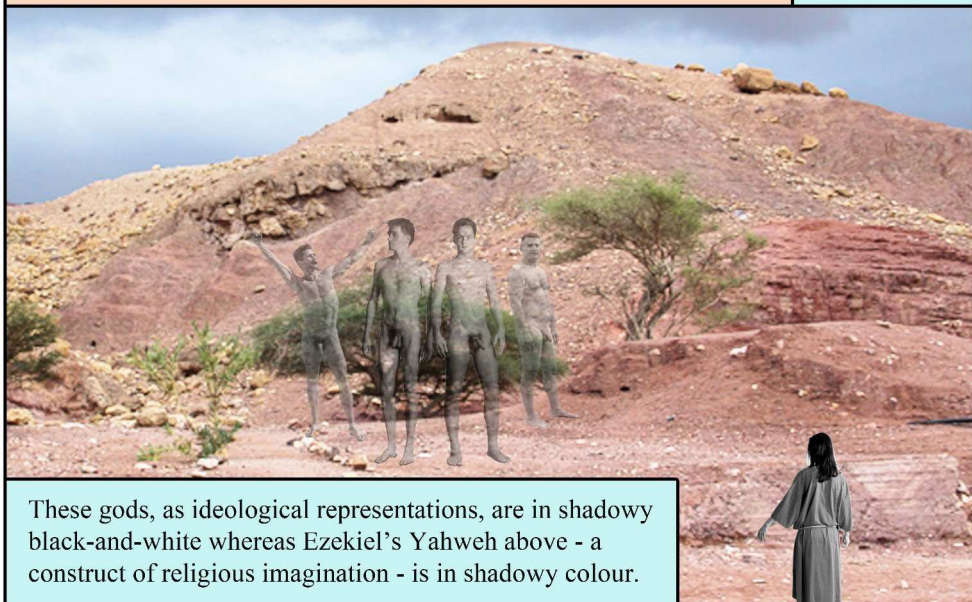
However, she is spotted by Yahweh - who happens to be passing - and he takes pity on her and rescues her.

Ezek 16. 6-7



Later, when she grows up, he adopts her as his bride but she is unfaithful and takes other gods as lovers...

Ezek 16. 8-34



These gods, as ideological representations, are in shadowy black-and-white whereas Ezekiel's Yahweh above - a construct of religious imagination - is in shadowy colour.

So in fury Yahweh abandons her to these lovers who strip her naked and abuse her, destroying all that is hers.

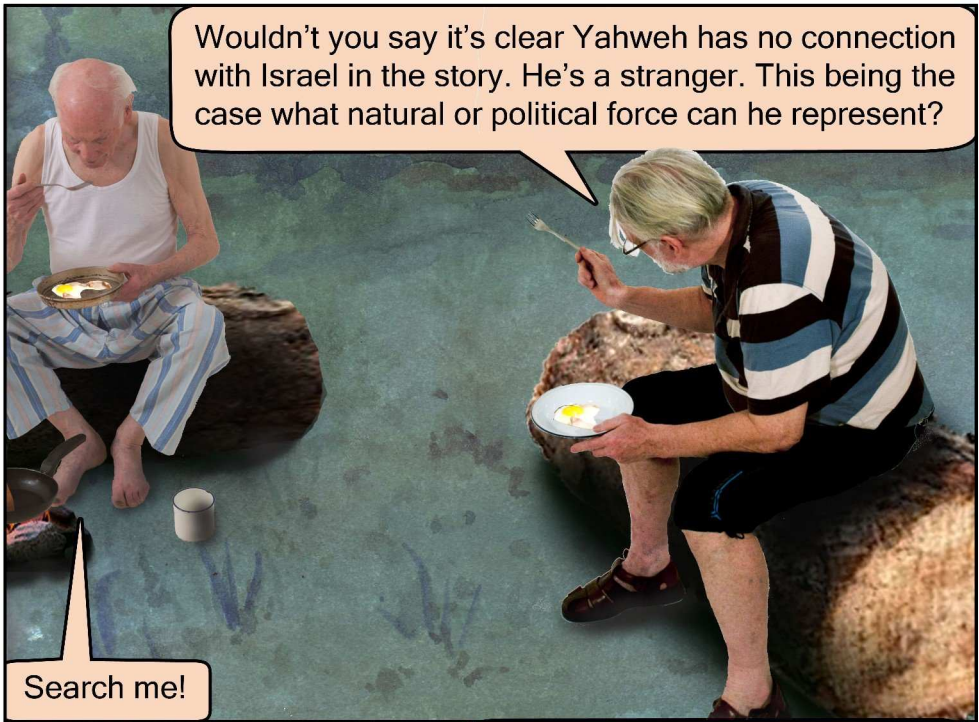
Ezek 16. 35-41



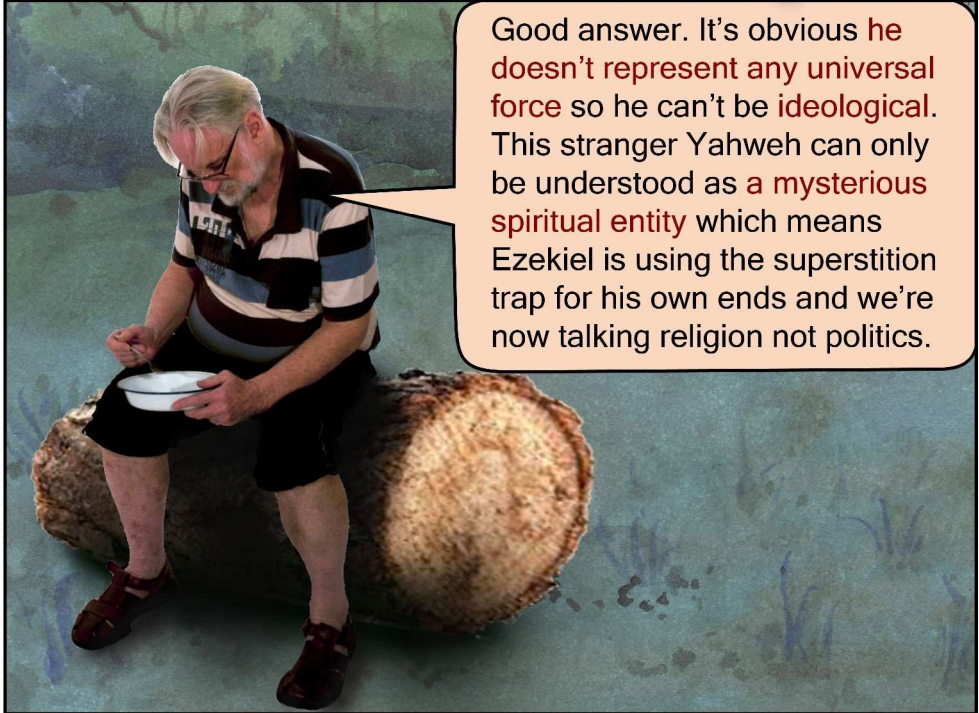
As a result she reforms and Yahweh, his anger assuaged, ends up forgiving her and restoring her fortune... only from now on she is under strict orders to blindly obey.

"I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God."

Ezek 16. 53-63

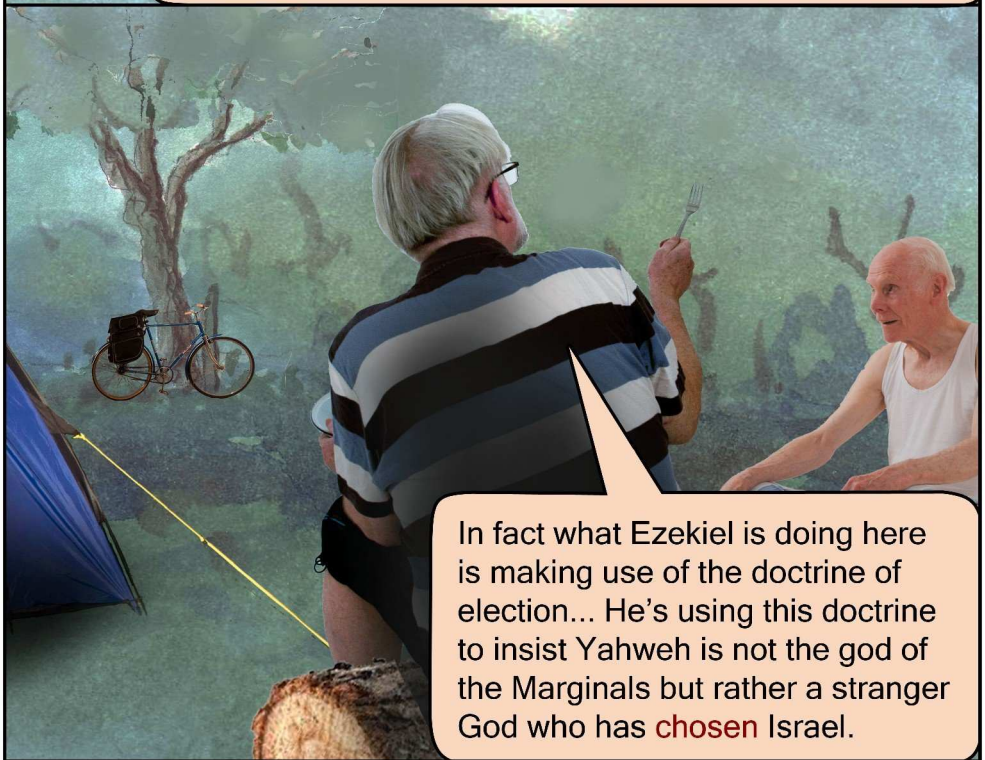


Wouldn't you say it's clear Yahweh has no connection with Israel in the story. He's a stranger. This being the case what natural or political force can he represent?



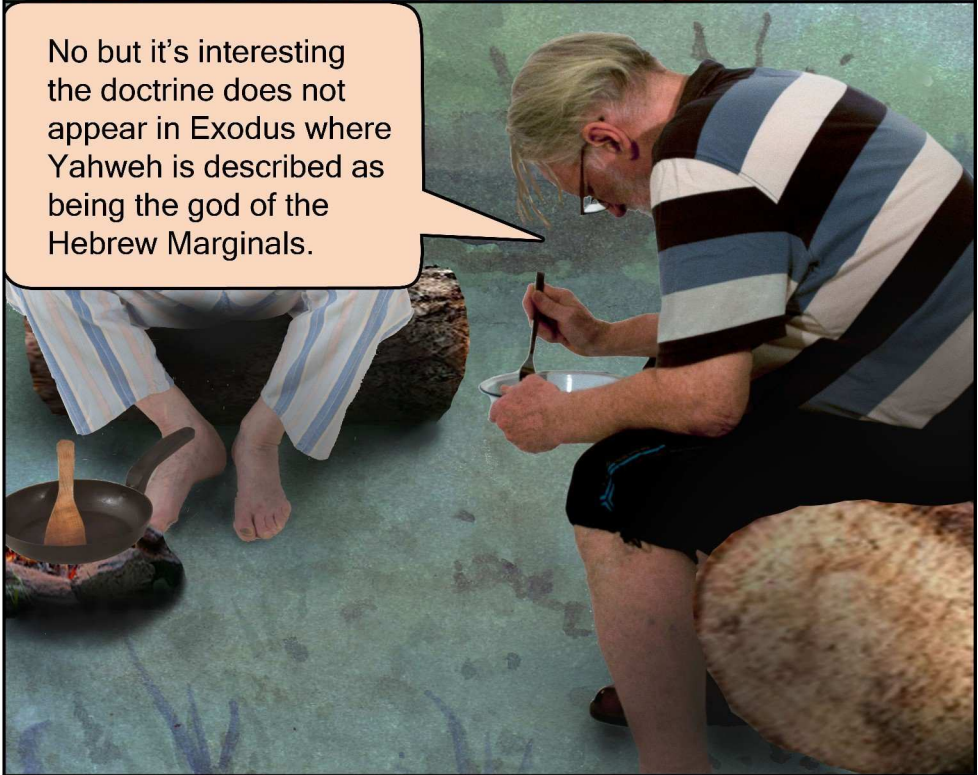


Well certainly he's using religion to buttress his political stance - just like the writer of Genesis 1 did. However, his language makes **spiritual sense** which can't be tested and simply has to be believed or not believed.





You're surely not trying to suggest Ezekiel created the doctrine of election.



No but it's interesting the doctrine does not appear in Exodus where Yahweh is described as being the god of the Hebrew Marginals.

The idea that Yahweh **chose** Israel first appears in a guarded way in Deuteronomy where the expression is used just once to insist that If Israel had such an extraordinary god it wasn't because she merited him but rather because she didn't.

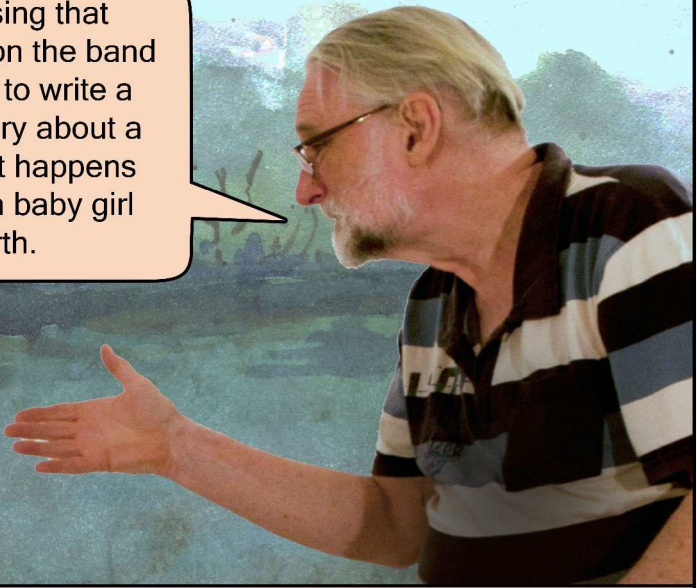
The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deut 7.6-7

Hard to find fault with that!

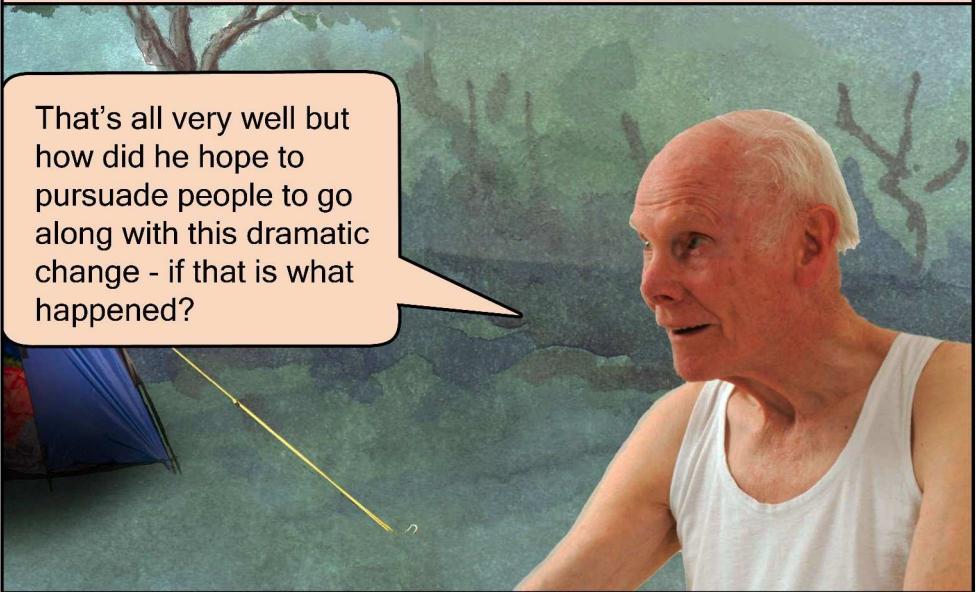
The prophets would certainly have agreed with you for they all went on to use the idea of election themselves. However, you can hardly deny it was superstitious to say Yahweh **chose** Israel since it clearly envisages him as an interfering spiritual being.


It's hardly surprising that Ezekiel jumped on the bandwagon deciding to write a powerful little story about a stranger who just happens to come across a baby girl abandoned at birth.



What we see here is Ezekiel using religion as a smoke-screen behind which he is free to dump the embarrassing god of the marginals and replace him with an authoritarian god complete with magical tricks, the objective being to make people happily subservient. It's magnificent... a *tour de force* in fact!

That's all very well but how did he hope to persuade people to go along with this dramatic change - if that is what happened?



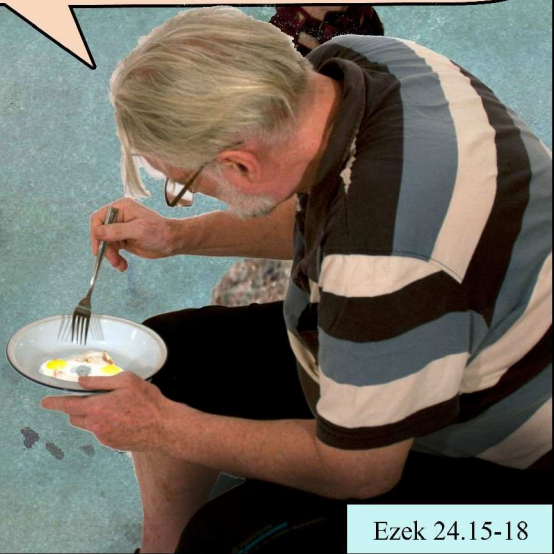


Well, people were in a state of shock and incredibly down-hearted so he tried to use this to his advantage by getting them to admit that, since their former hopes and dreams had failed, they should be given up as a bad job.

Along with the old covenant!

Ezek 16.61

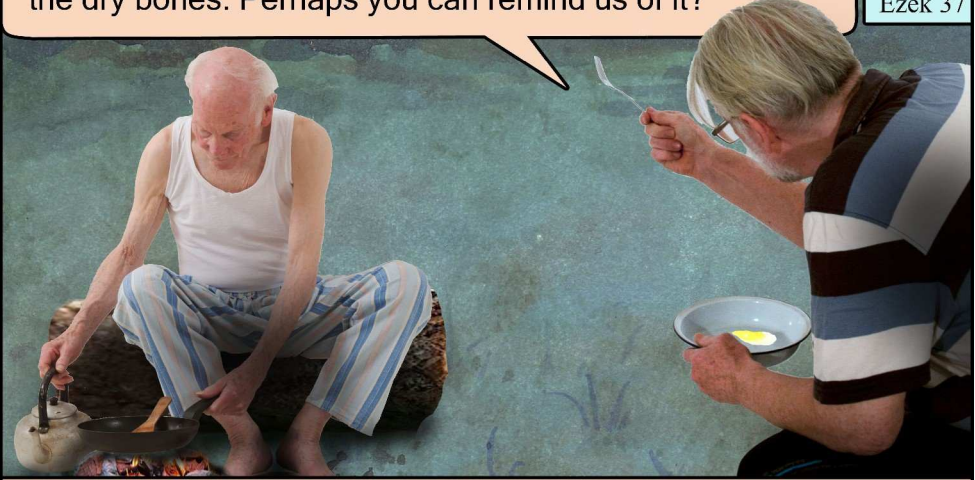
Exactly! And since Ezekiel's own wife died at the very moment news about the final calamity (the fall of Jerusalem) arrived, he ostentatiously refused to mourn. In this way he made the point that people should refuse to mourn for what they had lost.



Ezek 24.15-18

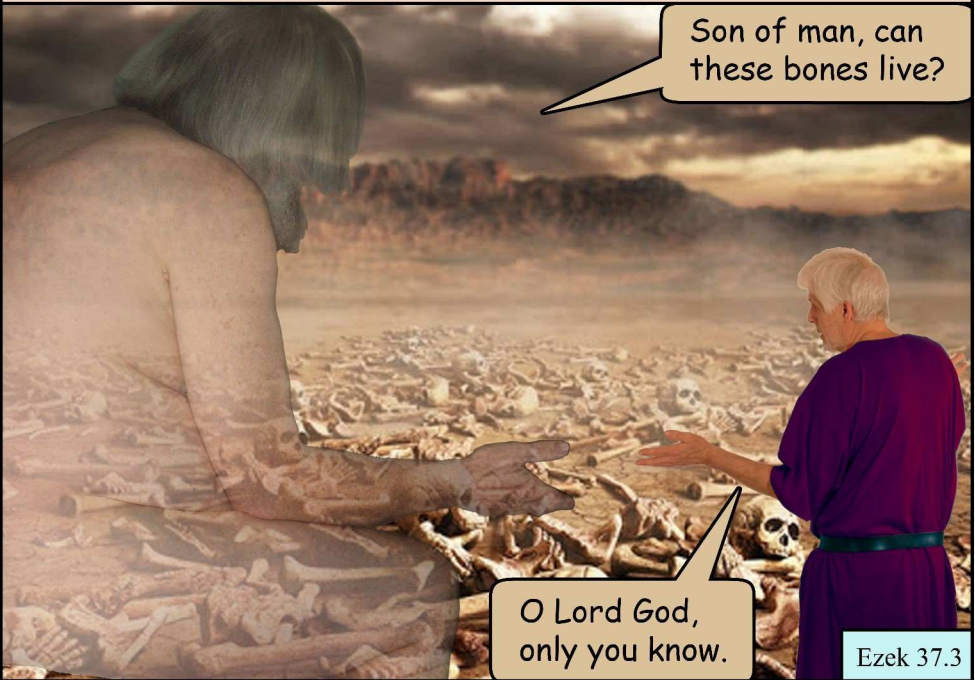
He then went on to make it brilliantly clear people should draw a line under the past, making a complete break and a new beginning, by telling the story about the valley of the dry bones. Perhaps you can remind us of it?

Ezek 37



Very well. Ezekiel recounts that the spirit of Yahweh carried him away and set him down in a valley full of dried up old bones.

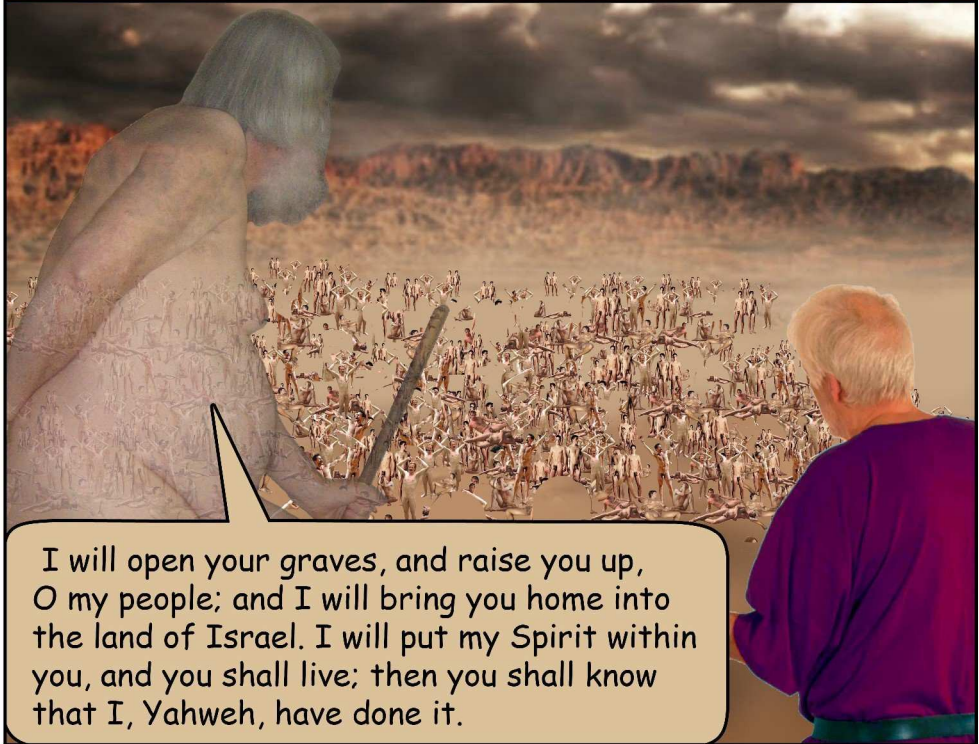
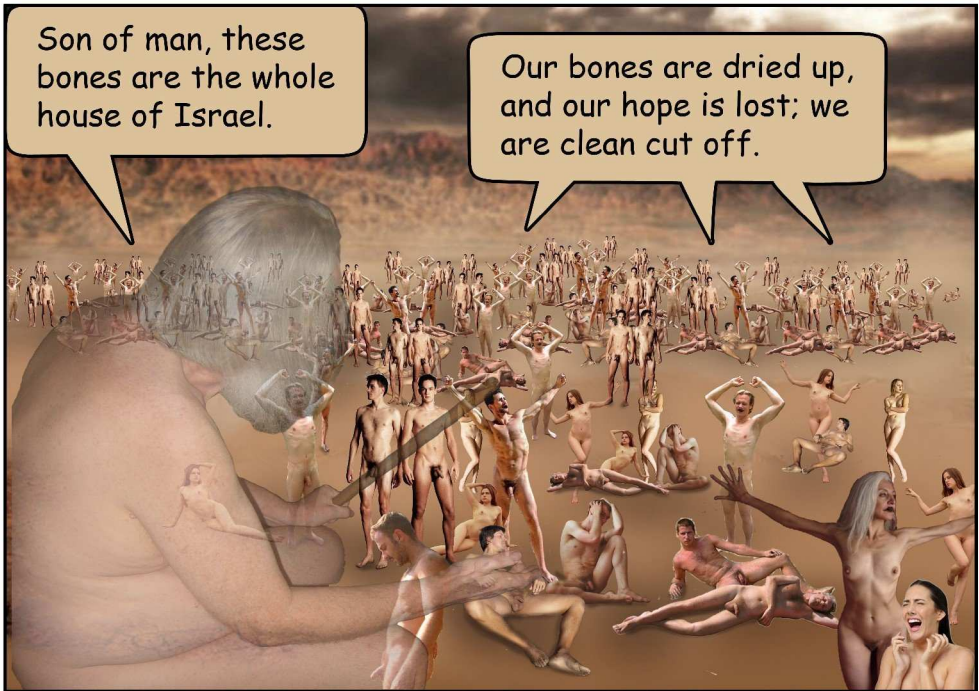
Son of man, can these bones live?



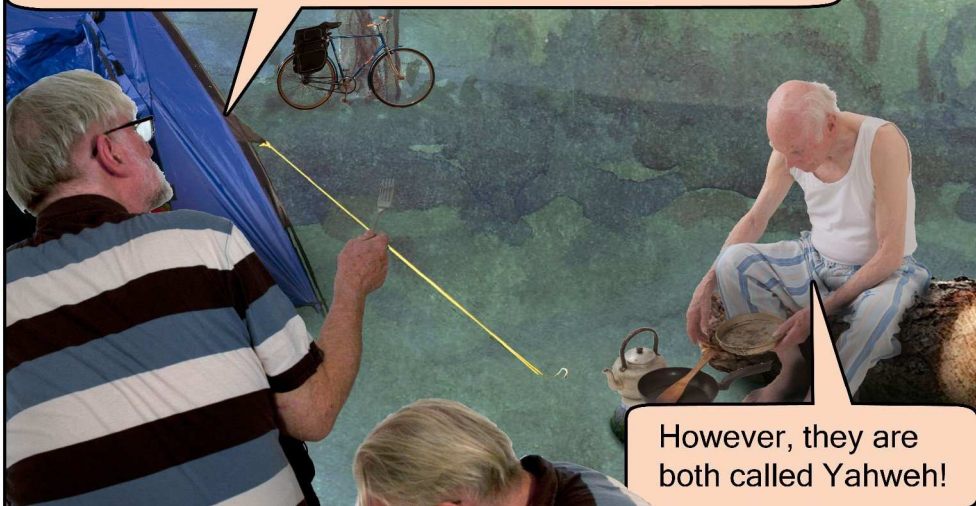
O Lord God, only you know.

Ezek 37.3





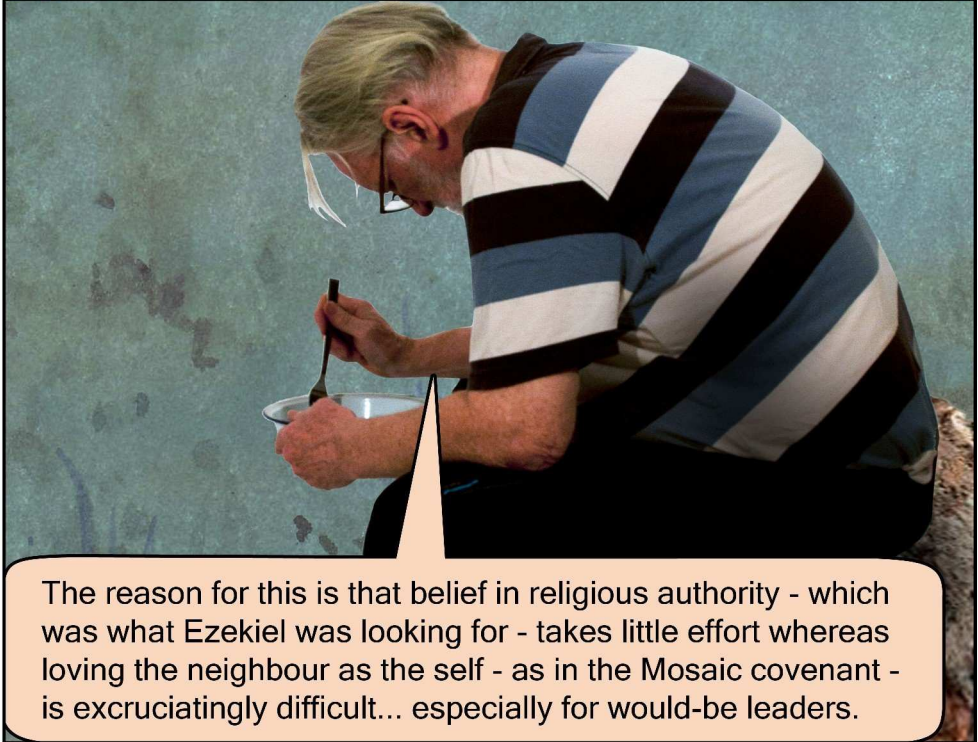
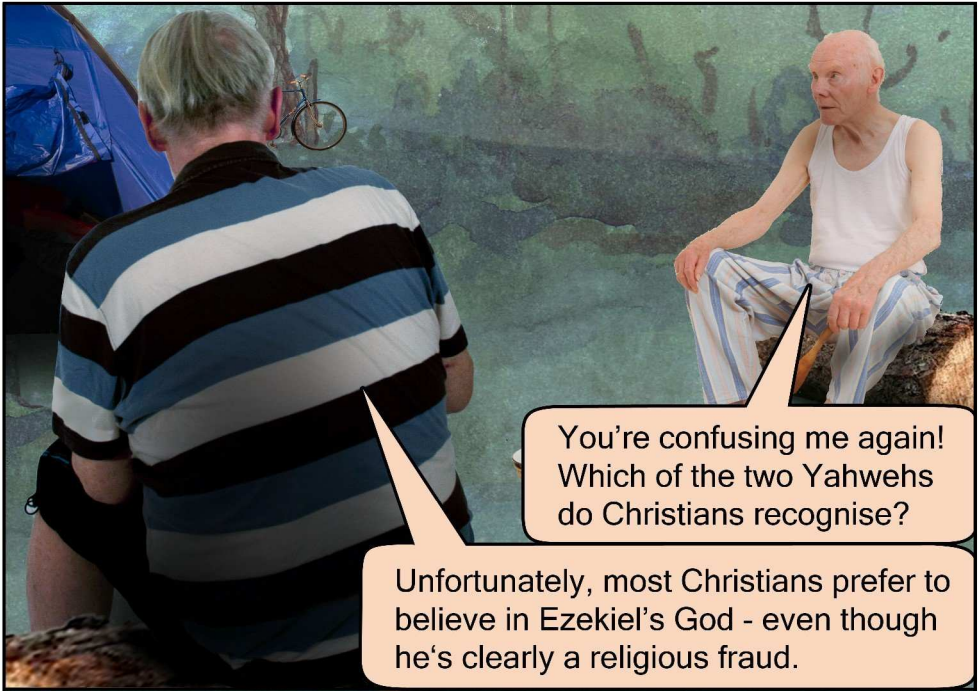
What Ezekiel doesn't say, of course, is that the god he claims is going to completely transform reality using magic is quite different from the god who, in Exodus 3, told Moses to go back to Egypt and ferment revolution.

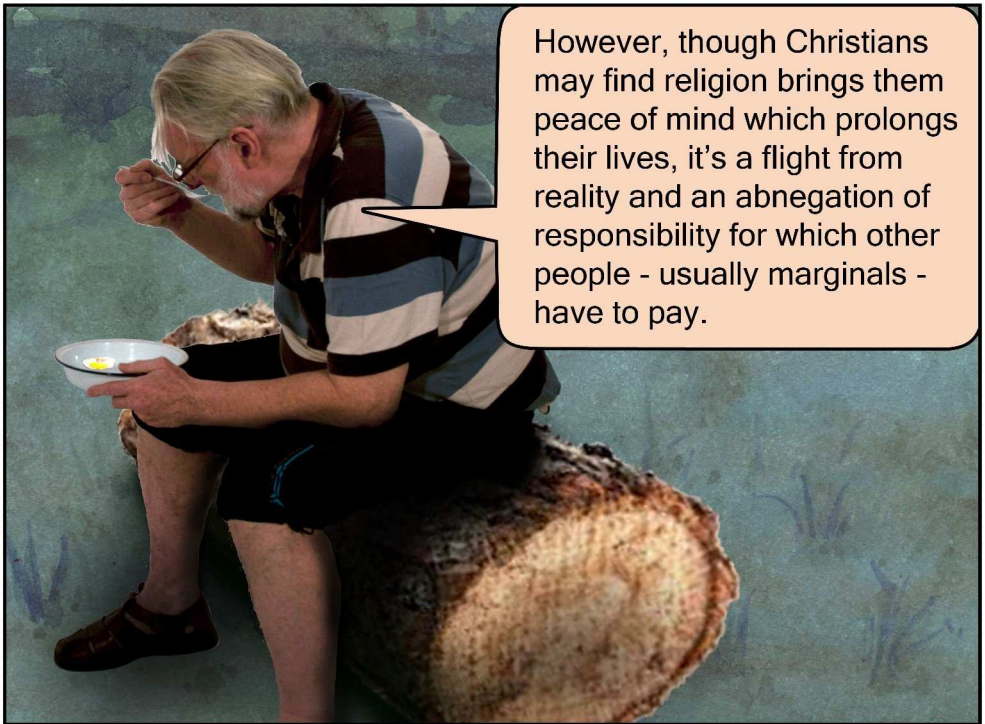


However, they are both called Yahweh!



Yes but, there the similarity ends for the Yahweh in Ezekiel is an imagined spiritual overlord looking for blind obedience whereas in Exodus he's the representation of the Israelites' own marginal perspective and the guarantor of their strategy to shame the world out of its authoritarian ways.






However, though Christians may find religion brings them peace of mind which prolongs their lives, it's a flight from reality and an abnegation of responsibility for which other people - usually marginals - have to pay.



You're not going to win many friends saying things like that!

3

ISAIAH



Shall we look now at Isaiah, or rather 'the Isaiahs', since clearly there were more than one of them.

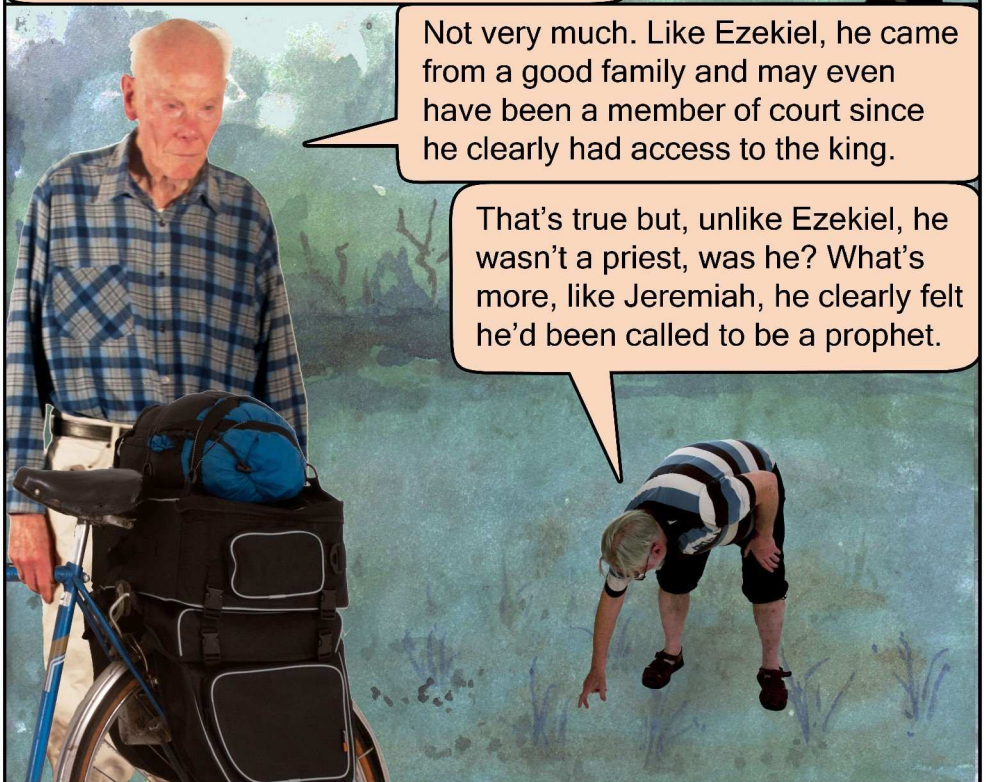
Yes, perhaps you could clarify the situation for us.

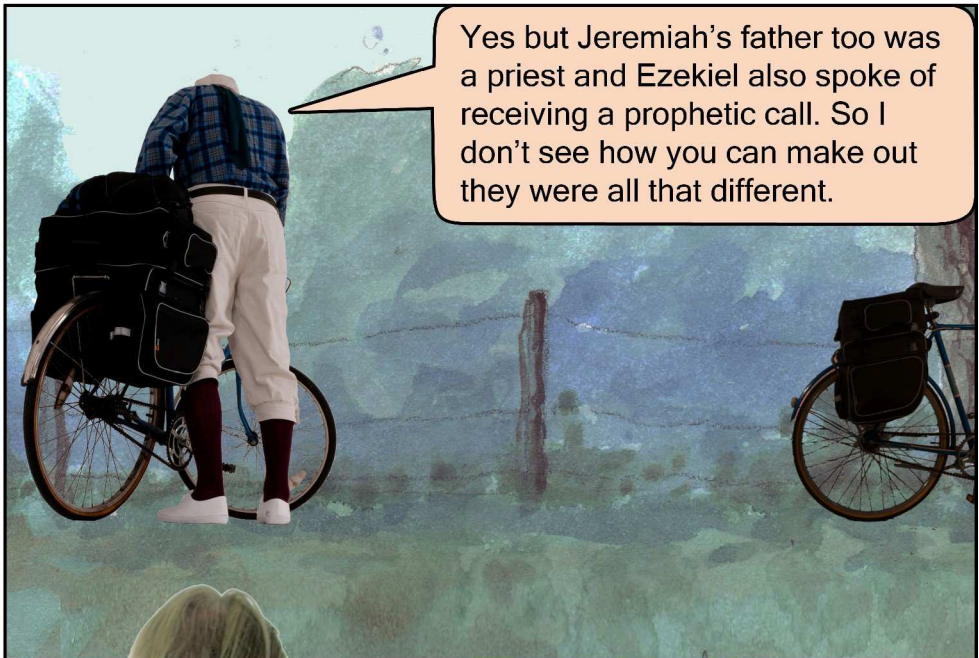
Well, Chapters 1 to 39 deal with the work of a prophet after whom the book as a whole is named. He operated during the first half of the 7th century BCE - a hundred years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, an event which indelibly marked the lifetime of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Scholars refer to these chapters as First Isaiah to distinguish them from chapters 40 to 55 or Second Isaiah which is the work of an anonymous disciple who, like Ezekiel, lived in Babylon during the exile.

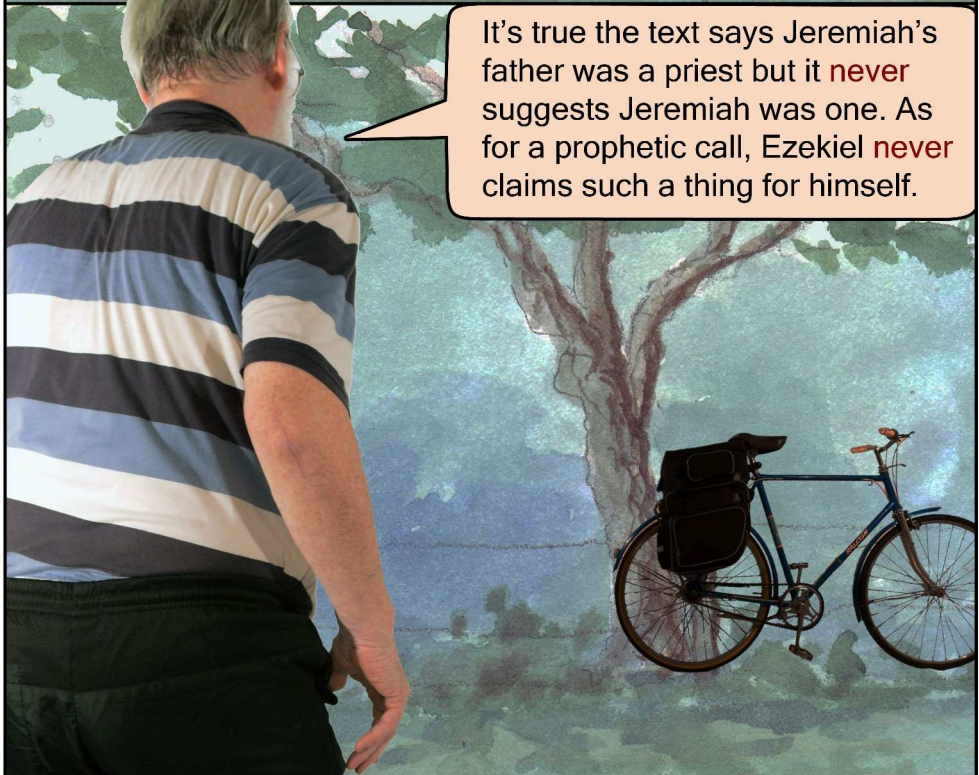


Finally, scholars call chapters 56 to 66 Third Isaiah since they show signs they were written back in Palestine by further disciples after 539 BCE when the exiles had started to return.





Yes but Jeremiah's father too was a priest and Ezekiel also spoke of receiving a prophetic call. So I don't see how you can make out they were all that different.



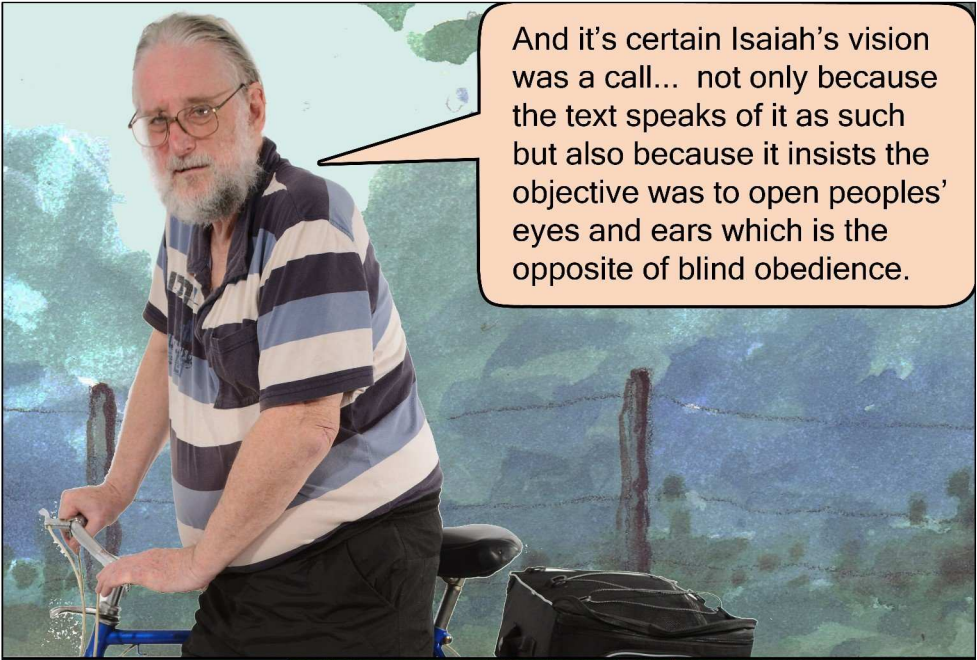
It's true the text says Jeremiah's father was a priest but it **never** suggests Jeremiah was one. As for a prophetic call, Ezekiel **never** claims such a thing for himself.

How can you say that! They both received similar visions telling them to denounce the community for its covenant breaking, a sin that was going to be severely punished.

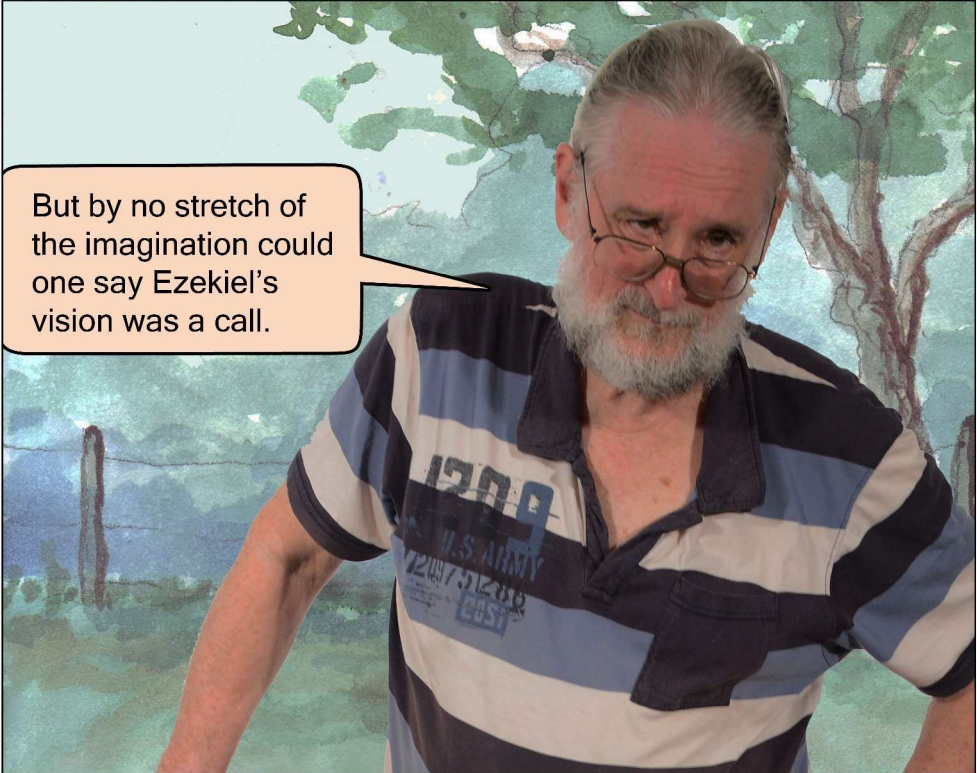


Yes they both had visions along those lines, though it has to be said Isaiah's was fairly simple compared with Ezekiel's grandiose affair.





And it's certain Isaiah's vision was a call... not only because the text speaks of it as such but also because it insists the objective was to open peoples' eyes and ears which is the opposite of blind obedience.



But by no stretch of the imagination could one say Ezekiel's vision was a call.

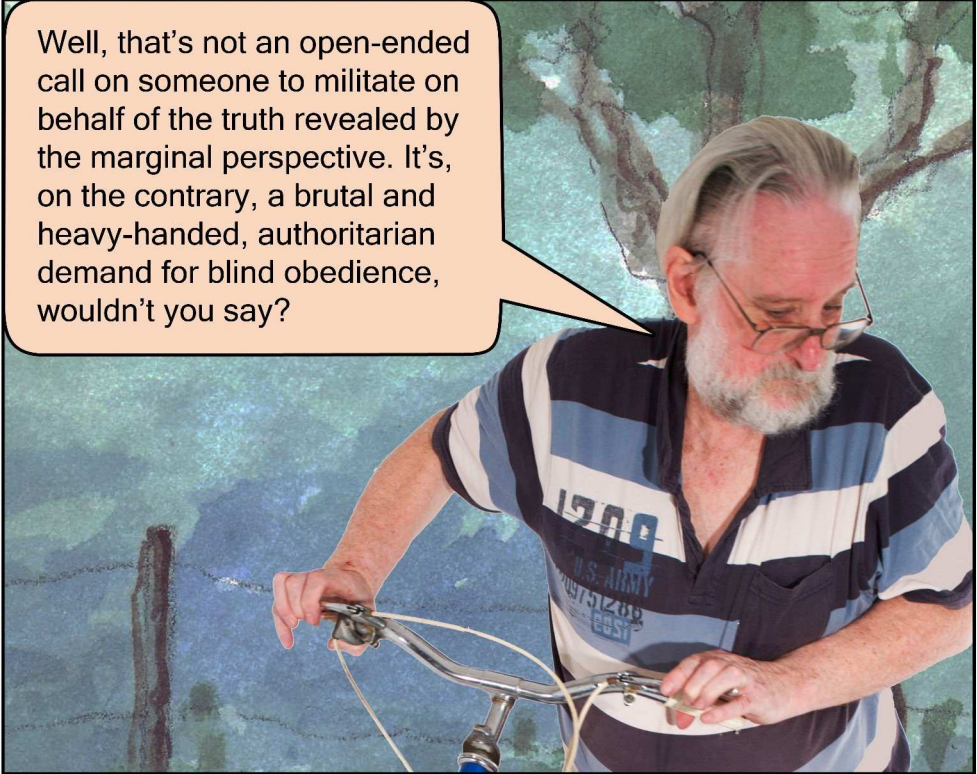
You're going to have to explain why you say that.



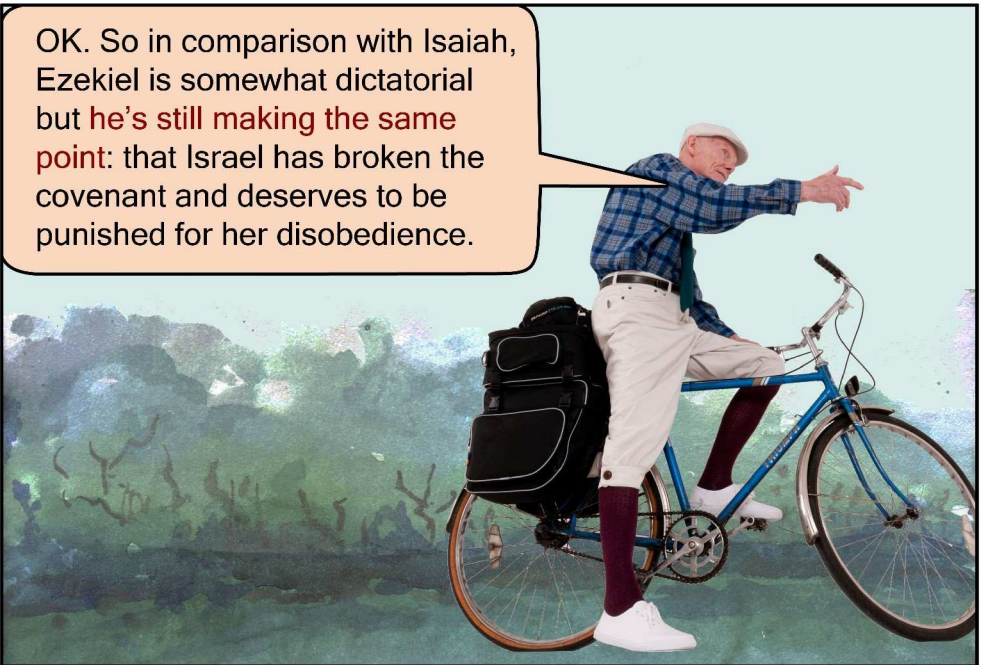
Well wasn't Ezekiel told that wrong-doers would be punished, whether he got round to warning them or not, but that if he failed to warn them then he himself too would be heavily punished!

If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you will have saved your life.

Ezek 3.18-19



OK. So in comparison with Isaiah, Ezekiel is somewhat dictatorial but **he's still making the same point**: that Israel has broken the covenant and deserves to be punished for her disobedience.



No he's not. **He's changing the point**. He's telling people to swap covenants. They must forget the business of changing the world by showing a better, non-authoritarian way of living together and, instead, concentrate on blindly doing what they are told, which is a very different matter!

But doesn't Isaiah insist heavily on **Israel's disobedience and rebellion** promising forgiveness only if **she agrees to obey!**

*"Come now, let us reason together,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

Is 1.18-20

Fair enough but he's not talking about blind obedience. He's talking about Israel's refusal to open her eyes and get involved in transforming the civilised world in the only way she can: by demonstrating a better, non-authoritarian way of living together.



That said, you're right to note something amiss here. I'm referring, of course, to Isaiah's description of Yahweh as an angry and vindictive god. We have already come across this feature in Jeremiah and Isaiah is quite as heavy-handed...



... It's not just that he describes Yahweh as punishing Israel for her covenant breaking. He also has Yahweh punishing the surrounding nations at great length for getting involved in his own punishment of Israel. It's all quite mad!



I don't like the idea of an angry and vindictive God any more than you do but why call it mad?



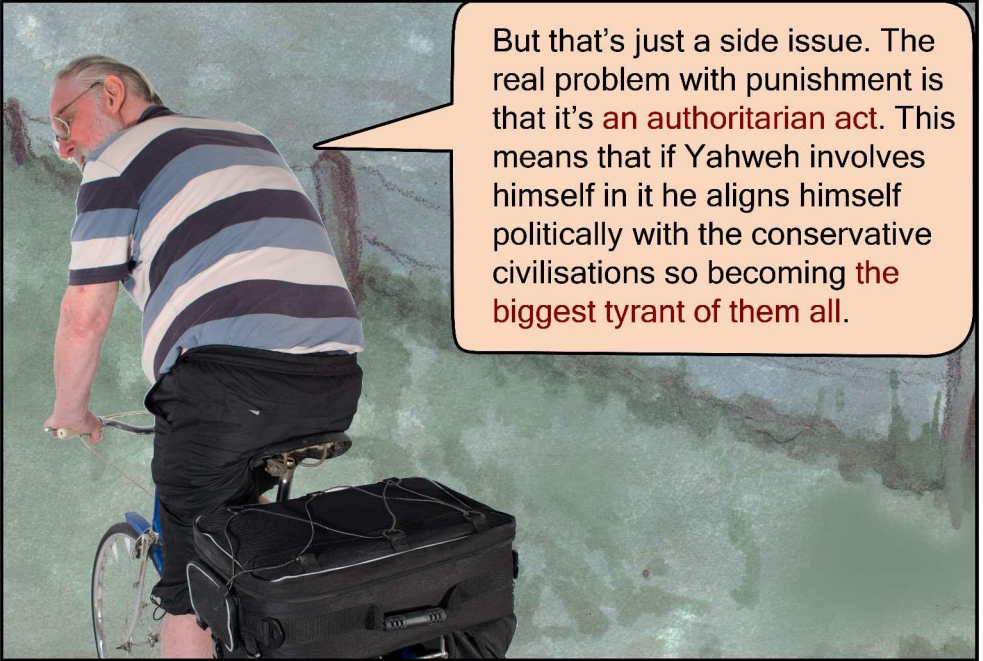
Well isn't it mad for Yahweh to call on the surrounding nations to chastise Israel... and then afterwards to chastise these nations themselves simply for doing his bidding?

He will raise a signal for a nation afar off, and whistle for it from the ends of the earth; and lo, swiftly, speedily it comes!... Their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar; they growl and seize their prey, they carry it off, and none can rescue.

Is 5.26-29

The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw.... Behold, I am stirring up the Medes against them, who have no regard for silver and do not delight in gold. Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not pity children.

Is 13.1-18




But that's just a side issue. The real problem with punishment is that it's **an authoritarian act**. This means that if Yahweh involves himself in it he aligns himself politically with the conservative civilisations so becoming **the biggest tyrant of them all**.

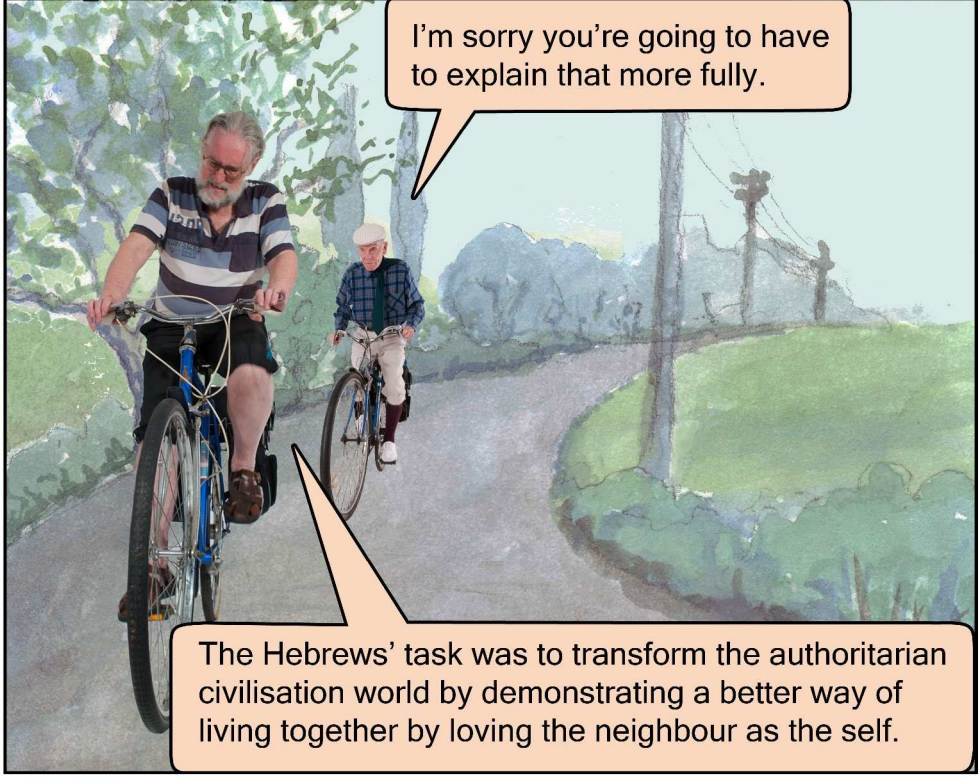


This is why I say it was an open door to Ezekiel and the revisionists: it made it easy for them to present Yahweh as an authoritarian God.

So why did prophets like Isaiah talk about the punishments of an angry god if it undermined their political stance?



Well, they had inadvertently fallen into the superstition trap.



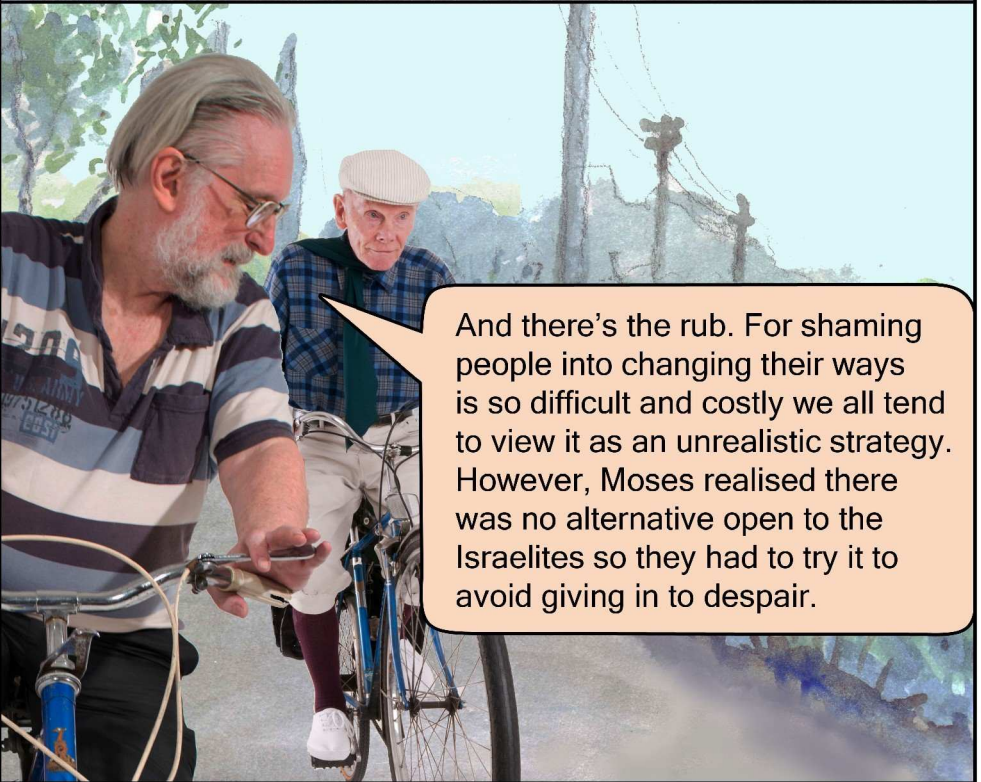
I'm sorry you're going to have to explain that more fully.


The Hebrews' task was to transform the authoritarian civilisation world by demonstrating a better way of living together by loving the neighbour as the self.

Since they were marginals they couldn't adopt the normal way of transforming society using political clout for they had none. So they were obliged to rely solely on the power of shaming.




And there's the rub. For shaming people into changing their ways is so difficult and costly we all tend to view it as an unrealistic strategy. However, Moses realised there was no alternative open to the Israelites so they had to try it to avoid giving in to despair.





Ah so that's why the Israelites were always backsliding... **because the shaming strategy was so difficult and costly!** I've always found the backsliding business puzzling.



Yes but for the prophets, who had the job of seeing to it Israel remained on course with her shaming strategy, such backsliding was extremely aggravating. Indeed it made them hopping mad!

So, of course, they were tempted to suppose it had the same effect on Yahweh making him very angry too.

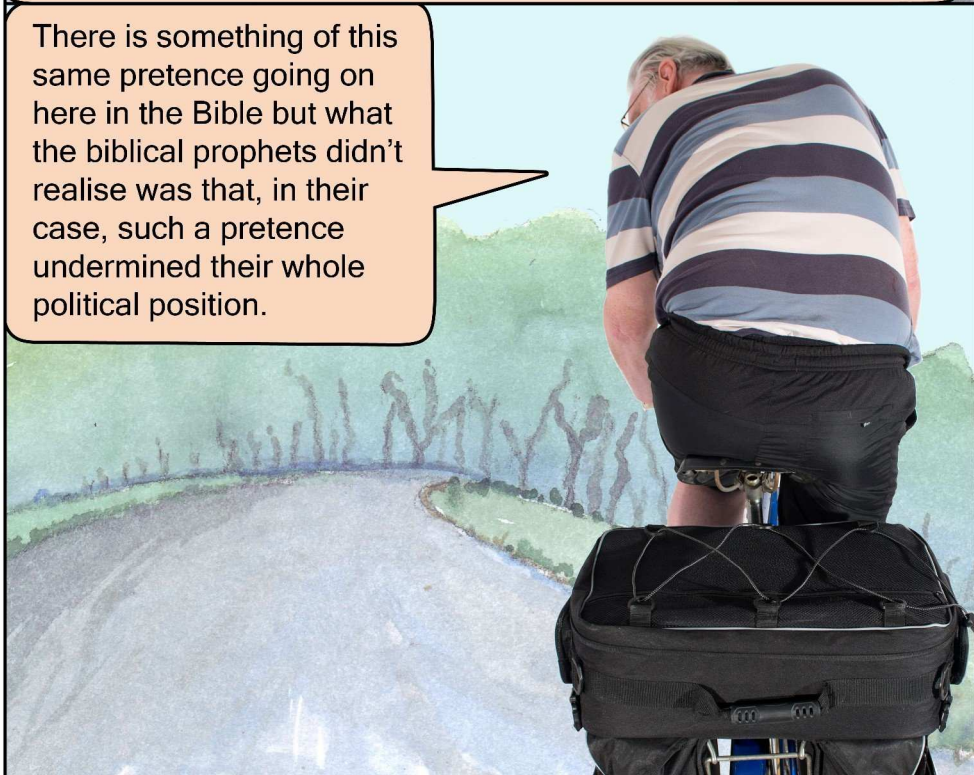
What's wrong with that?

Can't you see it was a crazy idea since it involved viewing Yahweh as a religious spirit when in point of fact he was no more than a representation of their own interests and view of the world as marginals or former marginals?

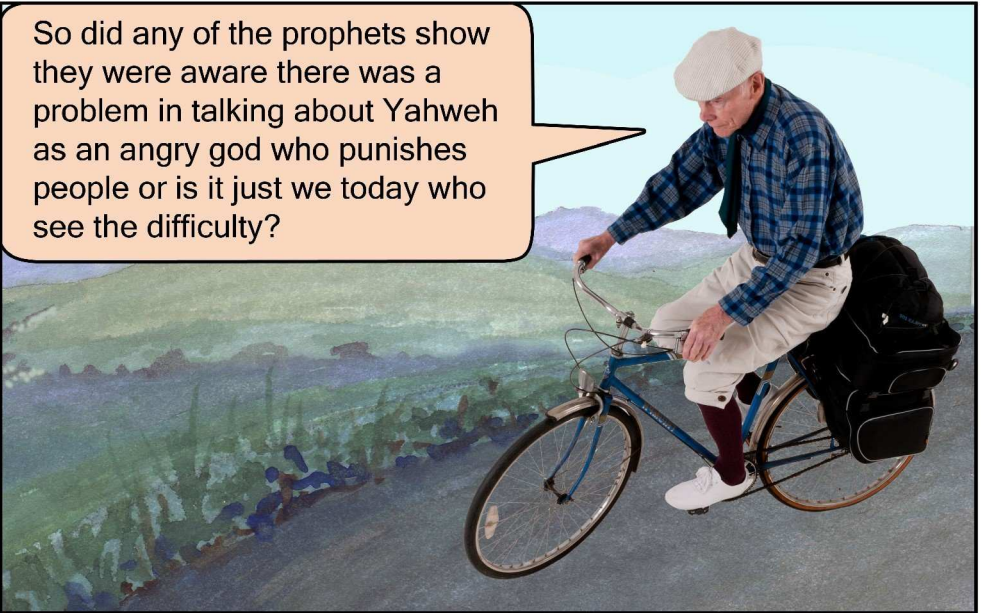


The Moabites fell into the same trap when they pretended their own god, Chemosh, was punishing them when they suffered defeat at the hands of the Israelites. They said this because they couldn't admit Yahweh was stronger than Chemosh.

There is something of this same pretence going on here in the Bible but what the biblical prophets didn't realise was that, in their case, such a pretence undermined their whole political position.

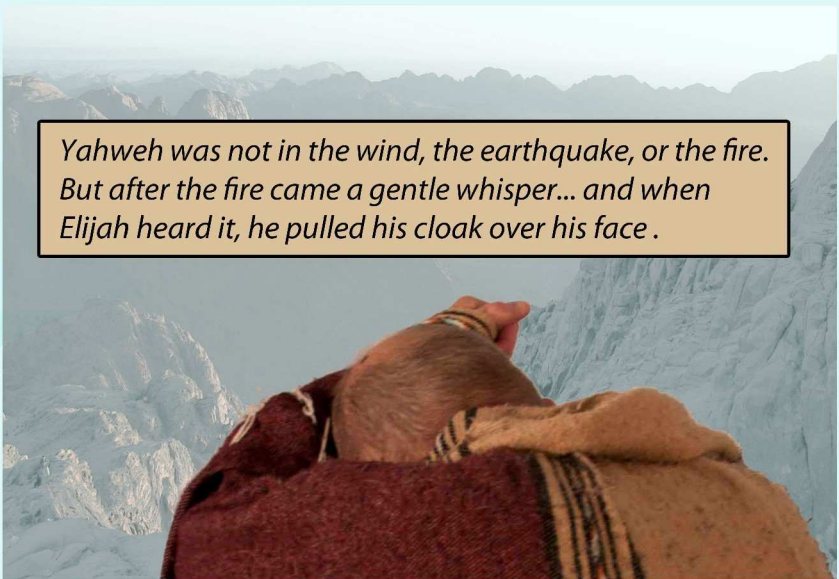


So did any of the prophets show they were aware there was a problem in talking about Yahweh as an angry god who punishes people or is it just we today who see the difficulty?



Well, as we have seen, Elijah had certainly already become aware that, while Yahweh's power as god of the Hebrews was massive, it didn't express itself in anger or violence..

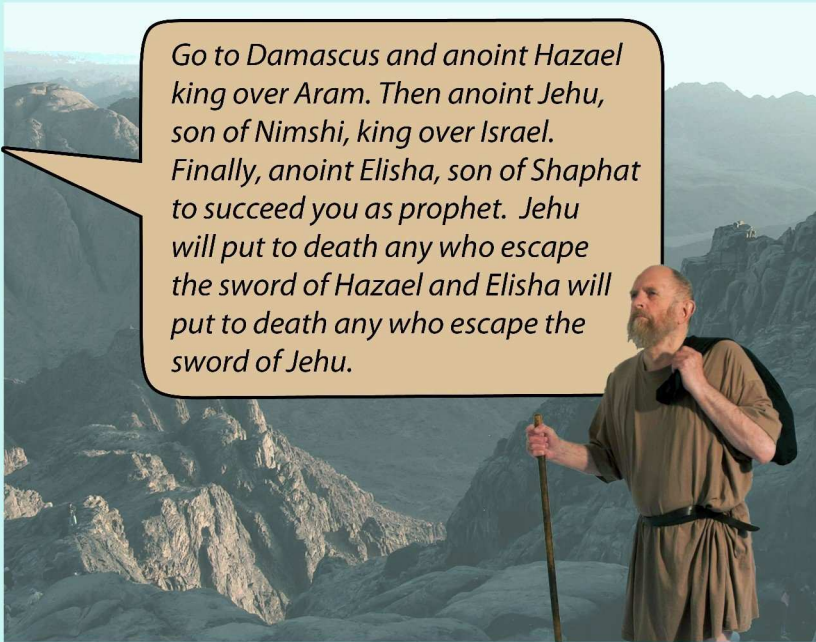
*Yahweh was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire.
But after the fire came a gentle whisper... and when
Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face .*



See *Politics Before and After the Exile Part I* p. 324

1 Kings 19.11-13

But unfortunately the point was lost on the scribe recording events as can be seen from his description of what followed. *



* See *Politics Before and After the Exile Part 1* p. 331

1 Kings 19:15-17

Interestingly, Hosea too showed unease at the bloodthirsty way in which Jehu later carried out his allotted task but in the end all he declared was that Yahweh would solve the problem by taking direct, bloodthirsty action himself!

*And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel *; for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day, I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."*

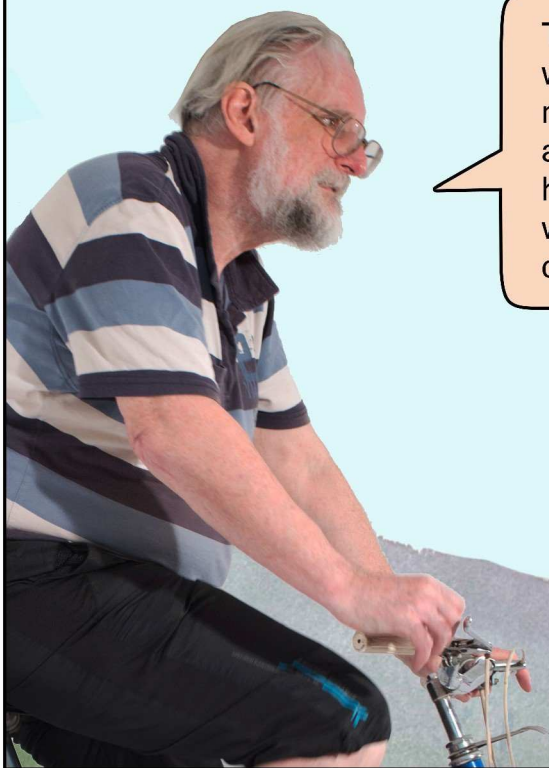
*Ancient Samarian city where Ahab had his royal palace

Hos 1. 4-5

OK so you see the prophets as falling into the superstition trap thus inadvertently opening the door to authoritarian and religious ideas. But doesn't this suggest there was little difference between Ezekiel and them?



The interesting thing is that when Isaiah eventually gets round to describing Yahweh as overcoming his anger... having reduced the whole world to a low-lying, flat desolate plane ...



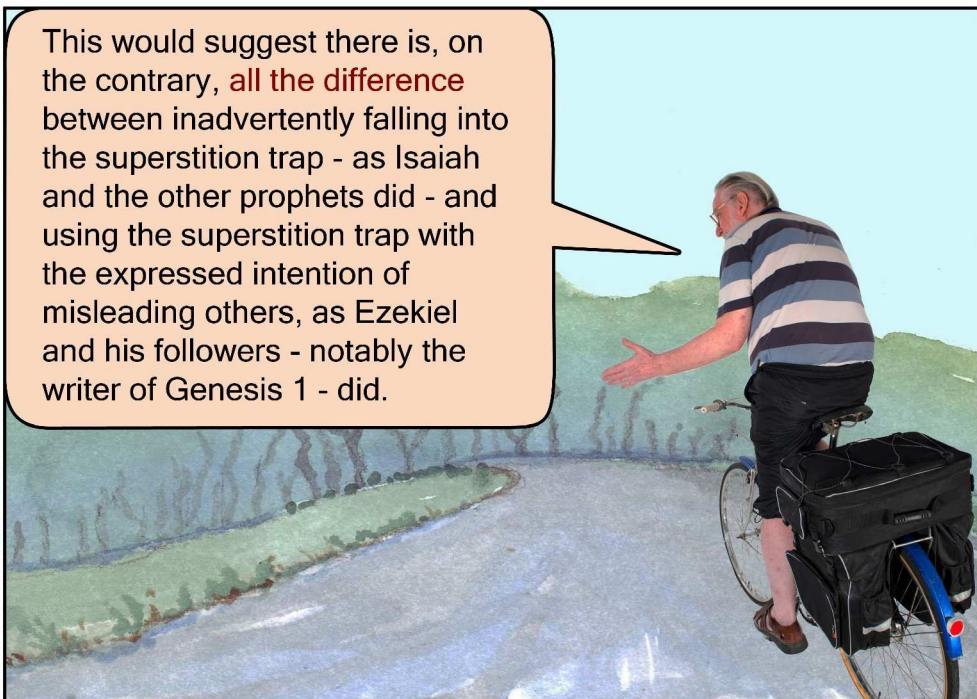
He produces a stunning vision of the new society which will come about when Israel, given a second chance, at last manages to properly perform her shaming strategy, thereby changing the whole world forever.

*It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide for many peoples;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.*

Is 2.1-4 See also Is 11.1-9

What we have here is a brilliant foretaste of the fulfilment of the Mosaic covenant and there is nothing in the least bit authoritarian about it since it describes people seeing things for themselves and changing their behaviour as a result.

This would suggest there is, on the contrary, **all the difference** between inadvertently falling into the superstition trap - as Isaiah and the other prophets did - and using the superstition trap with the expressed intention of misleading others, as Ezekiel and his followers - notably the writer of Genesis 1 - did.



Perhaps we should move on to Second Isaiah?



As a disciple, Second Isaiah naturally used and expanded on his master's themes.

Yes but what about his monotheism. This is surely something completely new.

You previously pointed out* how easy it is to wrongly assume an ancient writer was a monotheist simply because he talks exclusively about his own deity mentioning no other god.

*See *God of the Marginals: The Myth Cycle* p. 202

You said it was only possible to be certain a writer was a monotheist when he denies other gods exist which is precisely what we find Second Isaiah doing here for the very first time.

I am he.

*Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.*

Is 43.10

*I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God.*

Is 44.6

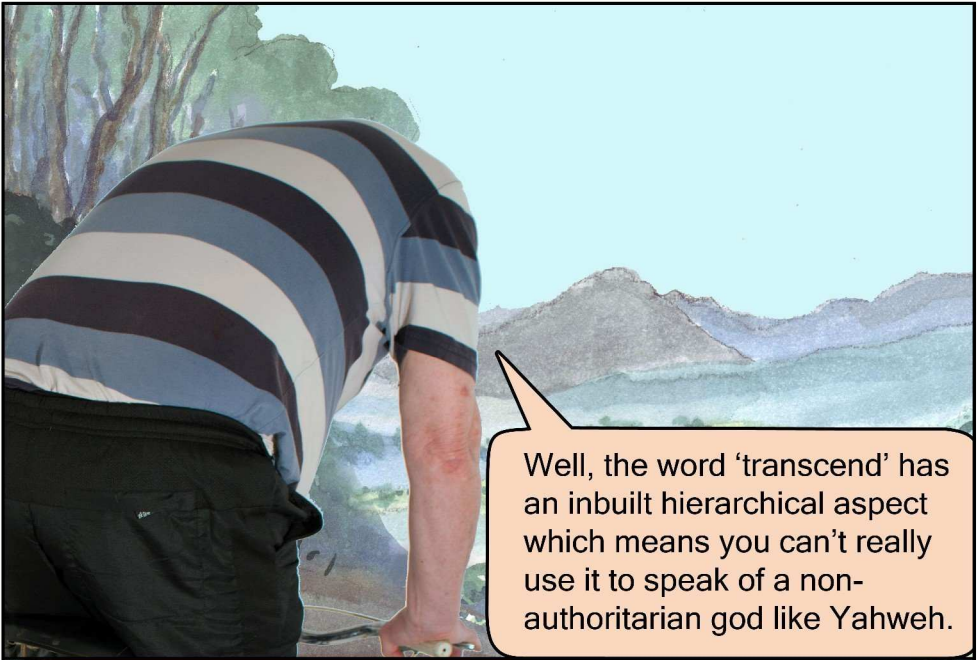
*I am the LORD, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.*

Is 45.5

True but you have to remember that in the Bible Yahweh is always different since he never displays the appetites and needs the other gods all gloried in which is why I label them as **cosmic** and him as **metacosmic**.

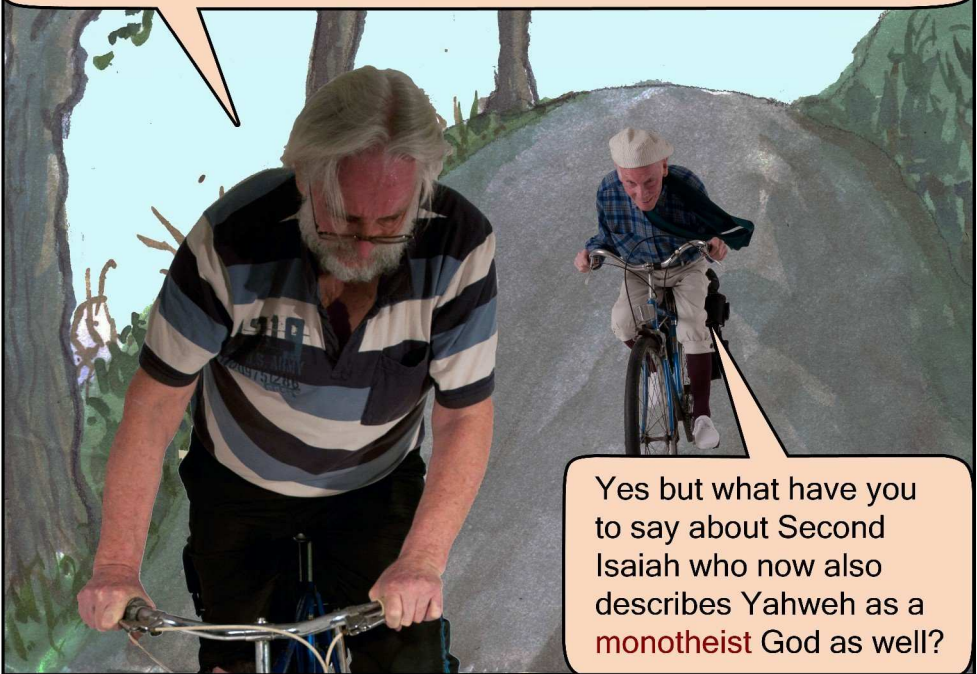


Why invent words? Why can't you call Yahweh **transcendent** like everyone else does?



Well, the word 'transcend' has an inbuilt hierarchical aspect which means you can't really use it to speak of a non-authoritarian god like Yahweh.

All the other gods in the ancient Near East could rightly be called transcendent, especially Aten and Ahura Mazda, who ruled alone.



Yes but what have you to say about Second Isaiah who now also describes Yahweh as a **monotheist** God as well?

Well, I know religious people like you see monotheism as a great advance in human awareness, however, there are good reasons to doubt this was historically the case.



How's that?

You have to bear in mind the two previous forms of monotheism - the cult of Aten in Egypt and of Ahura Mazda in Iran - were both **authoritarian** phenomena precisely designed **to suppress all competing cults**.



But you claim First and Second Isaiah were Hebrew marginals so they can't have been authoritarians!



True, Second Isaiah was clearly not advocating an empire cult designed to silence political opposition. However, when he enshrined Yahweh as the one-and-only god he was, for all that, effectively writing-off everyone else's ideological perspective.



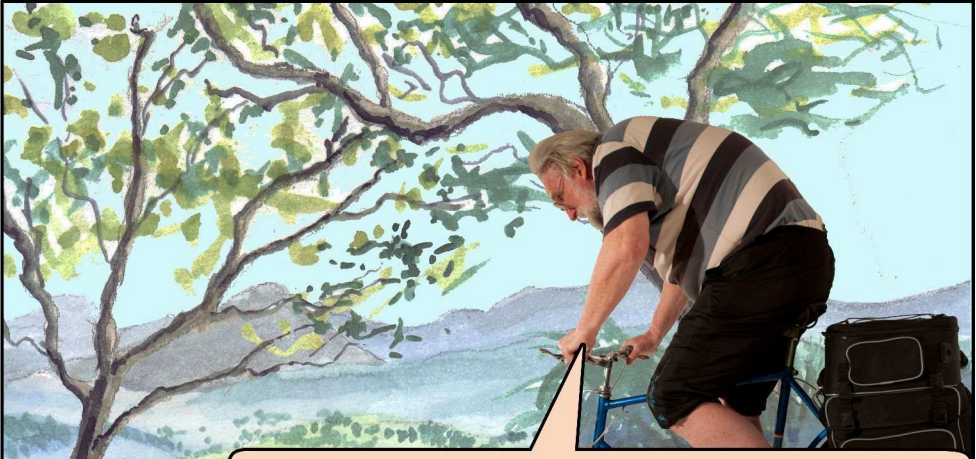
As we have seen, in depicting Yahweh as an all powerful angry god who chastised his own people... and everyone else into the bargain... all the prophets inadvertently fell into the superstition trap. For they were depicting him as something more than just a representation of their own political perspective as marginals.



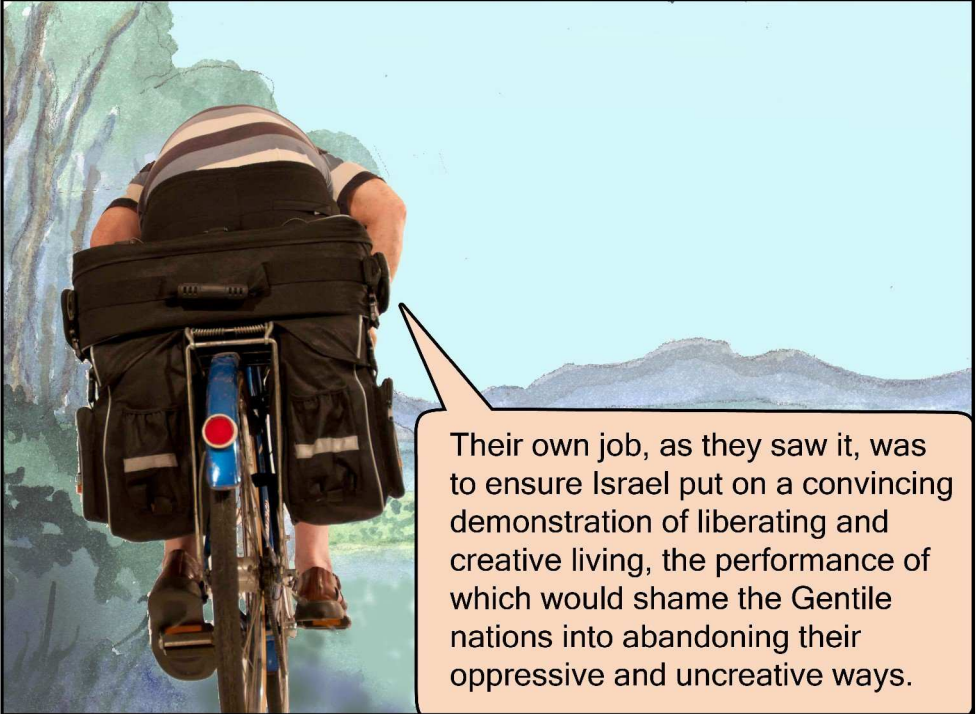
Here Second Isaiah, in denying that other gods even exist, commits the self-same error - only on a far grander scale. Now the door stands wide open to the revisionists and their religious God of blind-obedience... and it's not an advance we're talking about. It's a catastrophic backward step!

I take your point - the prophets inadvertently betrayed their marginal politics - but I'm less clear about what they were in fact really trying to say.





The prophets were well aware the surrounding nations' authoritarian world-views were basically restrictive and uncreative. Because of this they all too easily got into the habit of rubbing their noses in their own noses... perhaps forgetting that these gods represented the only policing power available.



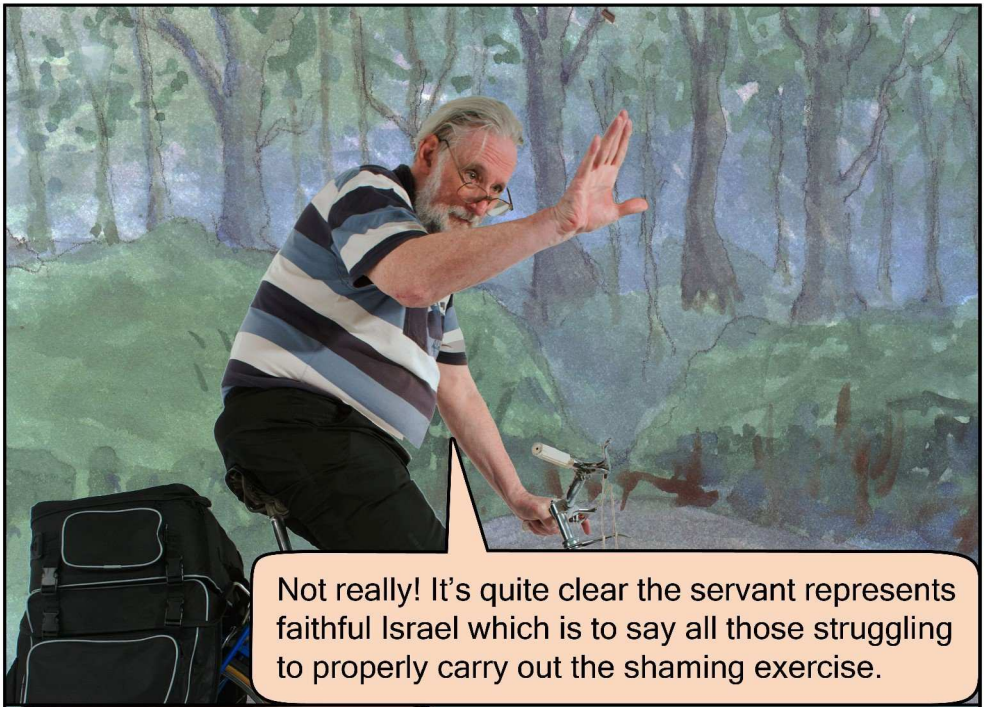
Their own job, as they saw it, was to ensure Israel put on a convincing demonstration of liberating and creative living, the performance of which would shame the Gentile nations into abandoning their oppressive and uncreative ways.

However, given this shaming exercise was so excruciatingly difficult and costly - as we both have agreed was the case - the prophets' job was easier said than done... hence their tendency to cut corners and fall into the superstition trap as Second Isaiah did here in a very spectacular manner!



You seem to have little positive to say about Second Isaiah!





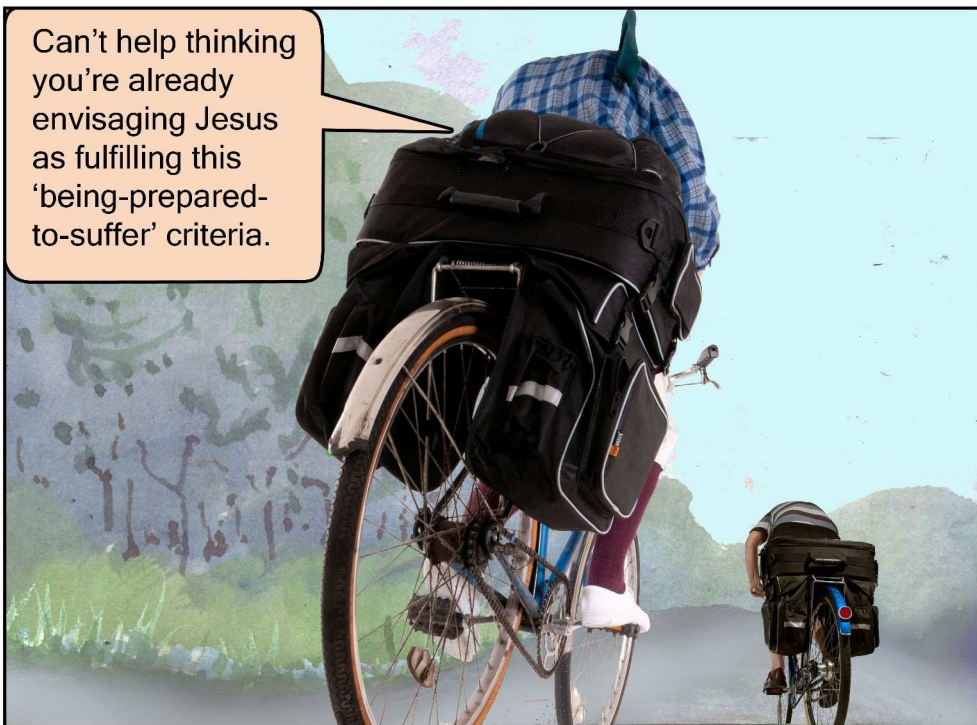


Second Isaiah finally realised it was rather a willingness to suffer that was needed. People had to be prepared to endure till the end even when there was no longer any hope left.

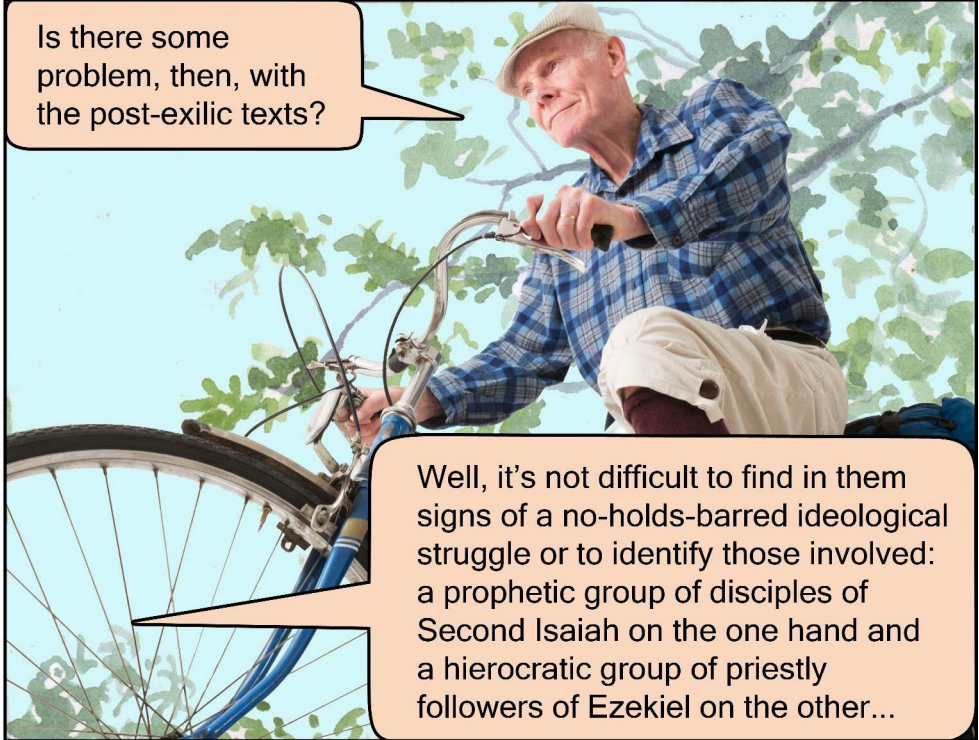
We have here, finally, the answer Elijah was looking for but could never quite manage to see... and it more than makes up for Second Isaiah's awful mistakes.

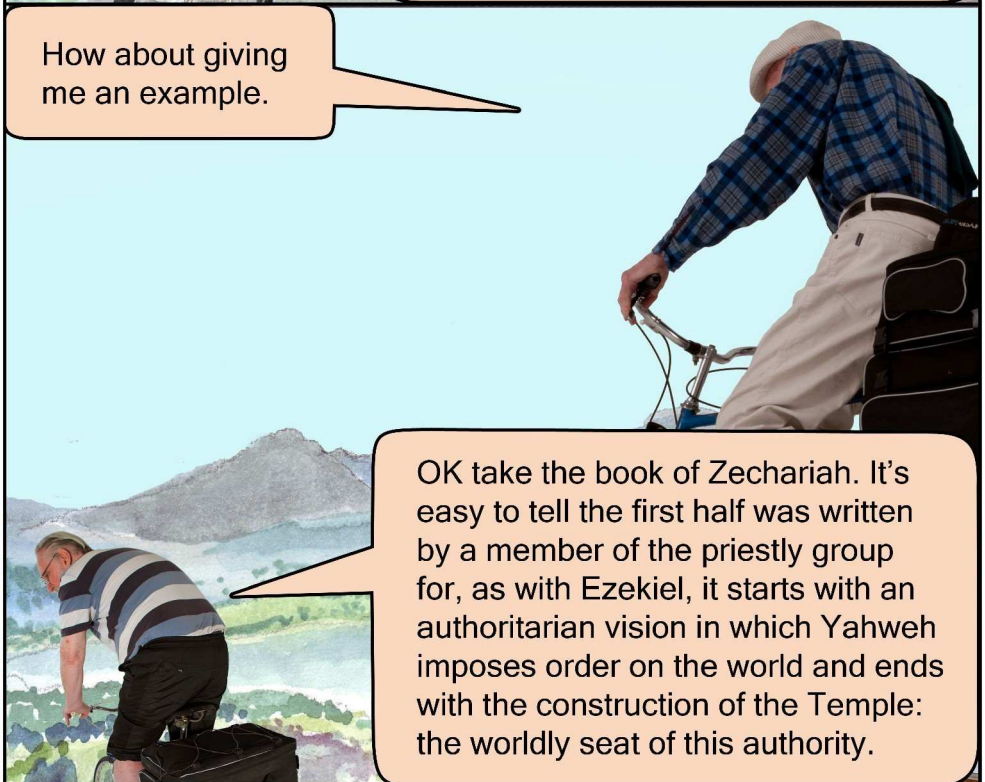
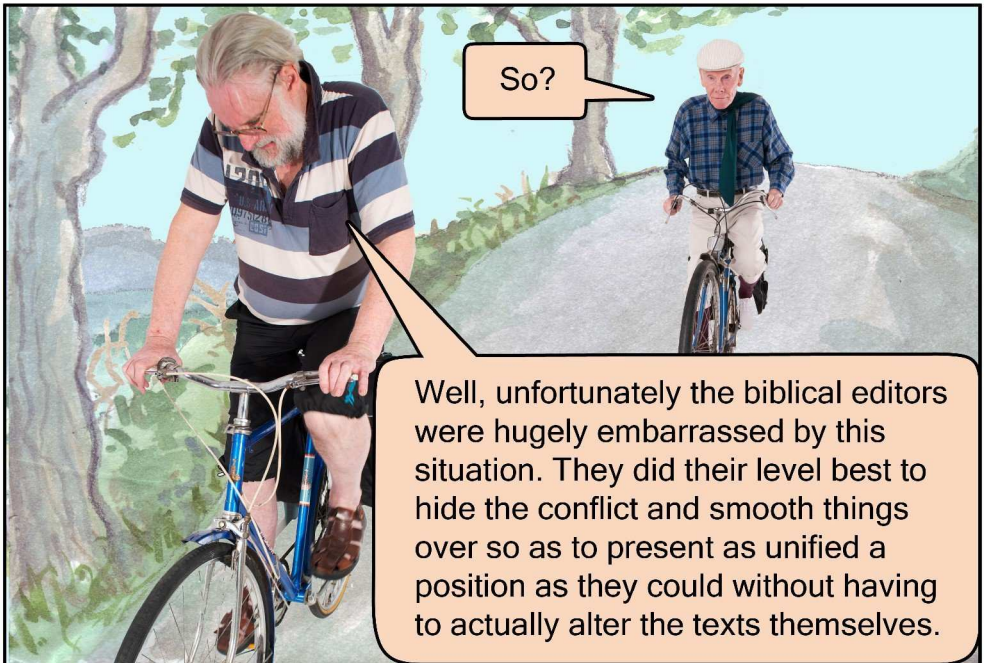


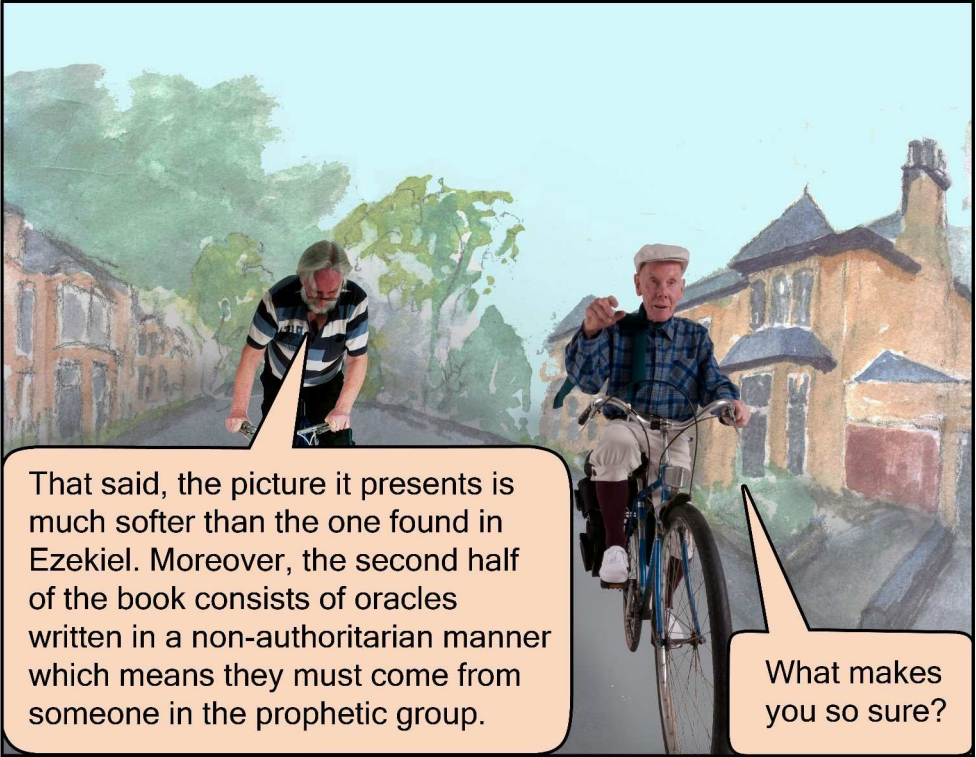
Can't help thinking you're already envisaging Jesus as fulfilling this 'being-prepared-to-suffer' criteria.



Fair enough but there's no suggestion the writer foresaw Jesus as many Christians like to pretend.







First, because the writer describes Yahweh as arriving in Jerusalem in triumph riding on a **donkey**...

*Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zech 9.9

...and then again, because instead of introducing some new authoritarian revelation, the writer bases his argument firmly on **the old Mosiaic covenant** which for him remains in force.

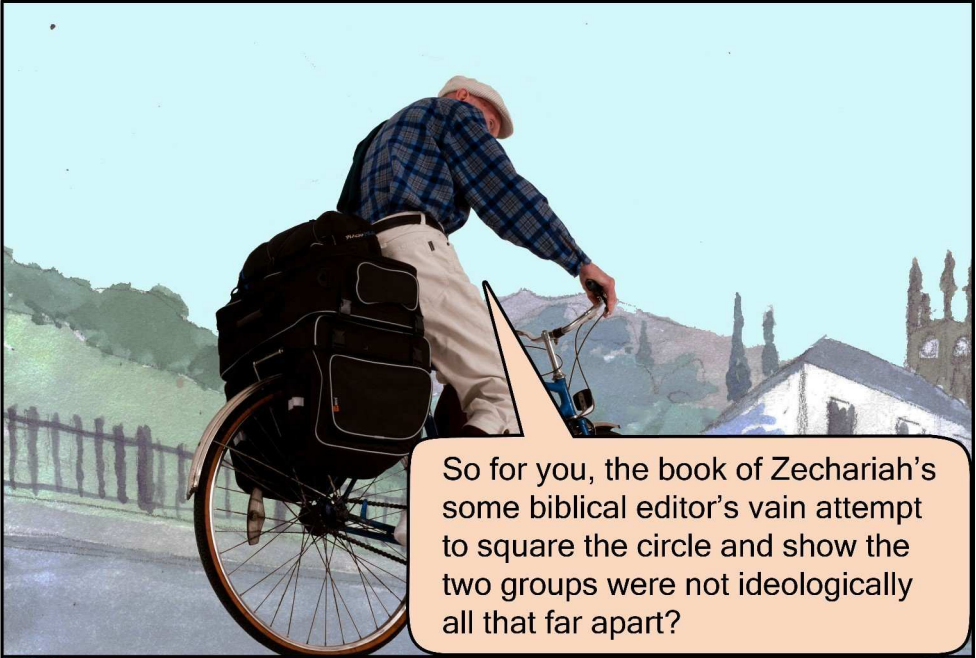
*As for you,
because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice
as much to you.*

Zech 9.11-12

In doing this he makes clear that for him nothing has changed. Israel is not now being asked to forget the past and blindly obey - as Ezekiel argued. Rather she is being given a second chance to put on a proper performance which will shame the Gentile world.

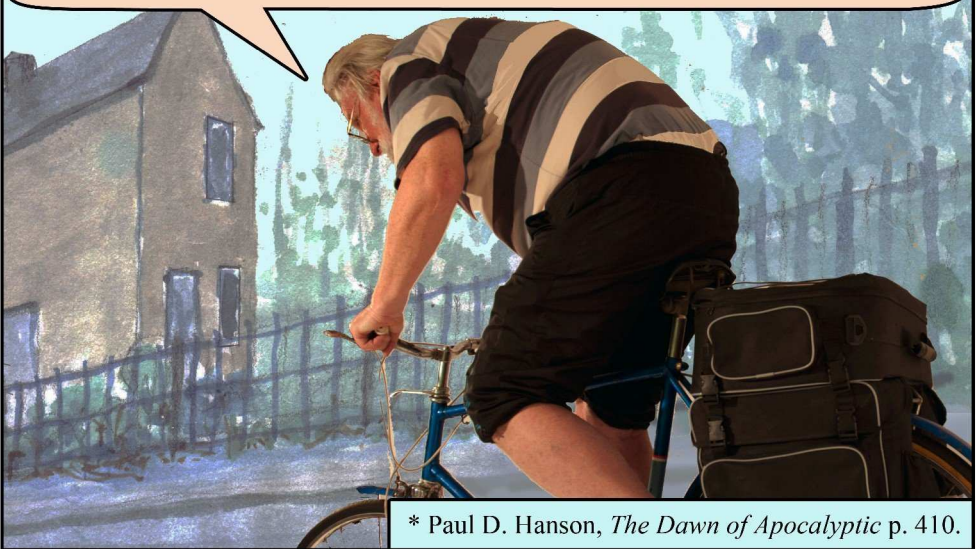
*"I will strengthen Judah
and save the tribes of Joseph.
I will restore them
because I have compassion on them.
They will be as though
I had not rejected them,
for I am the Lord their God
and I will answer them.*

Zech 100.6

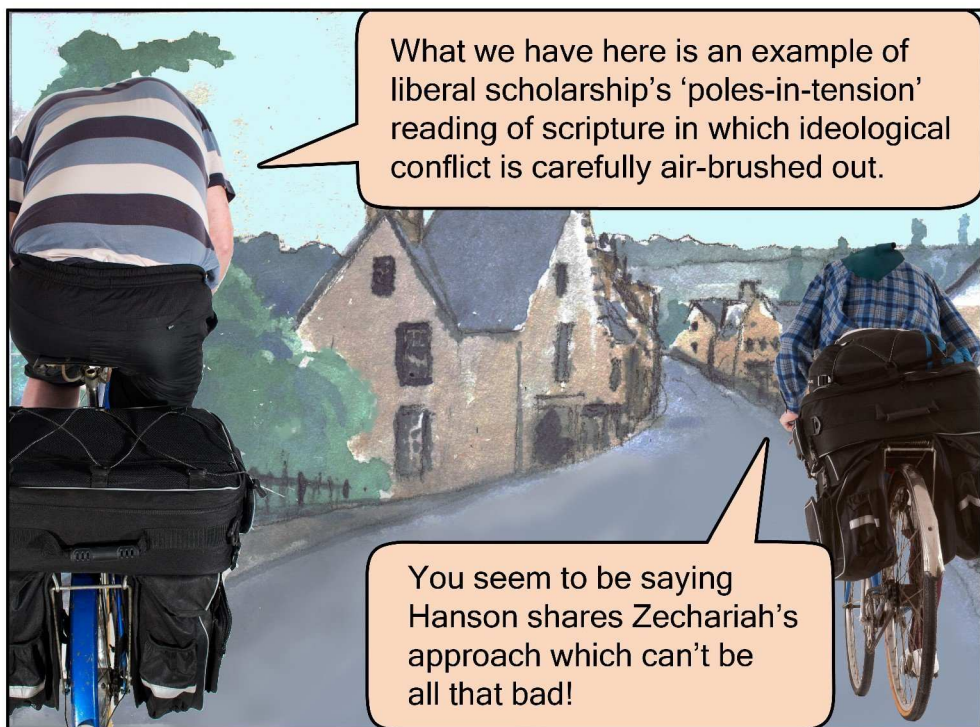


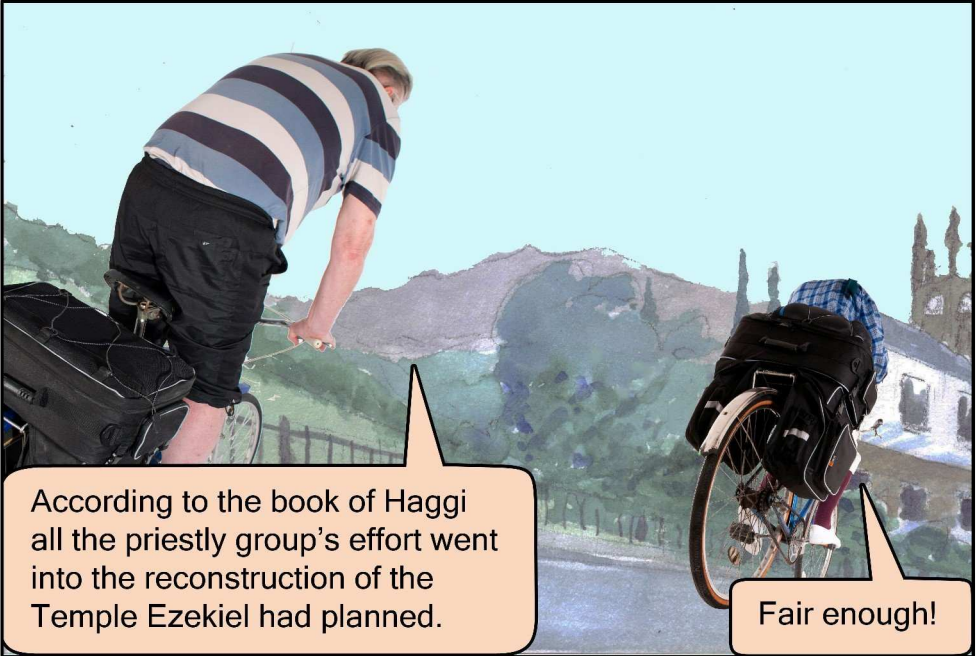
So for you, the book of Zechariah's some biblical editor's vain attempt to square the circle and show the two groups were not ideologically all that far apart?

Exactly! But its not just a biblical editor's duplicity we're talking about for modern scholars are quite as guilty. For example, Paul Hanson argues that whereas the priests were **realists** the prophets were **visionaries**, the implication being we don't really have to take their proposals fundamentally seriously! *



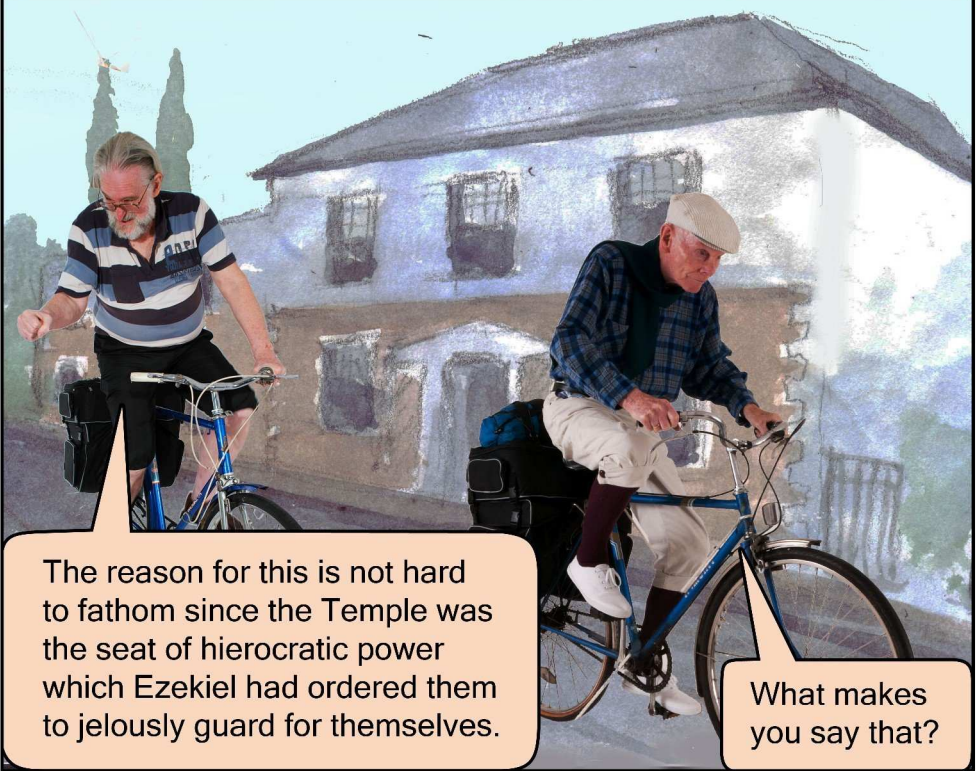
* Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* p. 410.





According to the book of Haggi all the priestly group's effort went into the reconstruction of the Temple Ezekiel had planned.

Fair enough!



The reason for this is not hard to fathom since the Temple was the seat of hierocratic power which Ezekiel had ordered them to jealously guard for themselves.

What makes you say that?

Well, in giving instructions on how the Temple was to be run, Ezekiel began by excluding all foreigners including sojourners...

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh is to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites.

Ezek 44. 9

He then made a distinction between two kinds of Levitical priests. First there was the sort that had been Moses' marginal shock-troops. Such 'revolutionary' Levites he believed should be excluded from power and made to operate simply as menial servants.

The Levites who went far from me when Israel went astray and who wandered from me after their idols must bear the consequences of their sin. They may serve in my sanctuary, having charge of the gates of the temple and serving in it; they may slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices for the people and stand before the people and serve them... But they are not to come near to serve me as priests or come near any of my holy things or my most holy offerings; they must bear the shame of their detestable practices.

Ezek 44.10-13

However, he also spoke of Levitical priests who were the sons of Zadoc. Here he was clearly talking of **Aaronic** priests like himself. These priests, according to him, were the only ones who should have power.

But the Levitical priests, who are descendants of Zadok and who guarded my sanctuary when the Israelites went astray from me, are to come near to minister before me; they are to stand before me to offer sacrifices of fat and blood, declares the Sovereign Lord. They alone are to enter my sanctuary; they alone are to come near my table to minister before me and serve me as guards.

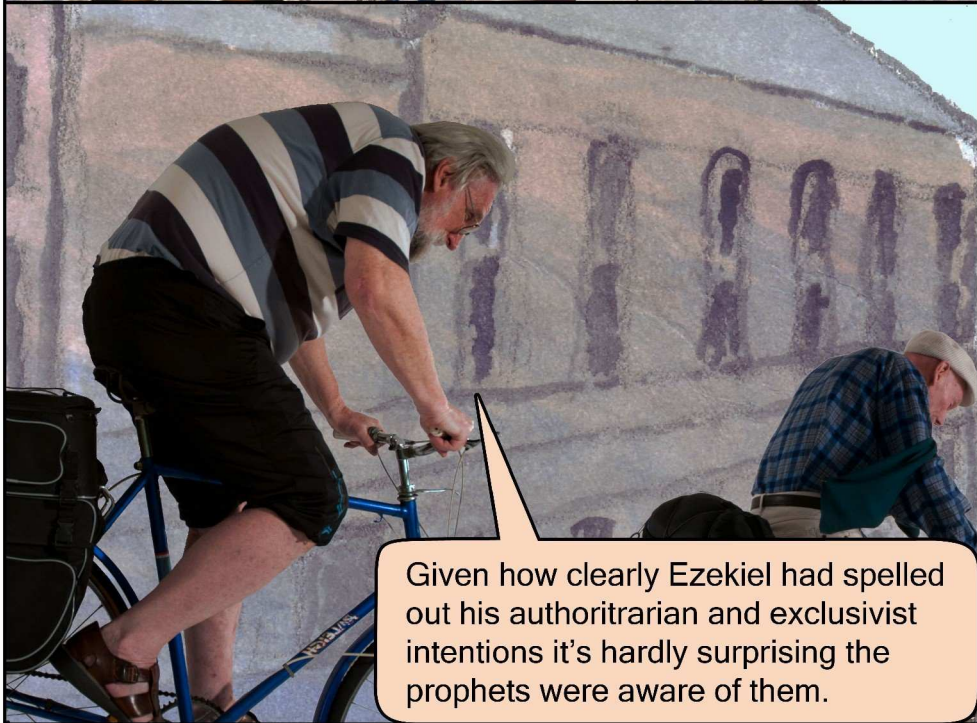
Ezek 44.15-16

Can't think why he insisted on calling all of these priests Levites. Why not call them priests and have done with it?



Well, he did not want to be seen as damning Levites which would have been as unacceptable as damning the Mosaic covenant. However, he was determined to get rid of the marginal ideology the Levites had been formed to defend, which is what he managed to do.

OK. So the priests saw the Temple as the mainstay of their hierarchical power. Tell me now how the prophets viewed it.



Given how clearly Ezekiel had spelled out his authoritarian and exclusivist intentions it's hardly surprising the prophets were aware of them.

They pointed out that Yahweh had no need of such an edifice making clear at the same time that, in being the god of the Hebrew marginals, he was looking for humility not dominance.

This is what the Lord says:

"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.

Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting place be?

Has not my hand made all these things,

and so they came into being?"

declares the Lord.

"These are the ones I look on with favor:

those who are humble and contrite in spirit,

and who tremble at my word.

Is 66. 1-2

They then went on to condemn the priestly authoritarians in no uncertain manner making all talk of 'poles in tension' ridiculous.

Whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a person.

Whoever offers a lamb is like one who breaks a dog's neck.

Whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig's blood,

Whoever burns memorial incense is like one who worships an idol.

They have chosen their own ways,

and delight in their abominations;

So I also will choose harsh treatment for them

and will bring on them what they dread.

Is 66. 3-4

You're saying the prophetic group didn't want a Temple in the post-exilic community?

Not at all, it was the priests' authoritarian ideas and exclusivity they objected to.

They believed that if the community returned to its covenant task of living together in a way in which no one was excluded, the Gentiles, suitably shamed, would do the rebuilding for them.

*"Foreigners will rebuild your walls
and their kings will serve you.
Your gates will always stand open,
they will never be shut, day or night,
so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations
their kings led in triumphal procession.*

*"The glory of Lebanon will come to you,
the juniper, the fir and the cypress together,
to adorn my sanctuary;
and I will glorify the place for my feet.*

Is 60. 10-13

The prophets found the priests' attitude of dominance and exclusivity abject. They denounced it in the strongest of terms by likening it to paganism and by using sexual innuendo and threats of capital punishment which clearly indicated they saw it as outright ideological sin... as an attack on Yahweh himself:

*You have made your bed on a high and lofty hill;
there you went up to offer your sacrifices.
Behind your doors and your doorposts
you have put your pagan symbols.
Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed,
you climbed into it and opened it wide;
you made a pact with those whose beds you love,
and you looked with lust on their naked bodies.*

Is 57. 7-8

*A people who continually provoke me
to my very face,
offering sacrifices in gardens
and burning incense on altars of brick;
who sit among the graves
and spend their nights keeping secret vigil;
who eat the flesh of pigs,
and whose pots hold broth of impure meat;
who say, 'Keep away; don't come near me,
for I am too sacred for you!'
Such people are smoke in my nostrils,
a fire that keeps burning all day.*

Is 65. 3-5

"Those who consecrate and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one who is among those who eat the flesh of pigs, rats and other unclean things—they will meet their end together with the one they follow," declares the Lord.

Is 66. 17



Not really. Ezekiel had successfully tied that one up. However, they had plenty to say in defence of the sojourners Ezekiel wanted to exclude.

*Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say,
"The Lord will surely exclude me from his people."
... foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord
to minister to him,
to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations."*

Is 55. 3-7

What is perhaps even more significant is the way they circumvented priestly authority by declaring that in the new community all would be considered as priests.

*Strangers will shepherd your flocks;
foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.
And you will be called priests of the Lord,
you will be named ministers of our God.*

Is 61. 5-6

Yes, as a denial
of authority and
exclusivity that's
hard to beat!

I rest
my case.

3

RUTH



Apparently there was a severe drought during the time of the Judges. As a consequence an Israelite named Elimelech was forced to sell his land and move with his wife Naomi and their two sons to Moab where conditions were less severe.



It's a tragic story for first Naomi's husband died then both of her sons - who had taken wives - died too. So Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law were left destitute.

Ruth 1.5



Naomi therefore decided to return home to Ephraim where the family held land-rights... though the use of the land had been sold by Elimelech and would have to be redeemed.

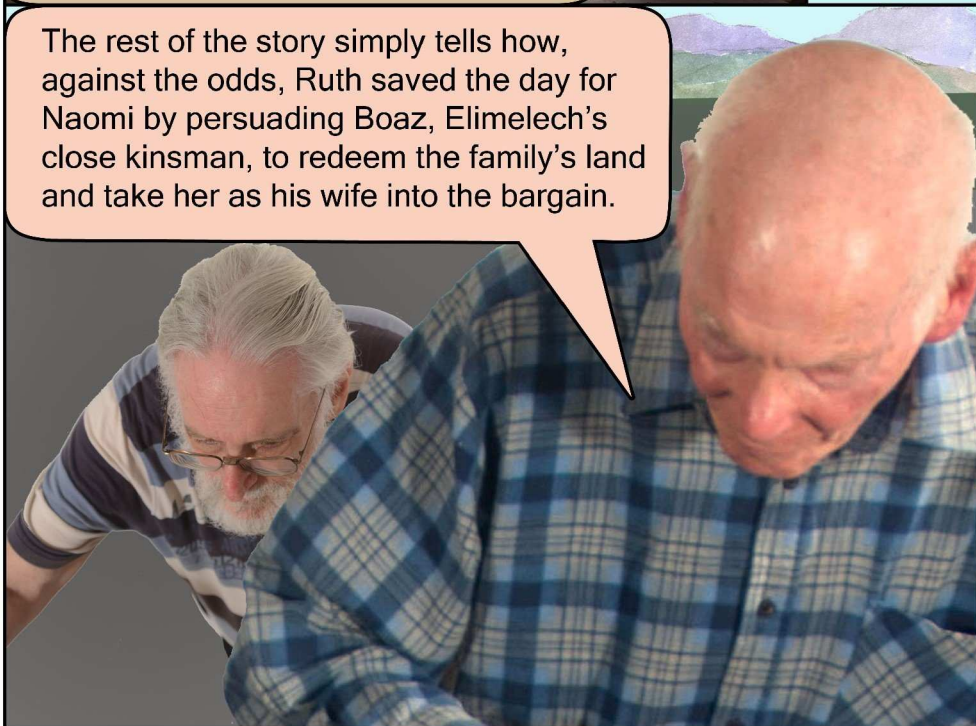


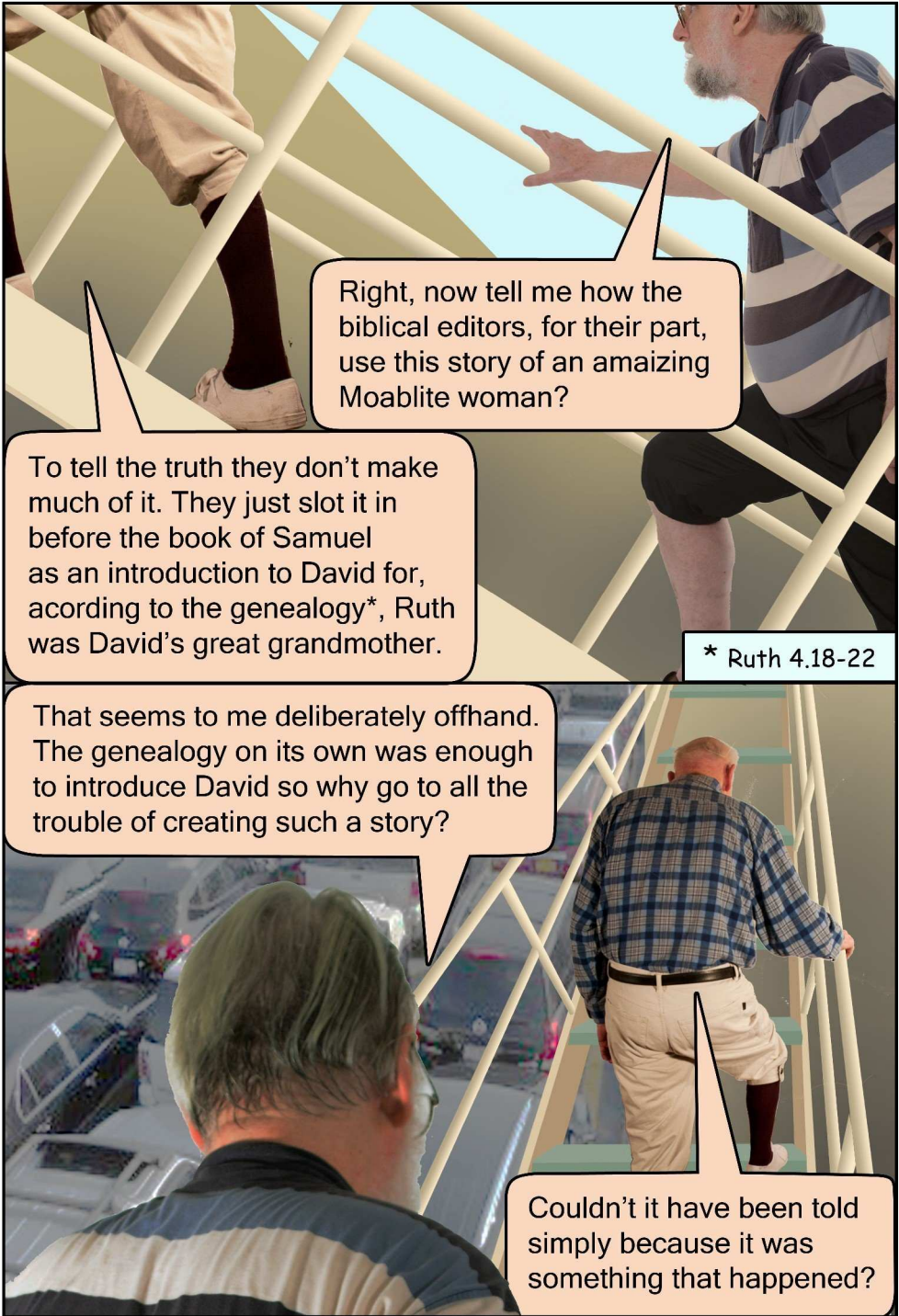
Dear daughters, my plan is to return to Judah since I am told the famine has ended.

One daughter-in-law naturally wanted to remain in Moab in the security of her family but the other, whose name was Ruth, chose to throw in her lot with Naomi.



The rest of the story simply tells how, against the odds, Ruth saved the day for Naomi by persuading Boaz, Elimelech's close kinsman, to redeem the family's land and take her as his wife into the bargain.





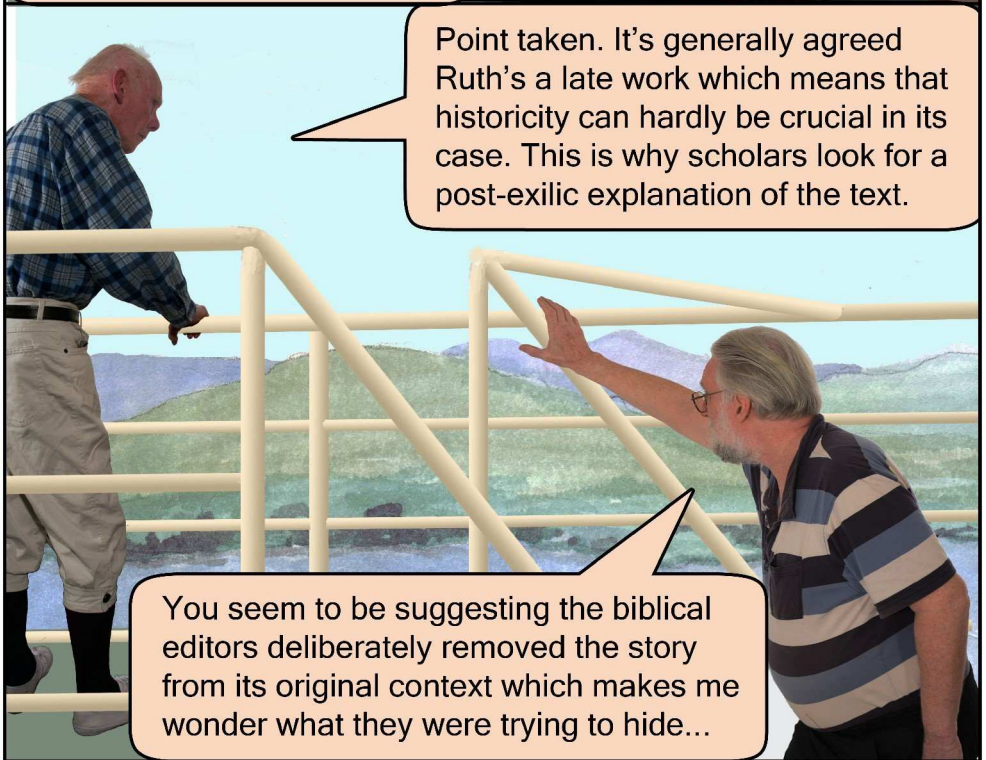
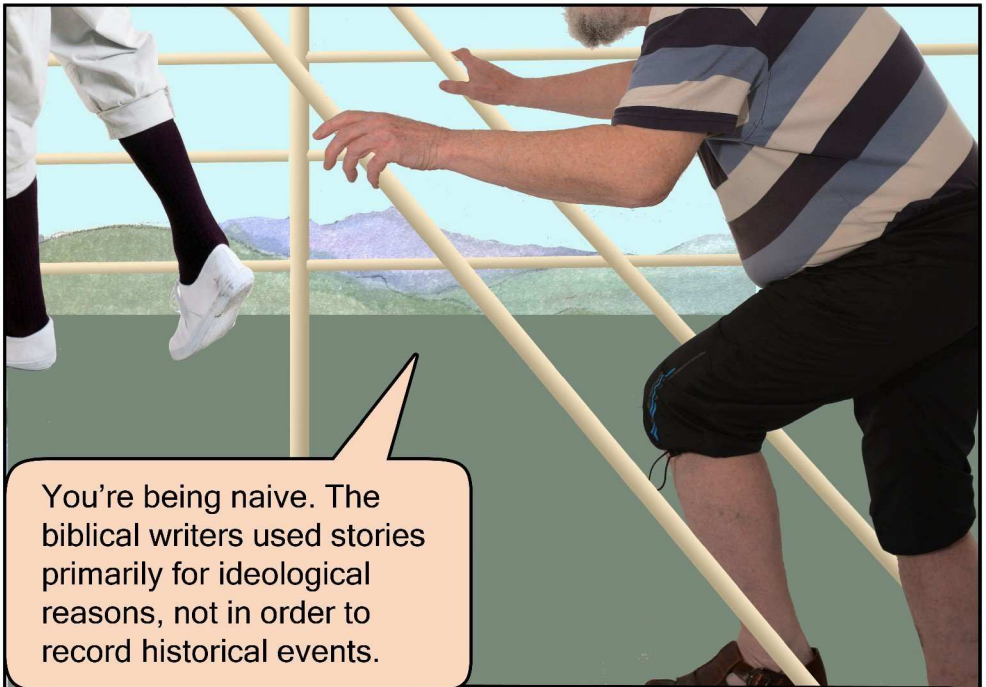
Right, now tell me how the biblical editors, for their part, use this story of an amazing Moabite woman?

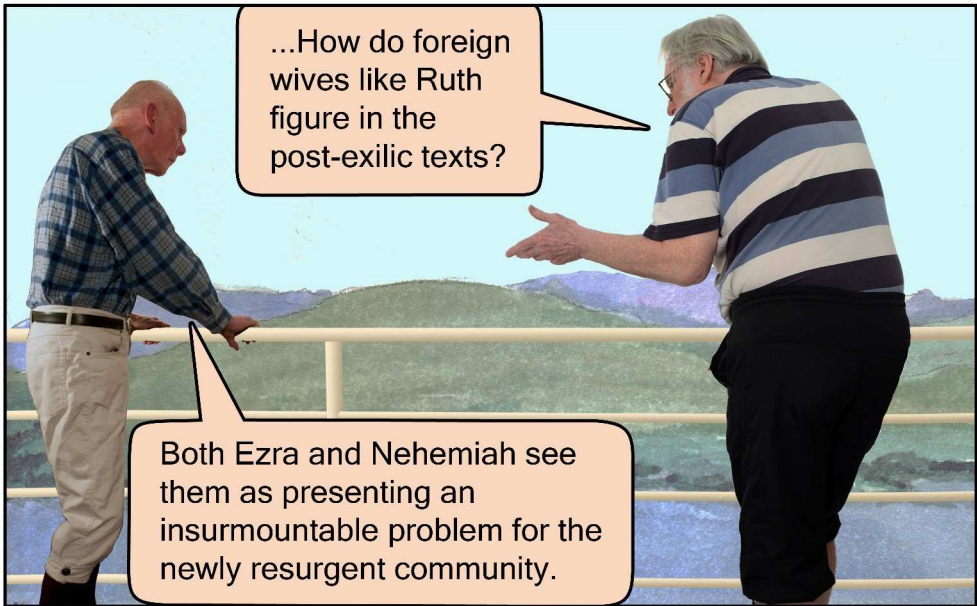
To tell the truth they don't make much of it. They just slot it in before the book of Samuel as an introduction to David for, according to the genealogy*, Ruth was David's great grandmother.

* Ruth 4.18-22

That seems to me deliberately offhand. The genealogy on its own was enough to introduce David so why go to all the trouble of creating such a story?

Couldn't it have been told simply because it was something that happened?



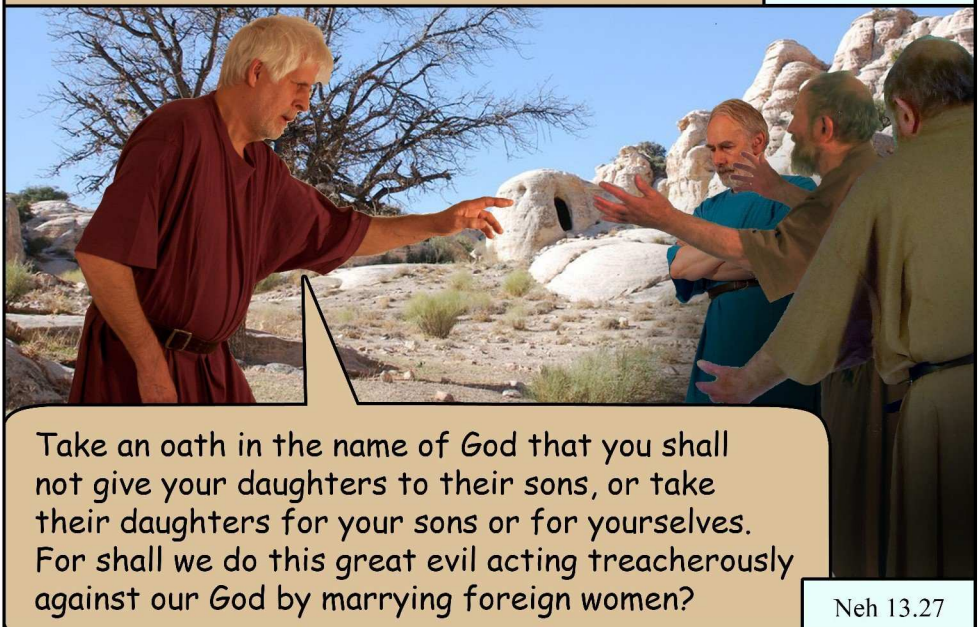


...How do foreign wives like Ruth figure in the post-exilic texts?

Both Ezra and Nehemiah see them as presenting an insurmountable problem for the newly resurgent community.

In those days I saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab; and half of their children... could not speak Judahite. So I contended with them, cursed them and beat them and pulled out their hair...

Neh 13.23-25



Take an oath in the name of God that you shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. For shall we do this great evil acting treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?

Neh 13.27

Nehemiah even digs up a text from Deuteronomy which explicitly states Moabites should never be allowed into the community.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh even to the tenth generation because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor to curse you.

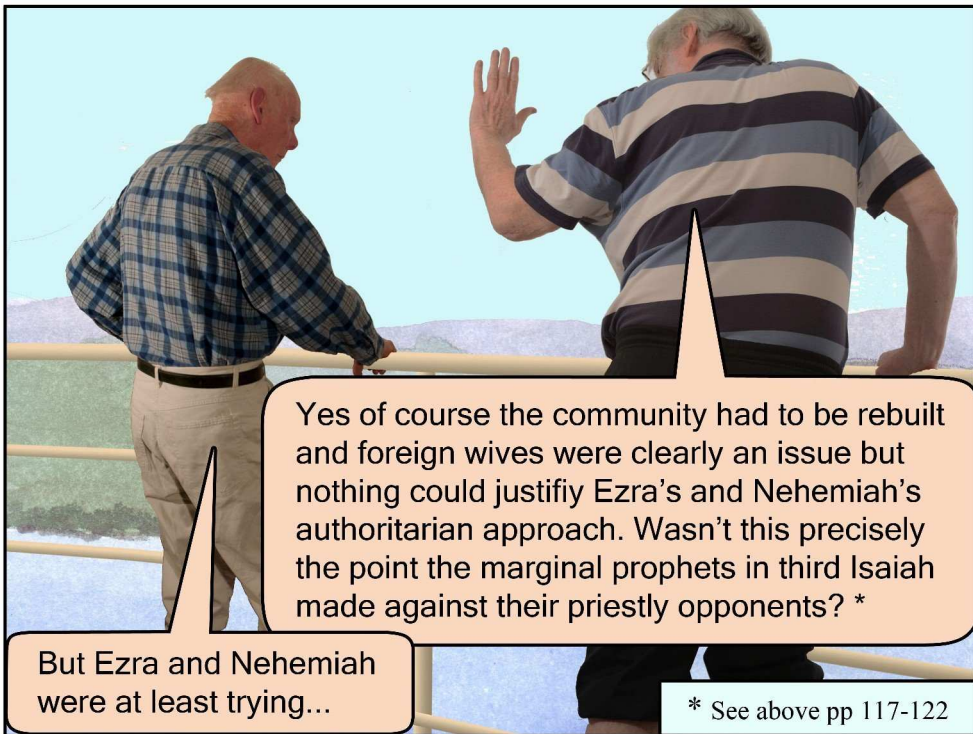
Deut 23.3-4

And he uses this to persuade those who had married foreign women to send them away, as Ezra says, together with their children and to vow to refrain from such unions in the future.

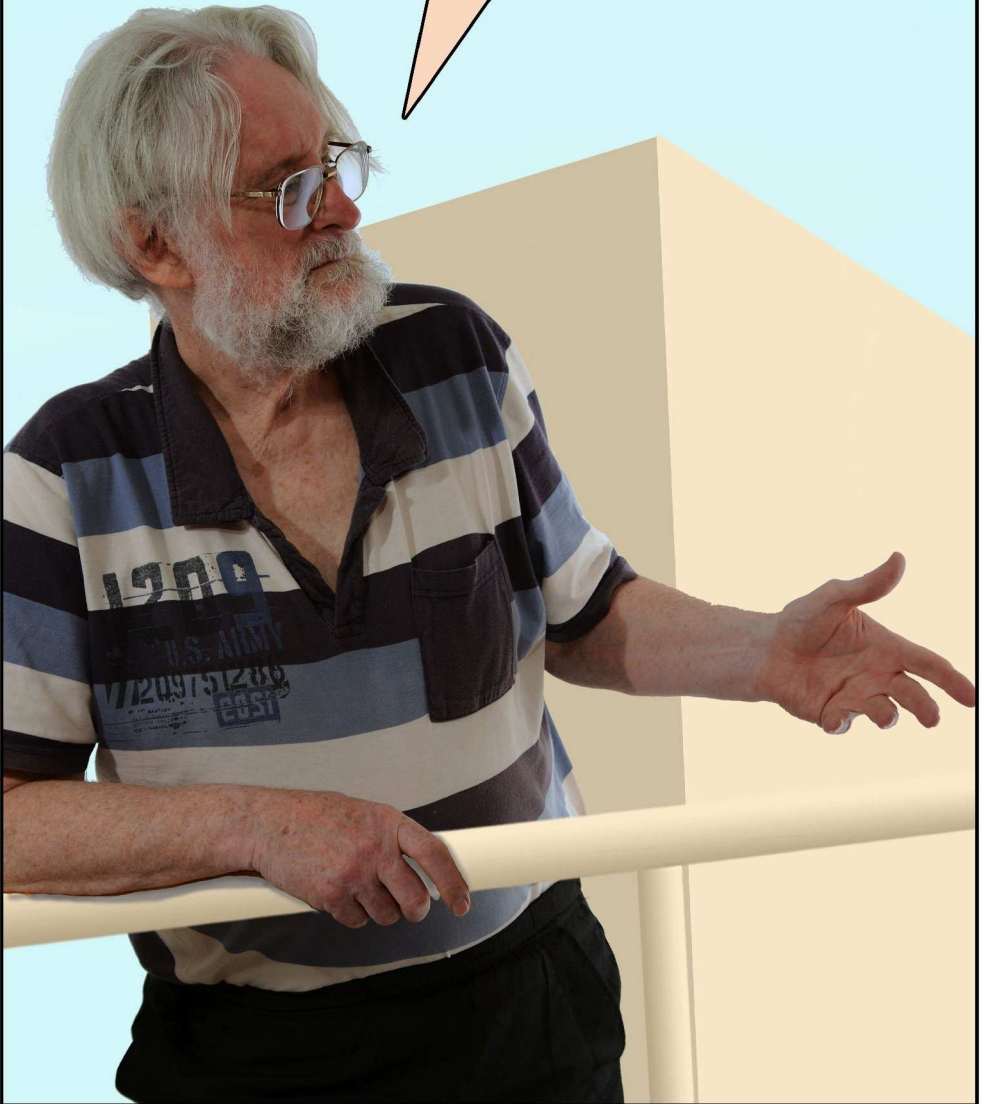
Hardly surprising biblical scholars see the book of Ruth as challenging such ghastly, conservative and revisionist doctrines!







Doesn't the book of Ruth attempt to set things straight by demonstrating how the revolutionary marginal community can overcome it's very real problems without in any way resorting to Ezra's and Nehemiah's diabolical tactics of punishment and coercion?



5

JONAH



Well it pretends to be about an historical character found in the book of Kings* but it makes no attempt to be historical itself.



* Jonah son of Amittai 2 Kings 14.25

Not only does it want people to believe in a fish that swallows someone and spits him out alive three days later...



Jonah 1.17 - 2.10

It also expects **us** to swallow a city that's so huge it takes people three days to cross it on foot!



And, if that wasn't enough, it then finally presents us with a shady plant that somehow grows full height overnight...



...only to succumb the next night from a worm attack. I ask you!

What's happened?

Jonah 4.7

All you've done so far is to identify the work as a spoof. You've not yet noticed that, as a figure of fun, the hero is the spitting image of the prophet Ezekiel.

If that's the case why is the prophet not identified as Ezekiel? Why name him as Jonah son of Amittai?

Well, it would have been foolish to openly make fun of Ezekiel, don't you think? Safer to name the prophet as someone obscure!

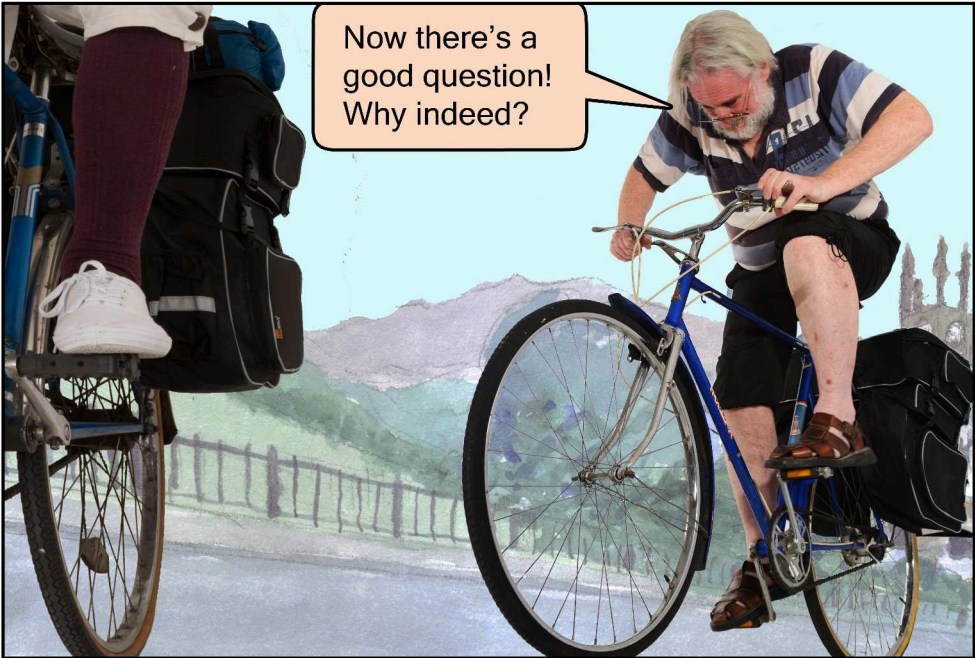


What makes you so sure Jonah is supposed to be an Ezekiel lookalike?

The fact that he's only interested in Judah's fate and that he's an undisguised authoritarian who firmly believes in punishment.



If Jonah's authoritarian why does he speak of himself as a Hebrew?



The word Hebrew is not often used in the OT and it is always employed - with the one notable exception in our Jonah text - to designate **people who have become marginalised**.

Genesis	14.13; 39.14; 39.17; 40.15; 41.12; 43.32.
Exodus	1.15; 1.16; 1.19; 1.22; 2.6; 2.7; 2.11; 2.13; 3.18; 5.3; 7.16; 9.1; 9.13; 10.3; 21.2.
1 Samuel	4.6; 4.9; 13.3; 13.19; 14.21; 29.3.
Deuteronomy	15.12
Jeremiah	34.9&14
Jonah	1.9 (The exception)

The word Hebrew in the Old Testament

Today, of course, the word has become de-politicised. Now it is used religiously to designate a **pukka Jew** as opposed to someone who is simply Jewish by extraction.



Fair enough but so what?



Well, it can only mean that at some point in time the sense of the word changed when it was chosen to dispense with its objectionable marginal connotations... and who was responsible for that, I wonder?



You fancy it was Ezekiel and his revisionist mates.



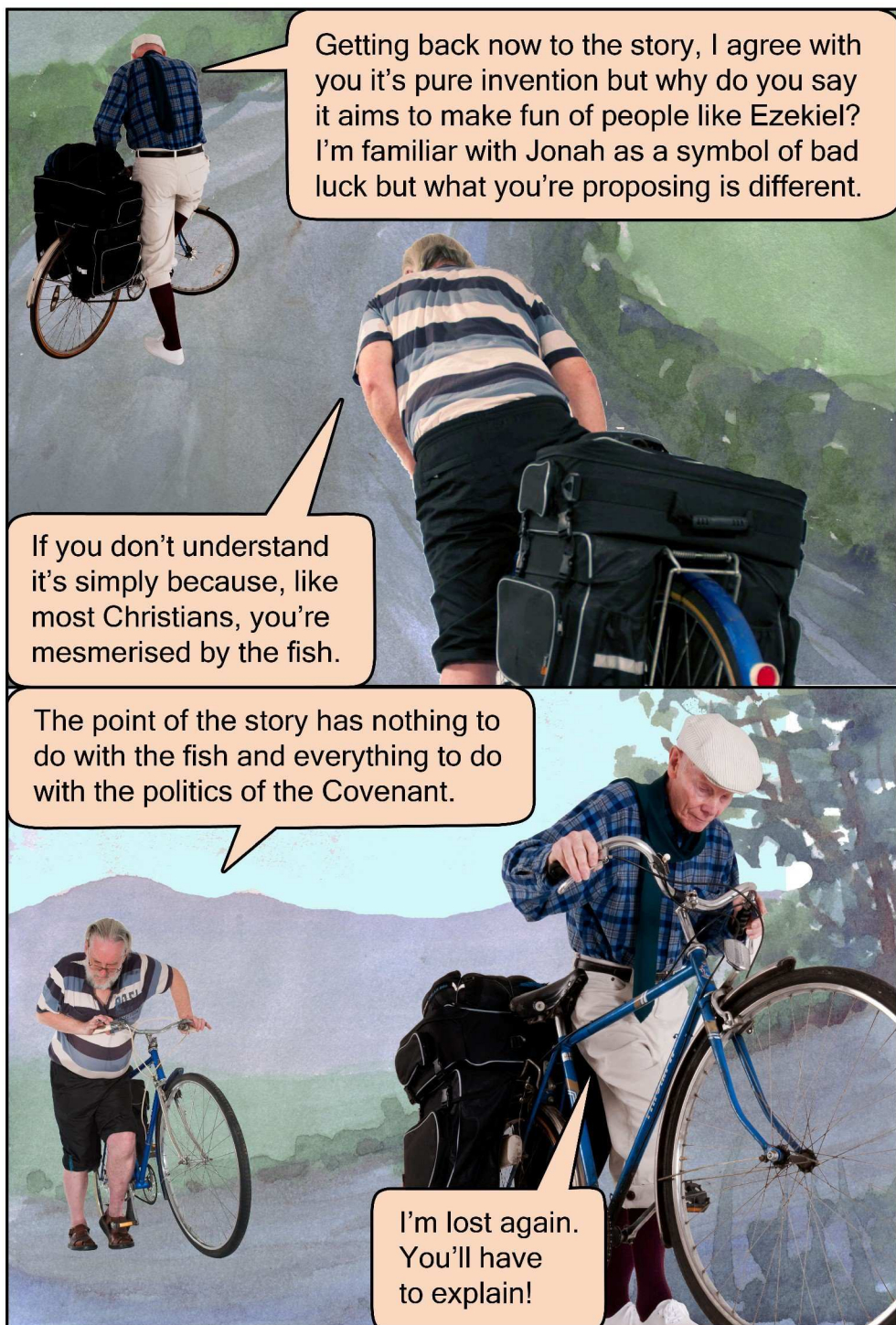


Who else
could it
have been?

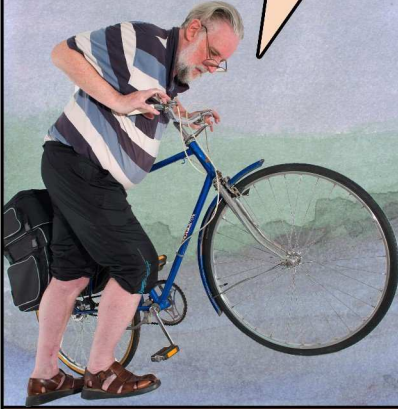
So you're suggesting Ezekiel
and co might also have spoken
of themselves as Hebrews?

Well, we have no record of them doing so
but they certainly thought they were pukka
Jews which is precisely what Jonah meant
when he called himself a Hebrew.

Fair
enough!



Wouldn't you agree the story accepts Jonah was a pious Jew who rightly appreciated Israel's special status?



Absolutely!

Yes but, as a pious Jew, Jonah wanted nothing to do with the costly business of shaming the world out of its oppressive ways. So when Yahweh orders him to do the job he runs away!

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.



Help! I'm off to Tarshish

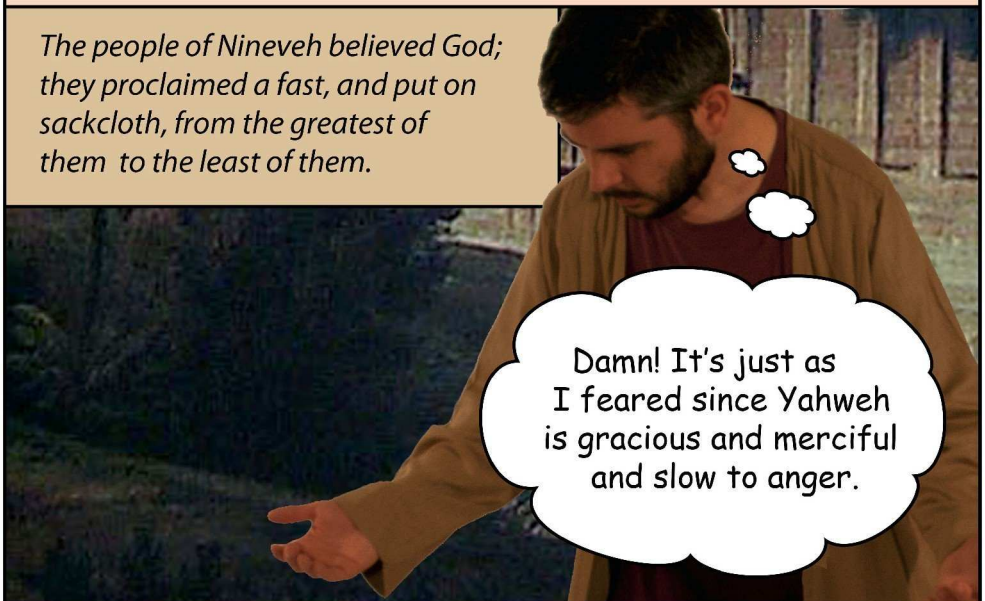
Jonah 1.1-3

Of course he is eventually cornered and forced, with bad grace, to do Yahweh's bidding but secretly he hopes the exercise will fail causing Yahweh to punish the Assyrians.



But against all expectation the Assyrians are shamed ...much to Jonah's annoyance as an authoritarian.

The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.



Now, very angry, Jonah goes off pouting.



Then Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.

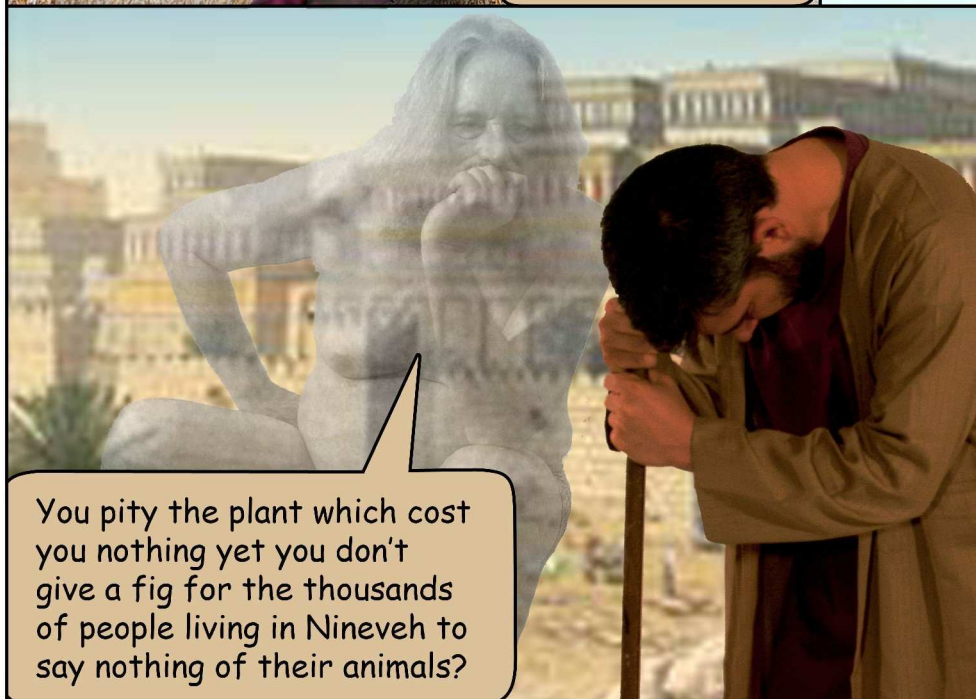
Jonah 4.5

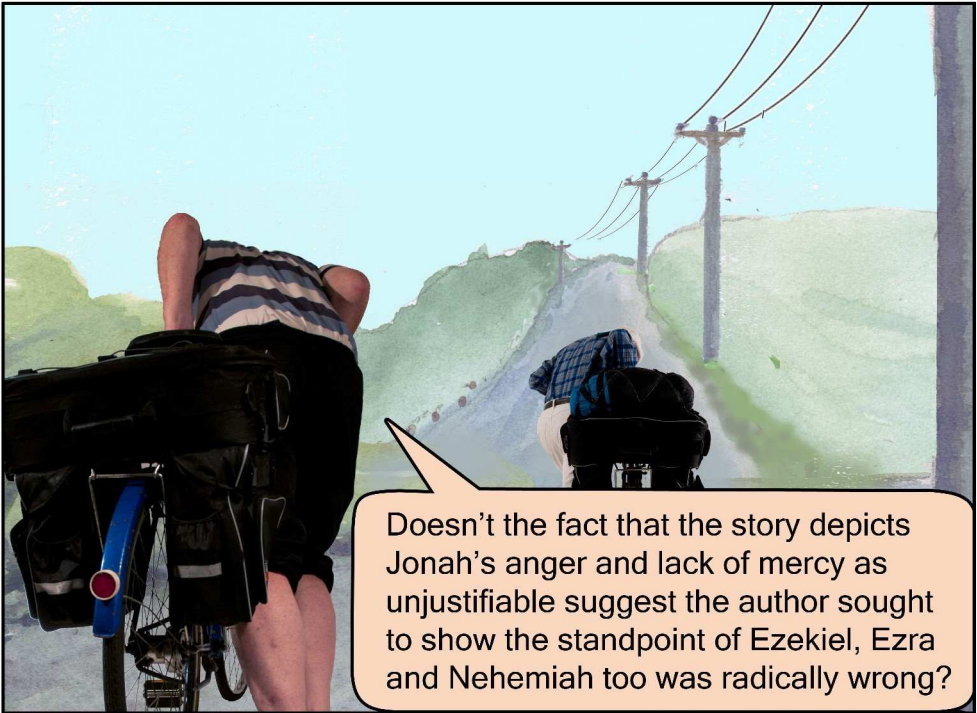
And Yahweh appointed a plant, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort.

Jonah 4.6



But the next day Jonah finds that the plant has withered during the night which only makes him more angry still.





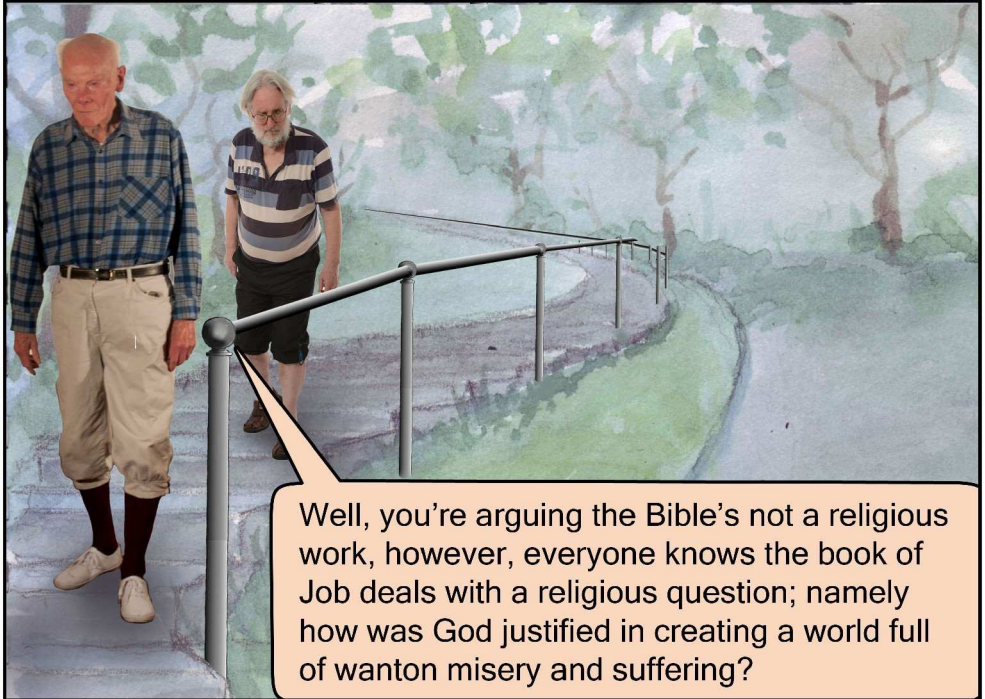
Doesn't the fact that the story depicts Jonah's anger and lack of mercy as unjustifiable suggest the author sought to show the standpoint of Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah too was radically wrong?




I'm speechless!
Perhaps we should
stop and have
a drink at the pub!

6

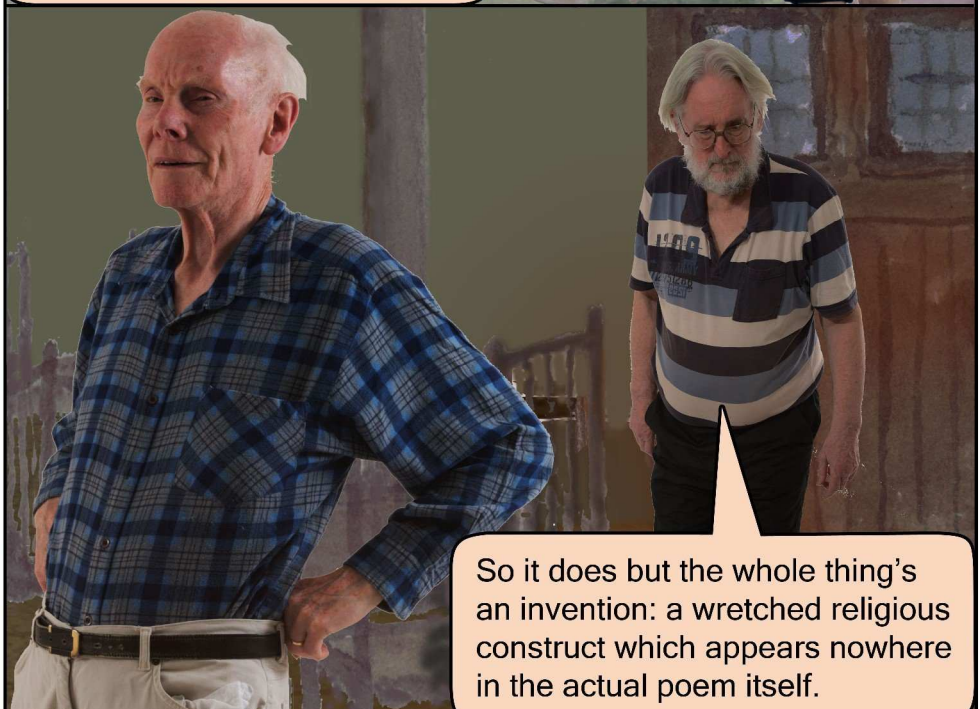
JOB





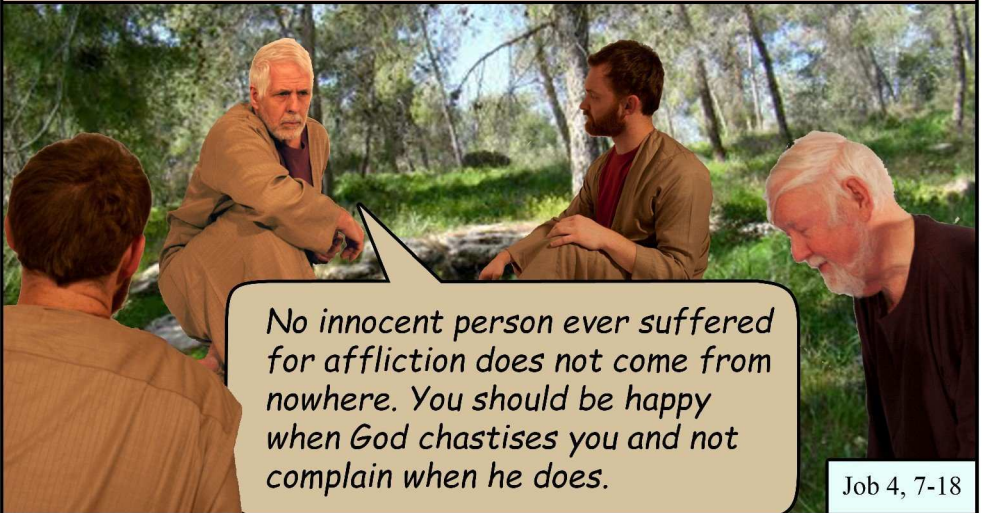
If the book now appears to deal with such an extraneous religious question it's only because the biblical editors have been at pains to see everyone misses its real political point!

What are you talking about?
The prose introduction makes quite clear Job's misfortunes were designed to test him.

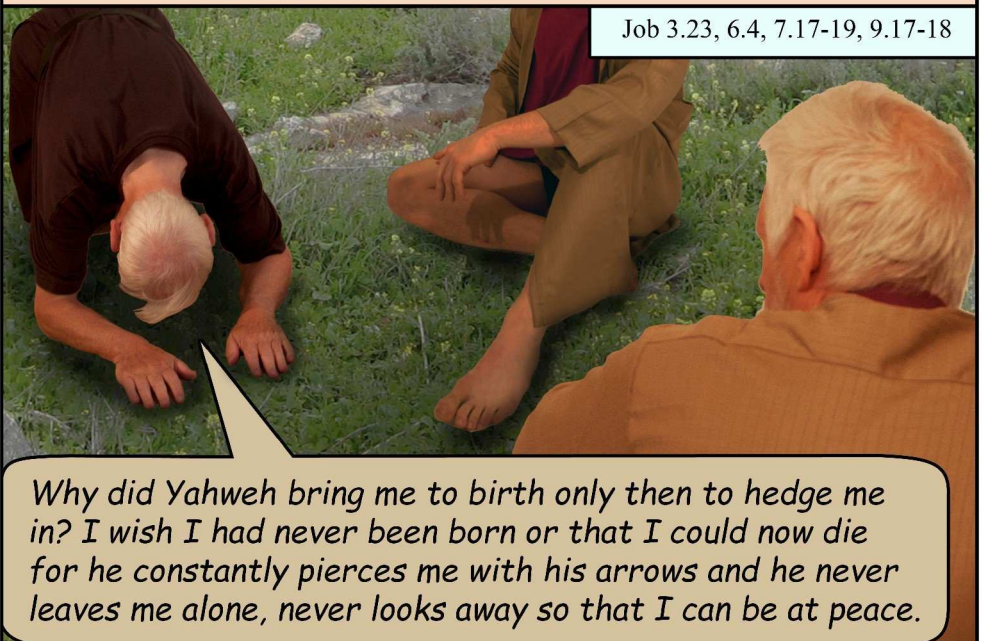


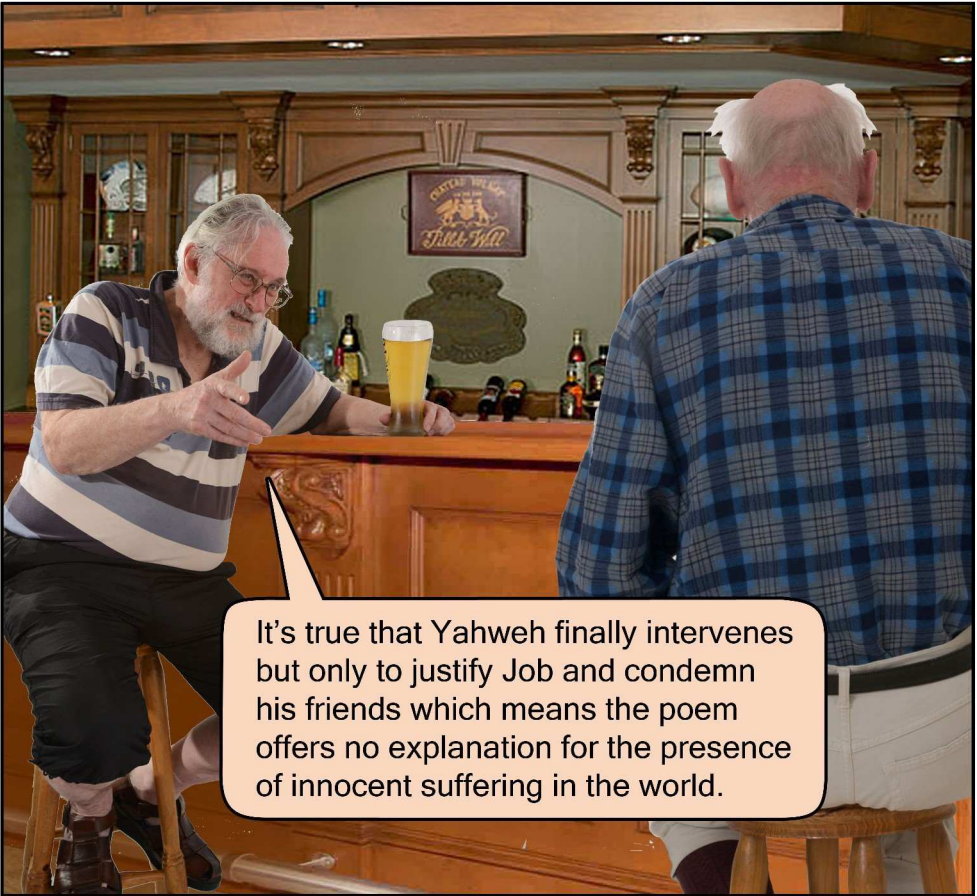
So it does but the whole thing's an invention: a wretched religious construct which appears nowhere in the actual poem itself.

In the poem Job's so-called friends argue that if he experiences misfortune it can only be because he has done something wrong and Yahweh is punishing him to get him to behave...



..whereas Job himself argues his misfortune is quite unmerited and results solely from Yahweh's inexplicable hounding of him.



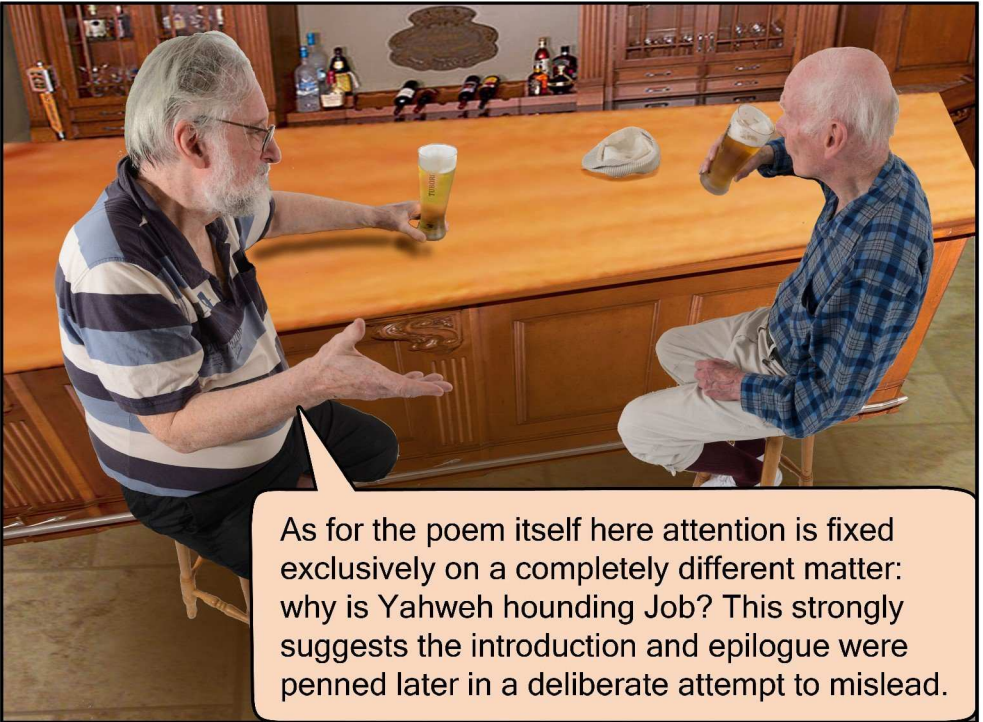


It's true that Yahweh finally intervenes but only to justify Job and condemn his friends which means the poem offers no explanation for the presence of innocent suffering in the world.

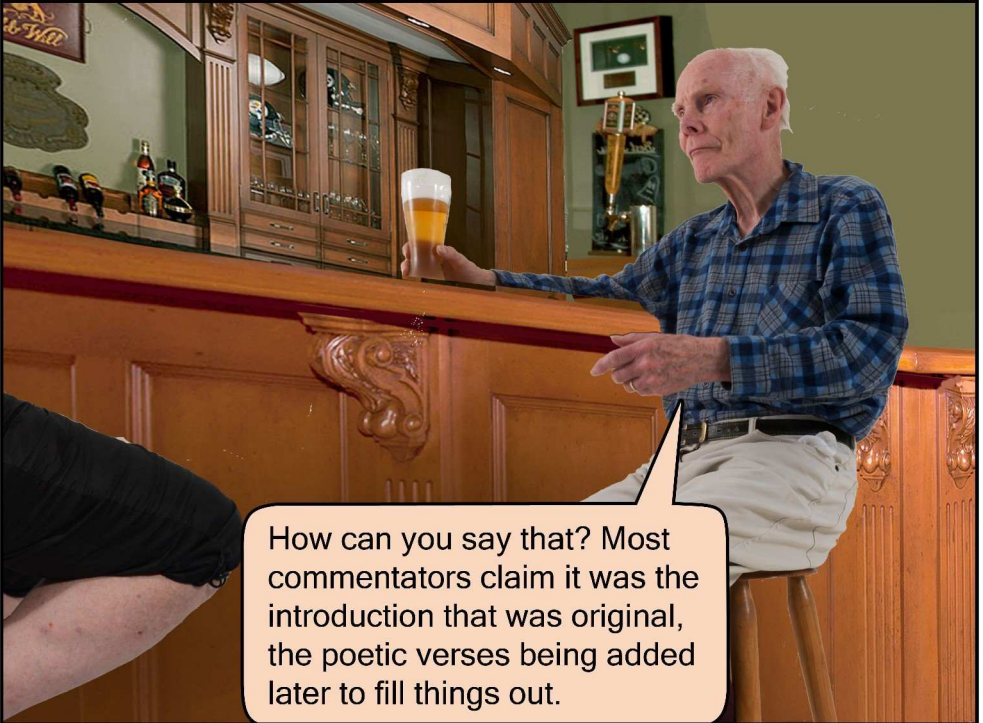
In fact this spurious religious idea that Job was being tested only reappears in the prose conclusion when Yahweh magically restores everything Job had supposedly lost.

The LORD restored the fortunes of Job and blessed his latter days more than his beginning. After this Job lived a hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, four generations. And Job died, an old man, and full of days.

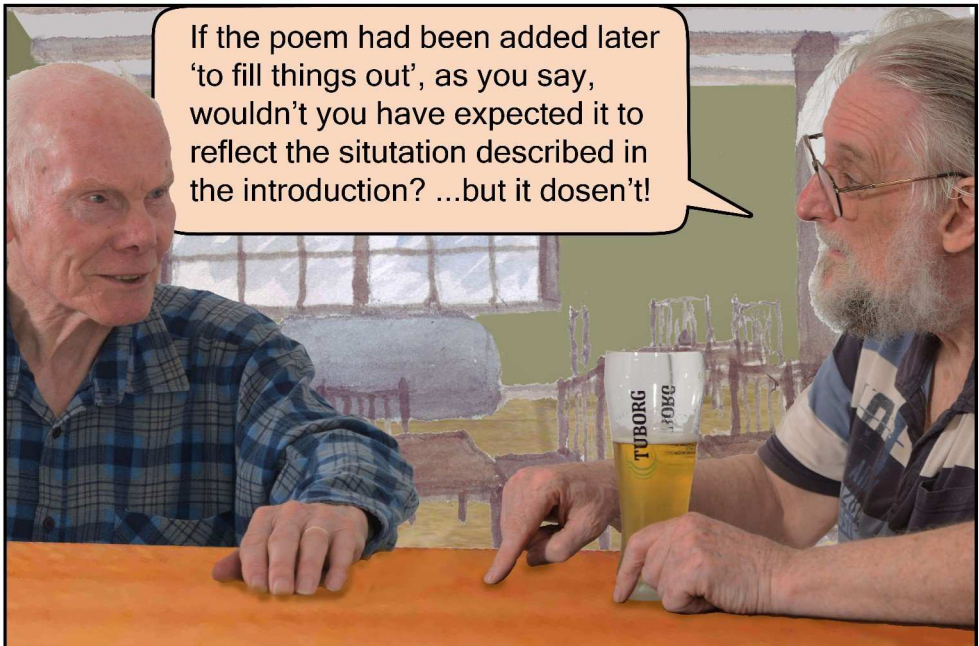
Job 42.10, 12, 16-17



As for the poem itself here attention is fixed exclusively on a completely different matter: why is Yahweh hounding Job? This strongly suggests the introduction and epilogue were penned later in a deliberate attempt to mislead.



How can you say that? Most commentators claim it was the introduction that was original, the poetic verses being added later to fill things out.



That's certainly
what Ezekiel says.*

And doesn't the book as
a whole describe Job as
being beset by all types
of unmerited misfortune?

No, as I have just said, only the introduction and epilogue
do that. In the poem Job's complaint is that, though he has
been entirely faithful, Yahweh quite inexplicably constantly
hounds him... which is not the same thing at all.




In truth, one is hard pressed to find in the poem itself any mention of the awful tragedies enumerated in the introduction.

So what is Job on about if it's not that he's been beset by misfortune?

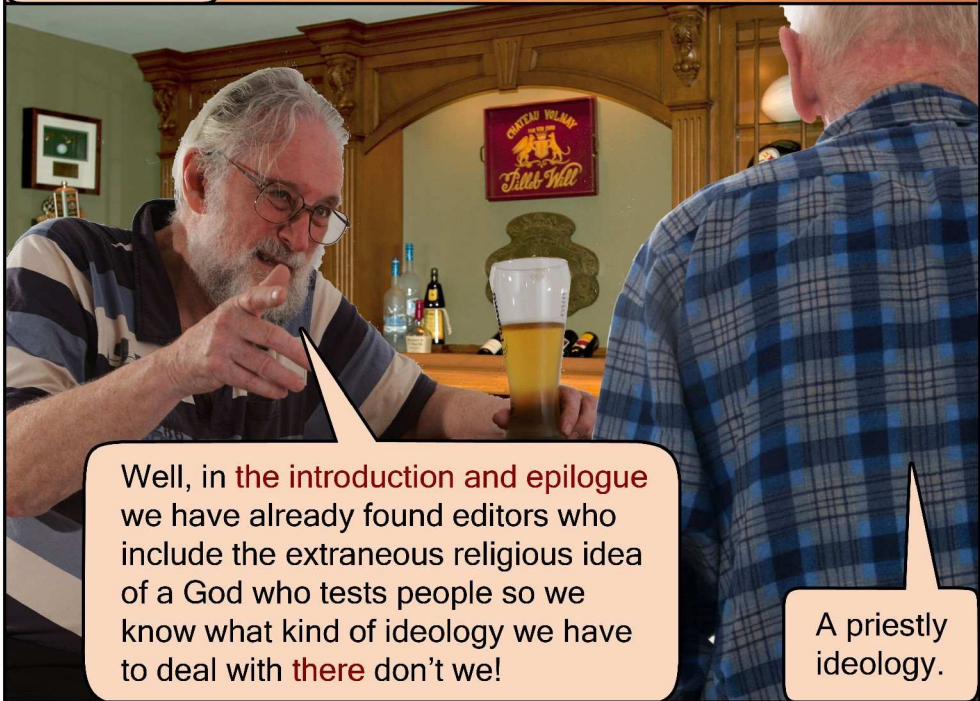


Well, in claiming Yahweh is constantly harrying him, Job makes it clear he sees his distressing condition as a direct result of his ideological faith... but to understand things more fully we need to know what ideology we are talking about.

A photograph of two men sitting at a bar. The man on the right, with a grey beard and glasses, is wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt and is pointing his finger while speaking. The man on the left, with white hair, is wearing a blue plaid shirt and is listening. Both are holding glasses of beer. The bar has a wooden top and a background with a painting of a church interior.

Are we talking about Yahweh as representing **the marginal Mosaic ideology** or are we talking about him in revisionist terms as **the authoritarian religious God** of Ezekiel and co?

So what's the verdict?

A photograph of the same two men at the bar. The man with the grey beard and glasses is now speaking and gesturing with his hand. The man in the plaid shirt is seen from the back, listening. The background shows a bar with a sign that says "CHATEAU VILLAIN" and "Tilke Vell".

Well, in **the introduction and epilogue** we have already found editors who include the extraneous religious idea of a God who tests people so we know what kind of ideology we have to deal with **there** don't we!

A priestly ideology.



Well, we have already seen how, in the post-exilic period, the revolutionary Hebrew prophets were hounded by the followers of Ezekiel. So it must be this horrendous situation Job is referring to.



Naturally they were deeply distressed by this situation since their understanding had always been that if they managed to put on a valid demonstration people would be shamed... but the very opposite seemed to be happening.

Oh, that I were as in the months of old,
as in the days when God watched over me;
When I went out to the gate of the city,
when I prepared my seat in the square,
the young men saw me and withdrew,
and the aged rose and stood;
But now they make sport of me,
men who are younger than I,
they do not hesitate to spit at the sight of me.
Because God has loosed my cord and humbled me,

Job 29.2 -3.11

So understandably they looked to their ideology - Yahweh - for an explanation... but all they got back was silence.

And now my soul is poured out within me;
days of affliction have taken hold of me.
I cry to thee and thou dost not answer me;
I stand, and thou dost not heed me.
Thou hast turned cruel to me;
with the might of thy hand thou dost persecute me.

Job 30.16-21

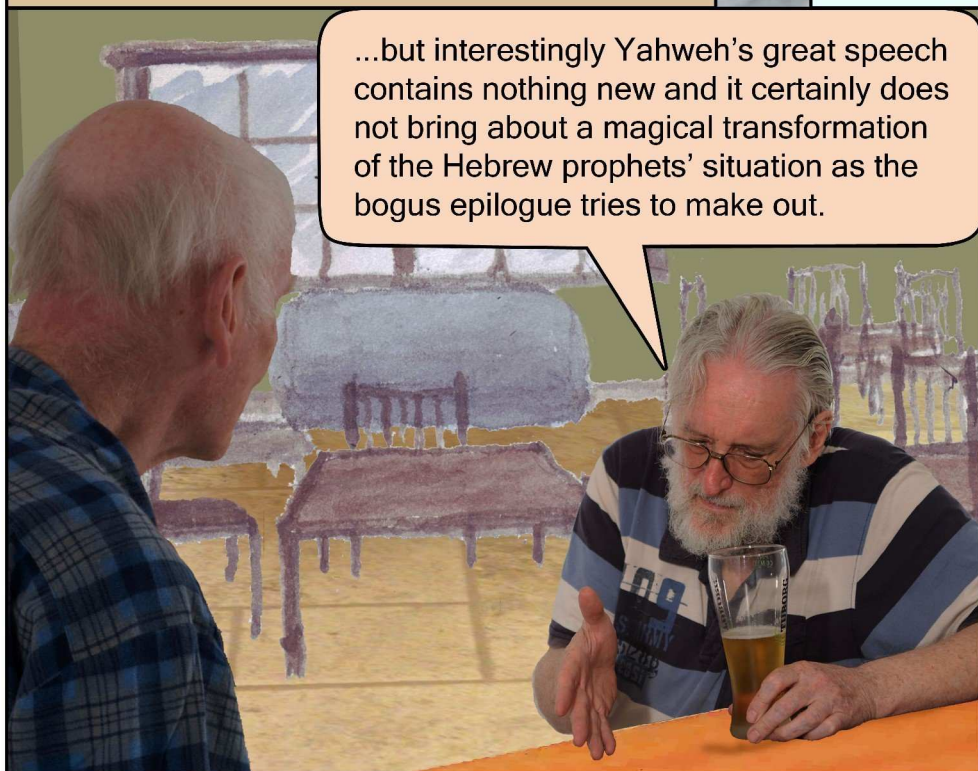
However, at its climax the poem suddenly claims against the odds that they did finally get an answer...



Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

Job 38-41

...but interestingly Yahweh's great speech contains nothing new and it certainly does not bring about a magical transformation of the Hebrew prophets' situation as the bogus epilogue tries to make out.



Indeed it leaves them, as ever, with nothing more than hope against hope only now there's an added assurance they are certainly in the right and will finally be vindicated.

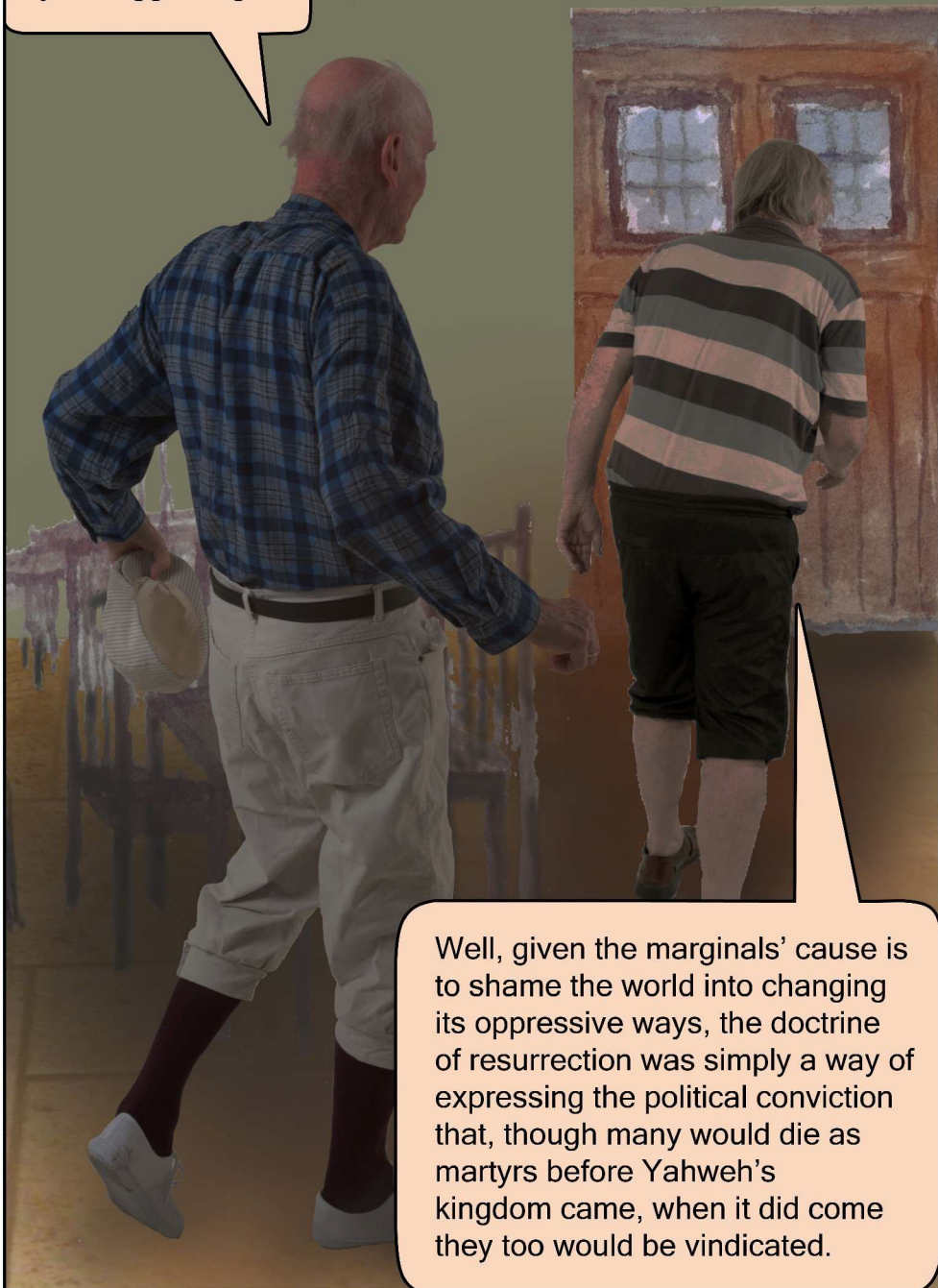


We see here the first tentative sign of the doctrine of resurrection emerging.

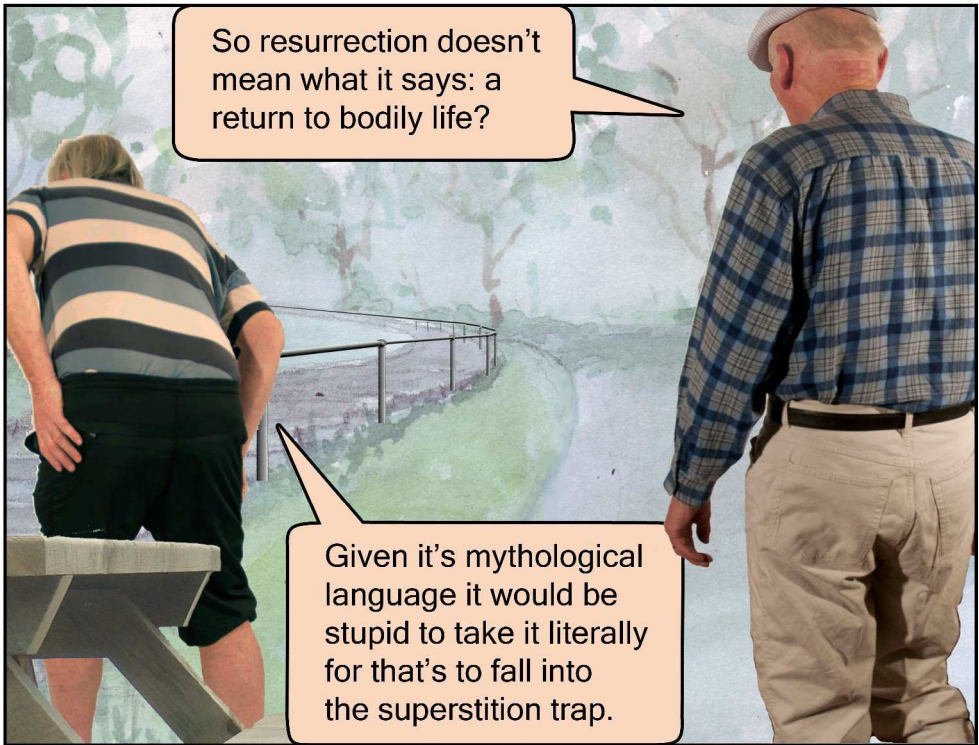
For I know that my vindicator lives,
and at last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then without my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Job 19.24-27

What exactly are you suggesting?

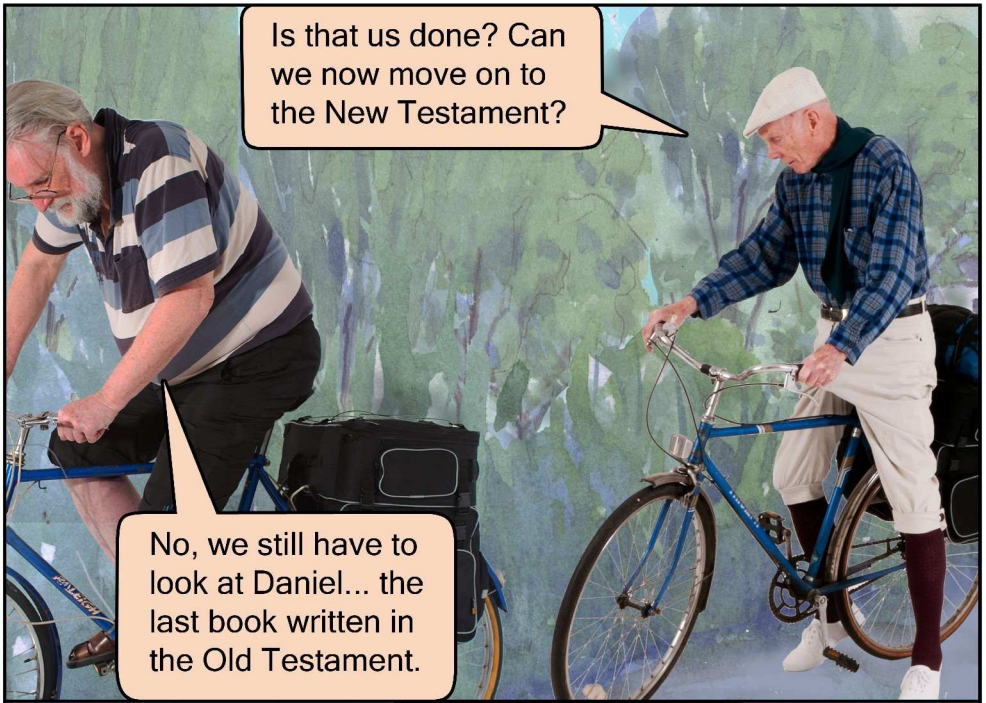


Well, given the marginals' cause is to shame the world into changing its oppressive ways, the doctrine of resurrection was simply a way of expressing the political conviction that, though many would die as martyrs before Yahweh's kingdom came, when it did come they too would be vindicated.



7

DANIEL



Is that us done? Can we now move on to the New Testament?

No, we still have to look at Daniel... the last book written in the Old Testament.



I know you've studied it so tell us about it.

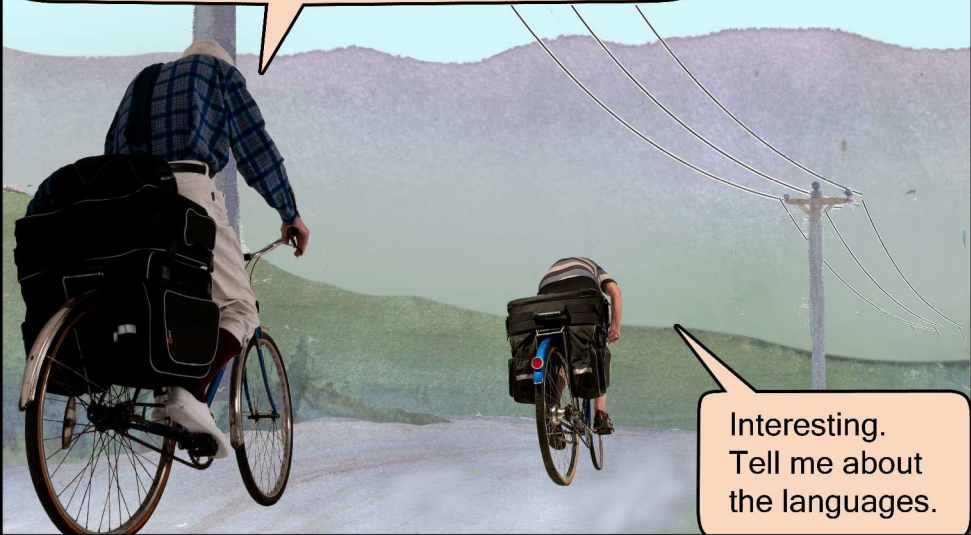
It's complicated!

At first sight the book appears to fall naturally into two halves, first the court tales in Chapters 1 to 6 and then the apocalyptic visions in Chapters 7 to 12.

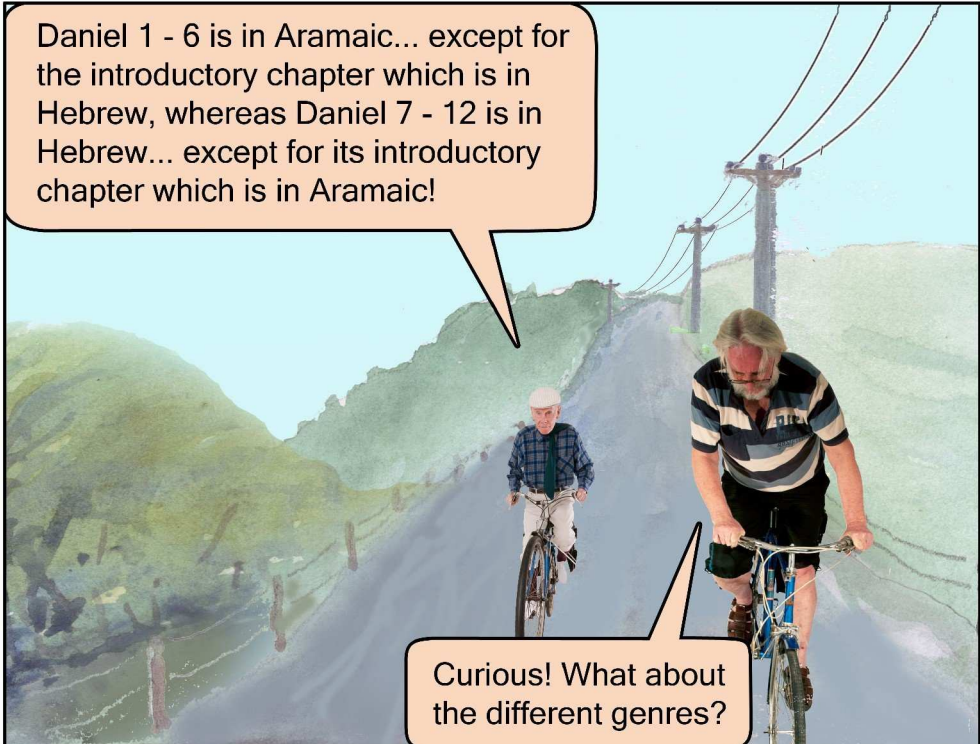


Sounds fair enough!

All of these chapters deal with the history of the Babylonian and Persian conquests using different languages and literary styles but unfortunately neither the languages nor the styles quite fit with this neat division.

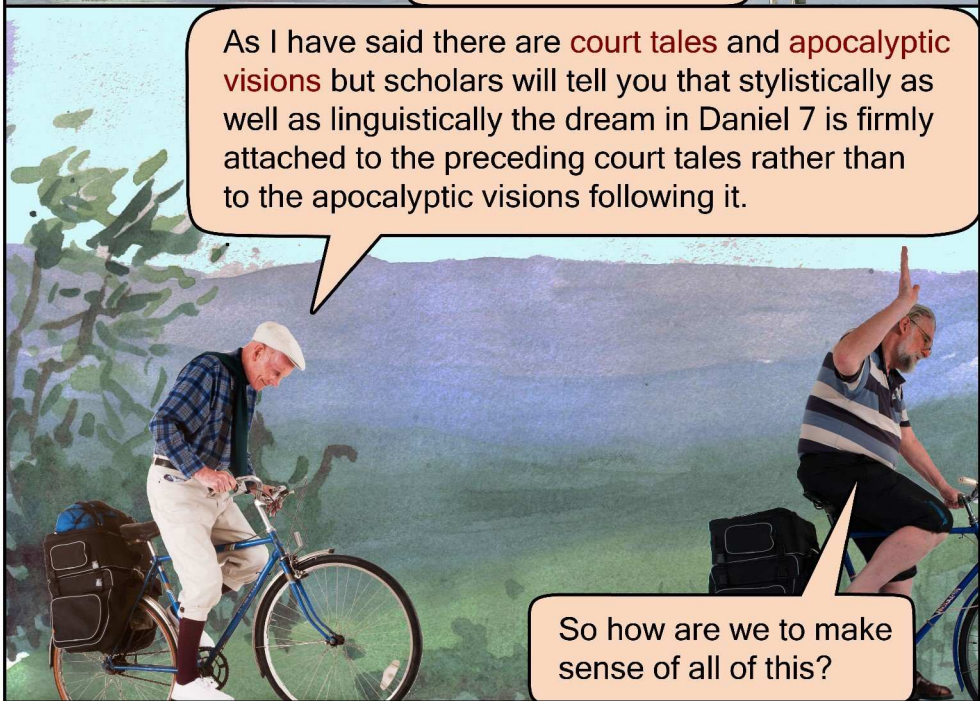


Interesting.
Tell me about
the languages.



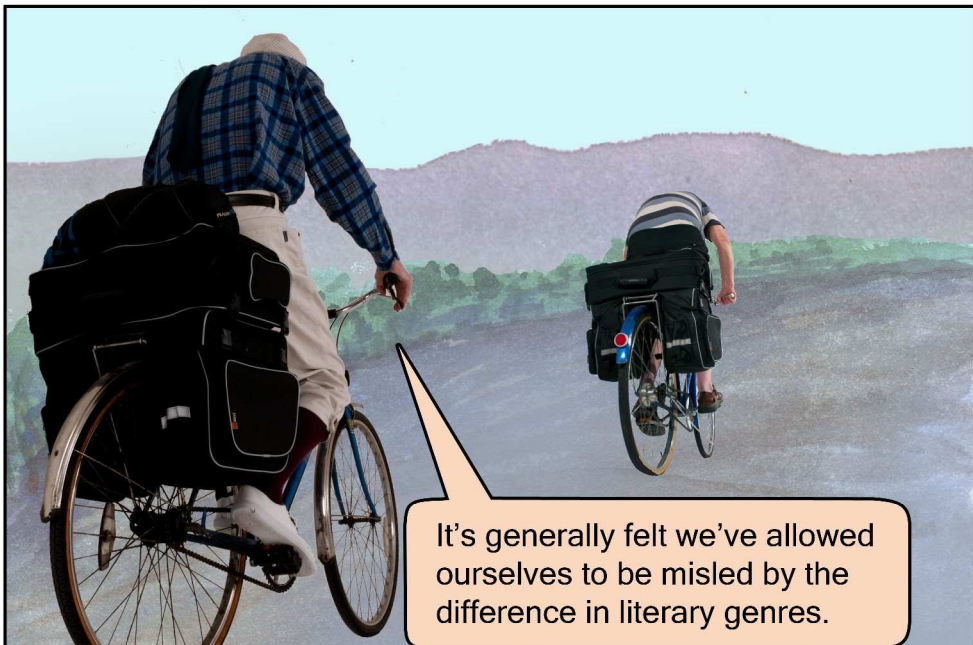
Daniel 1 - 6 is in Aramaic... except for the introductory chapter which is in Hebrew, whereas Daniel 7 - 12 is in Hebrew... except for its introductory chapter which is in Aramaic!

Curious! What about the different genres?



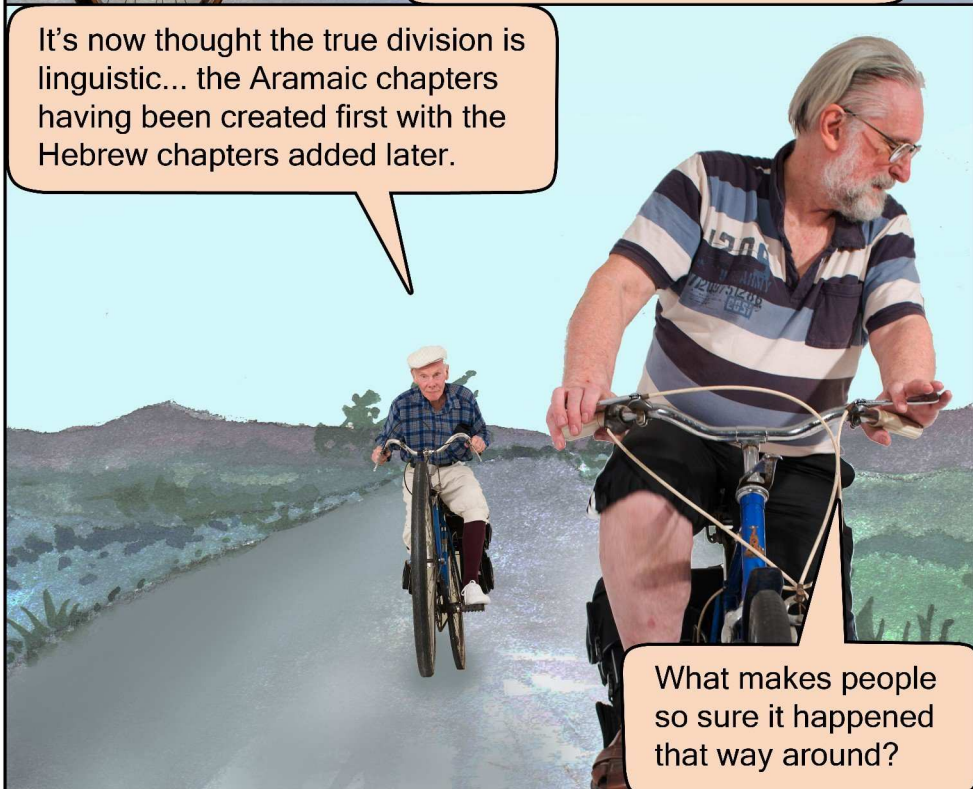
As I have said there are **court tales** and **apocalyptic visions** but scholars will tell you that stylistically as well as linguistically the dream in Daniel 7 is firmly attached to the preceding court tales rather than to the apocalyptic visions following it.

So how are we to make sense of all of this?

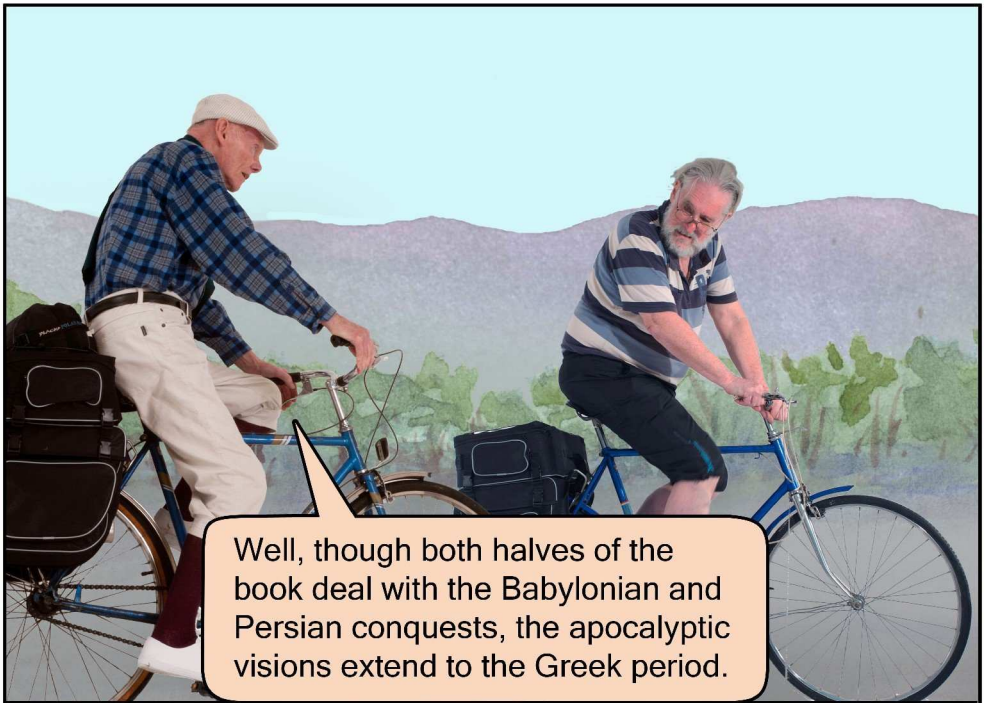


It's generally felt we've allowed ourselves to be misled by the difference in literary genres.

It's now thought the true division is linguistic... the Aramaic chapters having been created first with the Hebrew chapters added later.



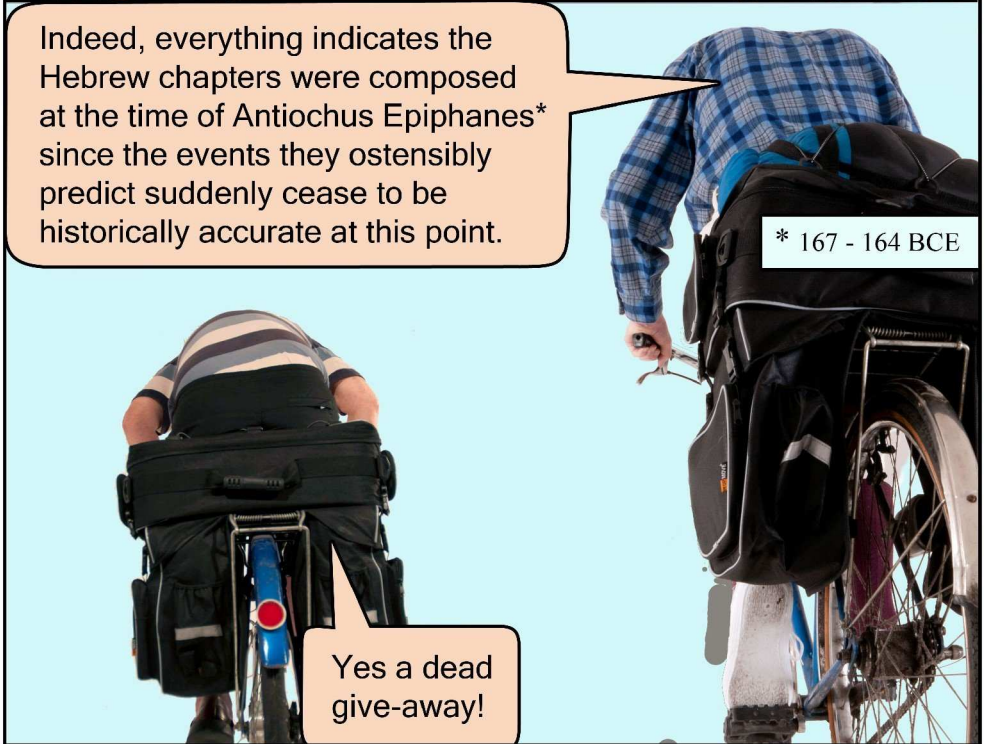
What makes people so sure it happened that way around?



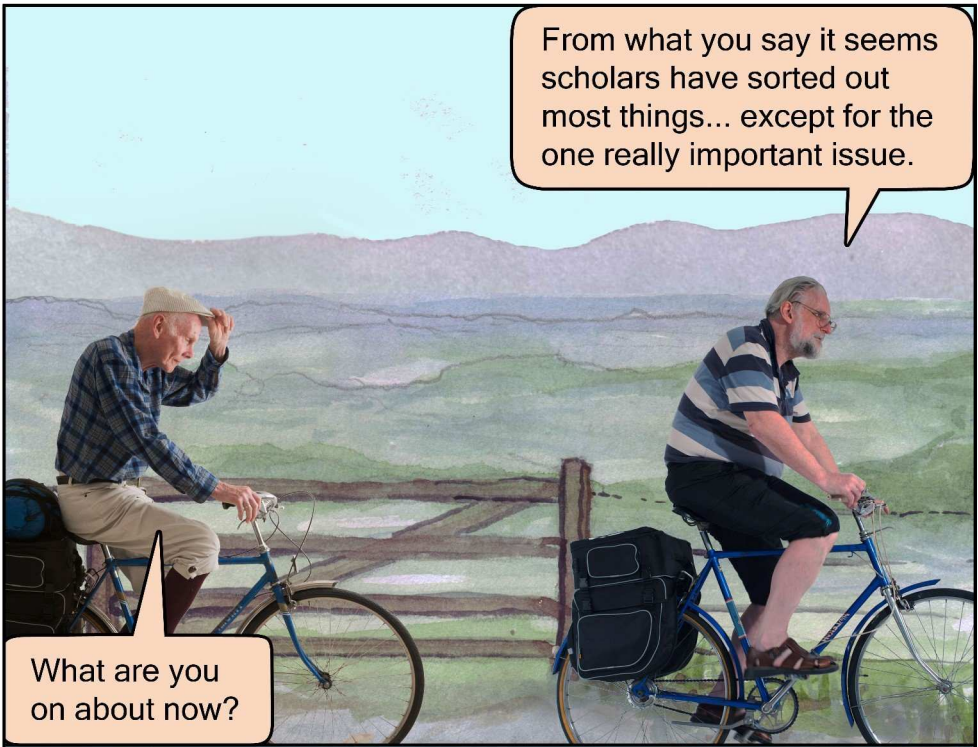
Well, though both halves of the book deal with the Babylonian and Persian conquests, the apocalyptic visions extend to the Greek period.

Indeed, everything indicates the Hebrew chapters were composed at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes* since the events they ostensibly predict suddenly cease to be historically accurate at this point.

* 167 - 164 BCE



Yes a dead give-away!

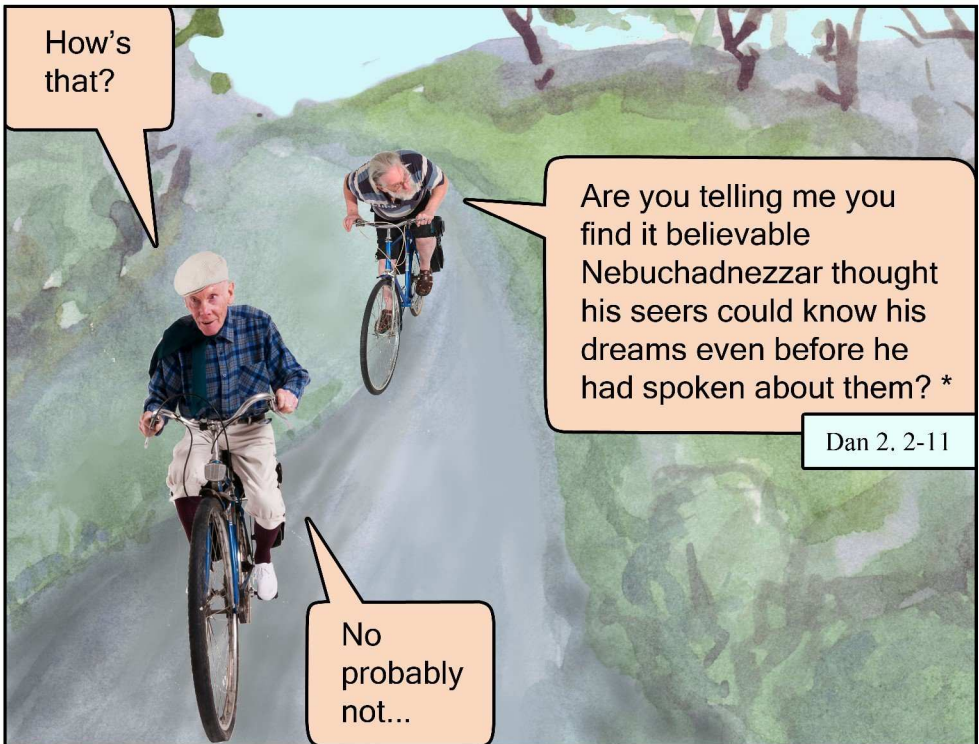


Were they now!
What makes
you say that?

Well, the court tales
are all about **how God**
miraculously rescued
his faithful servants...

... and the apocalyptic visions
are essentially eschatological...
dealing as they do with **God's final**
intervention to set things straight.

It beats me how you, as a
religious person, can say such
things with a straight face since
clearly you don't believe what
the texts say happened!





Now let's take your claim that the apocalyptic visions must have been religious because they were eschatological.



Aren't the beasts in Daniel 7 just symbols representing the authoritarian powers that ruled successively over the region?

That's certainly what scholars say.



Doesn't this indicate the writer was simply using mythological language in the normal way to make a political point?



Wasn't he just saying that authoritarianism in all its various shapes and forms is intrinsically de-humanising?



So when finally he goes on to describe a non-beast (a son of man) being presented to Yahweh (the ancient of days) and given dominion aren't we obliged to understand this **ideologically** also?



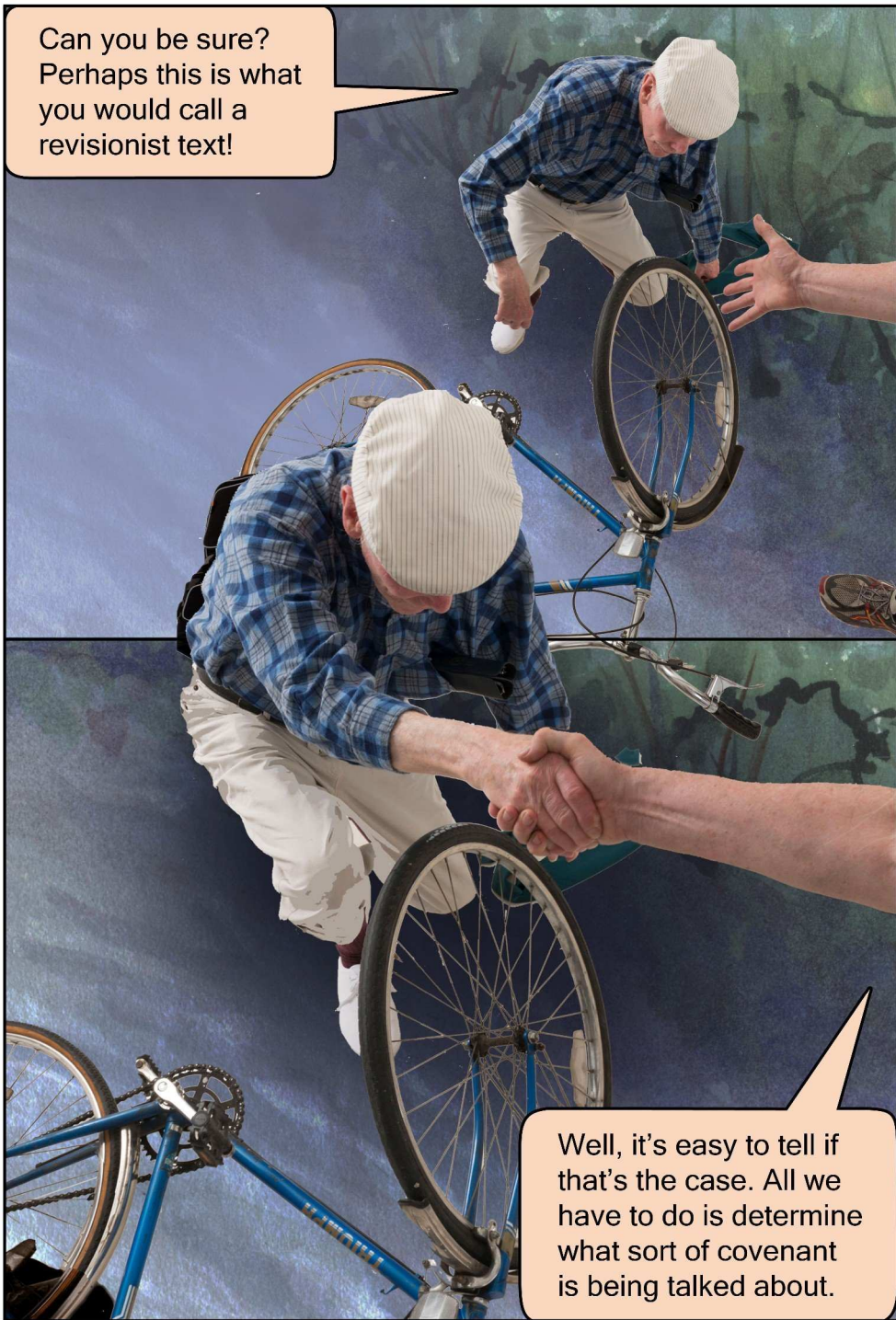
When we do this what we get is simply a political vision of a future when, against all odds and thanks only to the efforts of the faithful and their ideology, **a humane, non-authoritarian rule has finally emerged.**

But isn't it religious that for the moment everything remains just **a future hope** which - let's face it - looks as if it will never be realised... unless **God acts**.

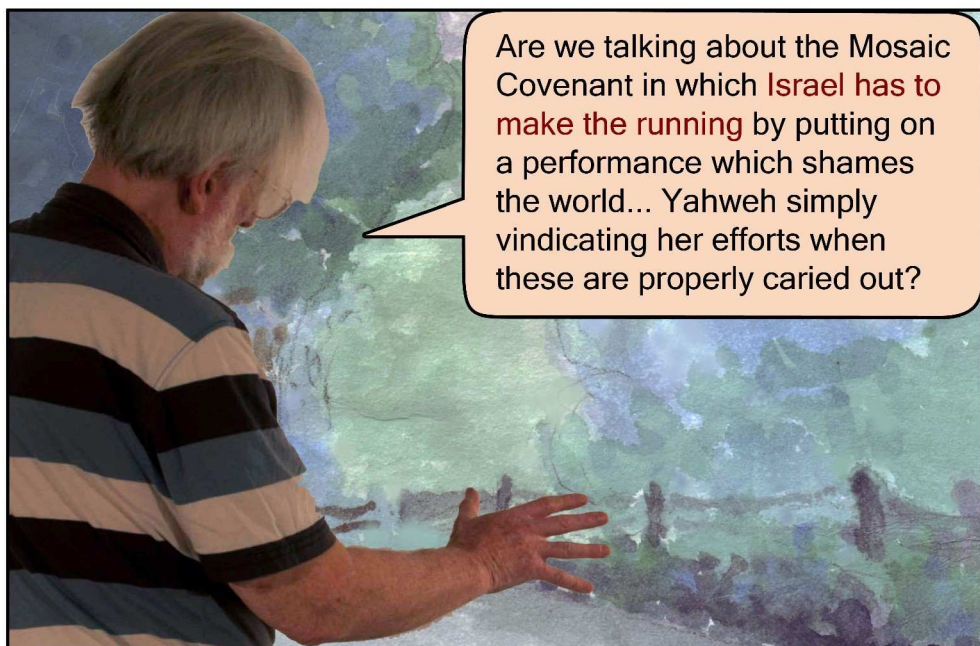


Now you're talking! However, everything indicates it's not **your religious God** who acts. Rather it's the court of Yahweh **god of the marginals** which, in passing judgement, vindicates his faithful servants.

Can you be sure?
Perhaps this is what
you would call a
revisionist text!



Well, it's easy to tell if
that's the case. All we
have to do is determine
what sort of covenant
is being talked about.



Are we talking about the Mosaic Covenant in which **Israel has to make the running** by putting on a performance which shames the world... Yahweh simply vindicating her efforts when these are properly carried out?



Or are we talking about the revisionists' New Covenant in which **God magically does everything** and all Israel has to do is blindly obey?



So?

Well, the covenant is mentioned several times in the Hebrew texts * but, sadly for you, it's clear the references are all to the old Mosaic Covenant **where Israel is the only partner who has to perform...** Yahweh's business being simply to vindicate if and when the performance is properly carried out.

* Dan. 9. 4-19, 11. 22, 11. 28, 11. 30, 11. 32.

What about the ideas of resurrection and immortality found in the last chapter? * Are you telling me these are not religious concepts?

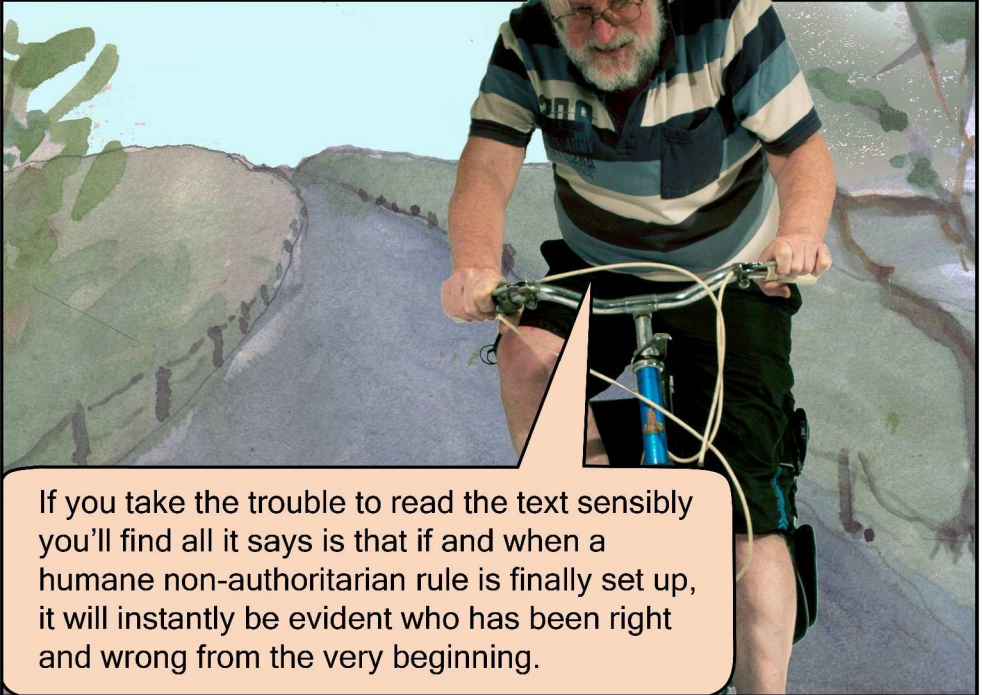
* Dan 12. 2

Well, it all depends on how you choose to read their mythological language. If you're silly enough to take this at face value then you will certainly end up reading them as religious drive!

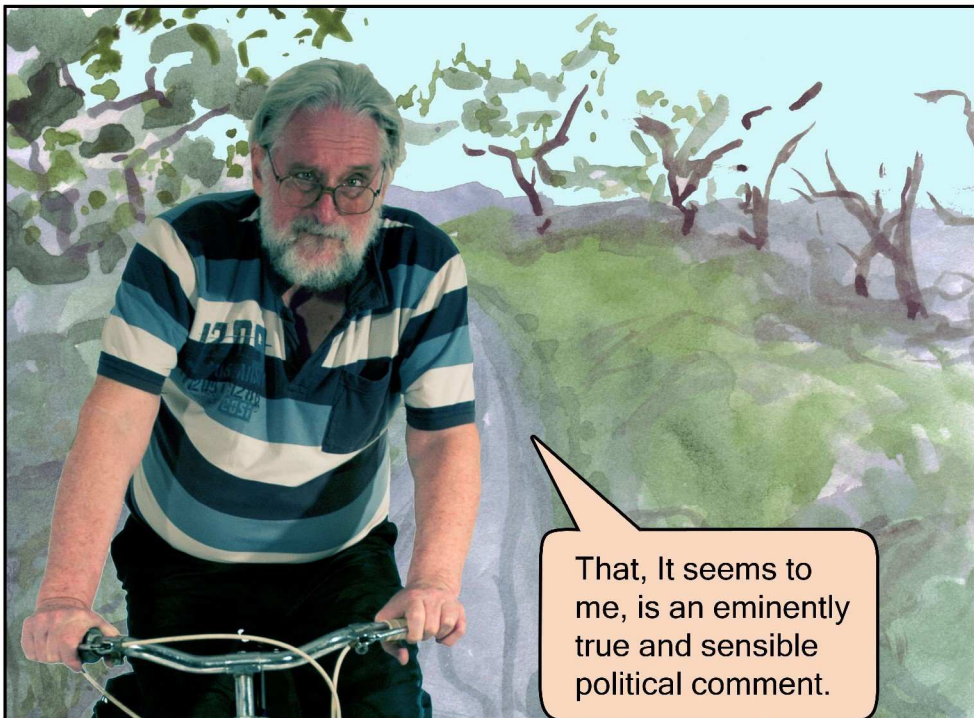
I don't see them as drive!!



No they are not! You and others have wrongly read them back into the text and it's a scandal.



If you take the trouble to read the text sensibly you'll find all it says is that if and when a humane non-authoritarian rule is finally set up, it will instantly be evident who has been right and wrong from the very beginning.



That, It seems to me, is an eminently true and sensible political comment.

It's also crucial in underlining the point the writer's making: that marginal heroes in the past did not die in vain as might have been supposed.





Is that it... your final word
on the Old Testament?

Yes, hopefully we've now
done enough spade-work
to properly understand
what Jesus was up to.

That brings us to the end of the Old Testament.
In Volume 4 we will be dealing with the New
Testament and Jesus.

Hope to see you there!

Many thanks to all who have helped
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