

**The  
Severn  
Forum**

# Reading in Critical Times

Hearing the Voice(s) of Scripture in a Divided World

Dr Meg Warner

Severn Forum, Tuesday 24 April 2018



Another disturbing image ...





# 'Critical' Times

- Defeat of an inviolable city
- Threat from the East
- Wall building projects (literal and metaphorical)
- Migrant crisis
- Deep division between inclusive and exclusive outlooks
- Success of the politics of fear
- Demonisation of the 'other'
- Rise of puritanism and fundamentalism
- Focus of fears onto issues of sexuality

And on the seventh day God rested ...



# The Ten 'Words'

**Deut. 5:6-10** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>7</sup> you shall have no other gods before me. <sup>8</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>9</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**Ex. 20:2-6** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

# Small differences

**Deut. 5:21** Neither shall you covet **your neighbor's wife**. Neither shall you desire **your neighbor's house**, *or field*, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

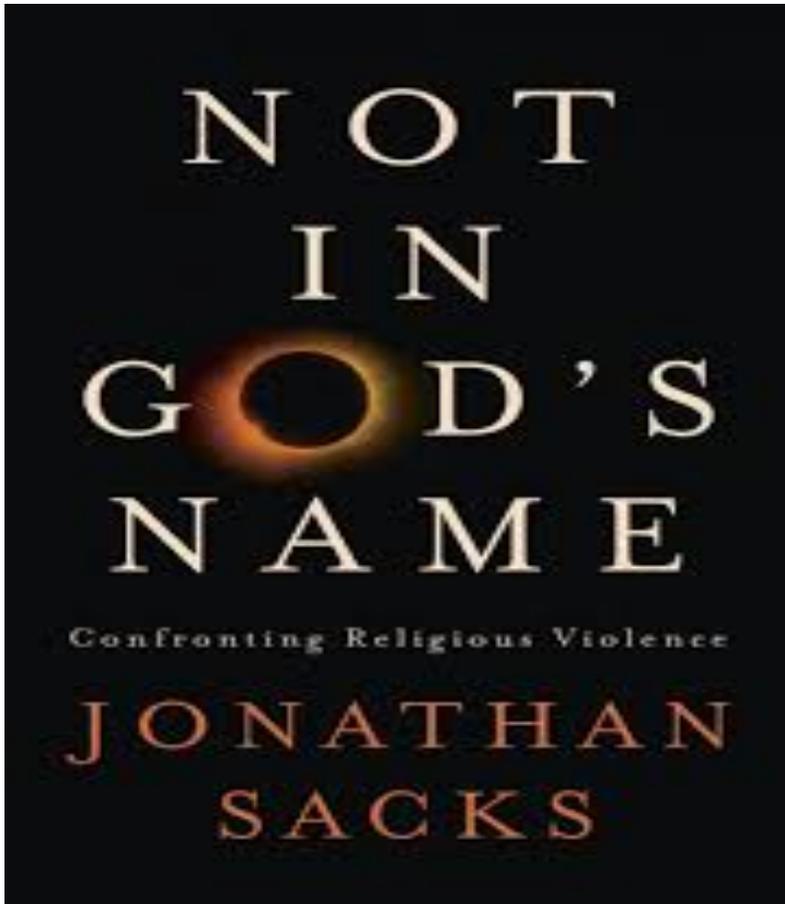
**Ex. 20:17** You shall not covet **your neighbor's house**; you shall not covet **your neighbor's wife**, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

# The Problem of the Sabbath

**Deut. 5:12** **Observe** the sabbath day and keep it holy, **as the Lord your God commanded you.** <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>14</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, **or your ox or your donkey**, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, **so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.** <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

**Ex. 20:8** **Remember** the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup> **For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.**

# Remember that you were a slave ...



“The entire structure of biblical law is rooted in the experience of slavery in Egypt, as if to say: you know in your heart what it feels like to be the victim of persecution, therefore do not persecute others.

“Biblical ethics is based on repeated acts of role-reversal, using memory as a moral force. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, we are commanded to use memory not to preserve hate but to conquer it by recalling what it feels like to be its victim.

“Remember” – not to live in the past but to prevent a repetition of the past.”

**Deut. 19:1** When the Lord your God has cut off the nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you, and you have dispossessed them and settled in their towns and in their houses, ...

# The Promised Land of the South



# The *other* Promised Land of the South

1842

THE LORD HAS GIVEN US THIS

LAND Joshua 2.9

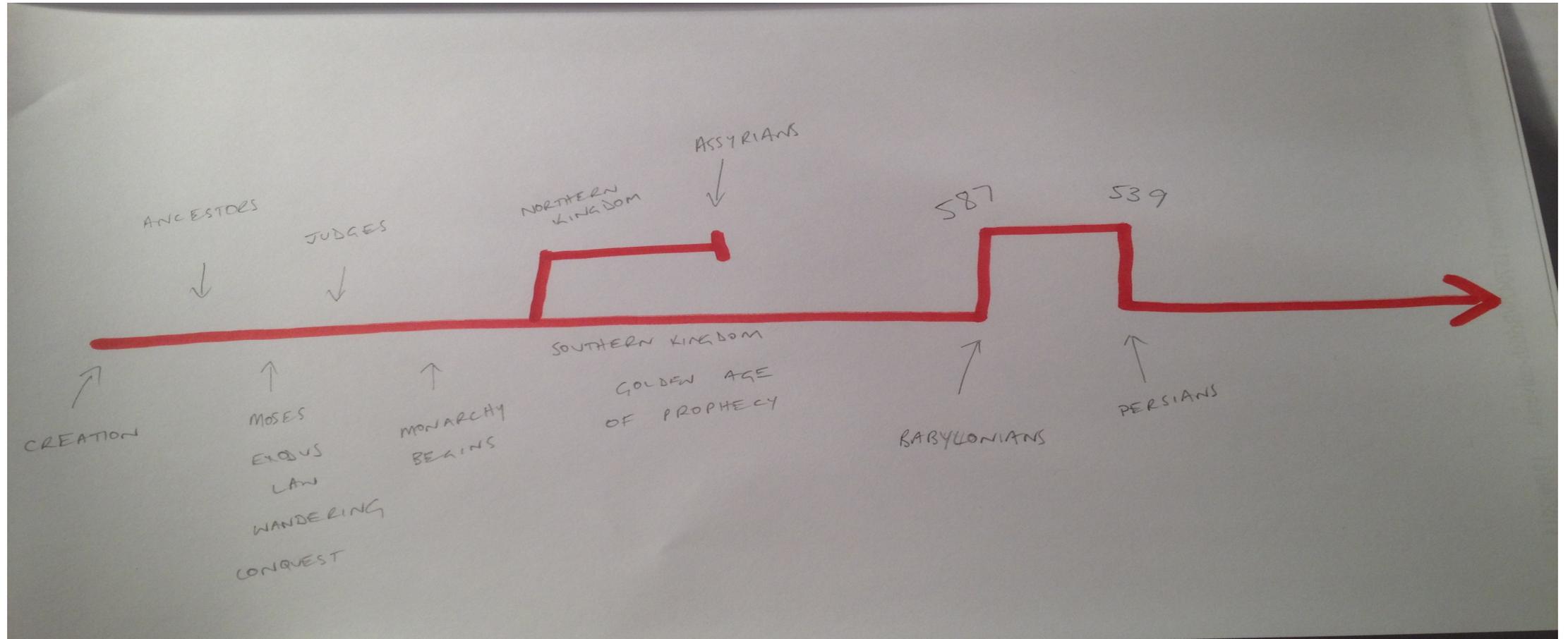
1992



**BAROSSA PIONEER MEMORIAL** In the early 1840s the Barossa was settled by scattered British families. They were followed from 1842 onwards by large groups of Germans who had fled from their homeland to escape religious persecution. The first settlers were engaged in agricultural pursuits, but soon they turned to grape and fruit growing, for which the Barossa has become renowned. The life of the pious pioneers was centered around the family and the church. They sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, trusting that God would provide their everyday needs.

THANKS BE TO GOD

# Not the first time this model has been problematic ...



# Two 'Critical' Times

## **Judah – 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE**

- Defeat of an inviolable city (Jerusalem)
- Threat from the East (Babylon/Persia)
- Wall building projects (literal and metaphorical)
- Migrant crisis
- Deep division between inclusive and exclusive outlooks
- Success of the politics of fear
- Demonisation of the 'other'
- Rise of puritanism and fundamentalism
- Displacement of fears onto issues of sexual purity (incest and ethnicity)

## **First World – 21<sup>st</sup> Century CE**

- Defeat of an inviolable city (New York)
- Threat from the East (ISIS etc.)
- Wall building projects (literal and metaphorical)
- Migrant crisis
- Deep division between inclusive and exclusive outlooks
- Success of the politics of fear
- Demonisation of the 'other'
- Rise of puritanism and fundamentalism
- Displacement of fears onto issues of sexual purity (gender)

# Two responses in 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE

## **Exclusivist**

- We are few and vulnerable
- We must maintain strong group boundaries (especially in marriage)
- We must maintain the status quo
- eg. Ezra and Nehemiah; Joshua; Deuteronomy functioning as a sort of constitution

## **Inclusivist**

- We can learn from others
- We will become strong through cooperation and integration
- We must challenge the status quo
- eg. Genesis; Leviticus; Ruth; Isaiah 45-55; Jonah

# Gen 2:1-3

**Gen. 2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup> So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.



# Leviticus and Sabbath

**Lev. 19:2** Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.

**Lev. 26:34** Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. <sup>35</sup> As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it.

**Lev. 25:2** When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; <sup>4</sup> but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. <sup>5</sup> You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.

# Leviticus and Land and People

**Ex. 12:49** there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.

**Lev. 24:22** You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God.

**Lev. 25:23** The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens (*gerim*) and tenants (*toshavim*).

**Gen. 23:3** Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, <sup>4</sup> “I am a stranger (*ger*) and an alien (*toshav*) residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight.”

‘possession’      אחזה (*ahuzzah*)  
נחלה (*nachlah*)

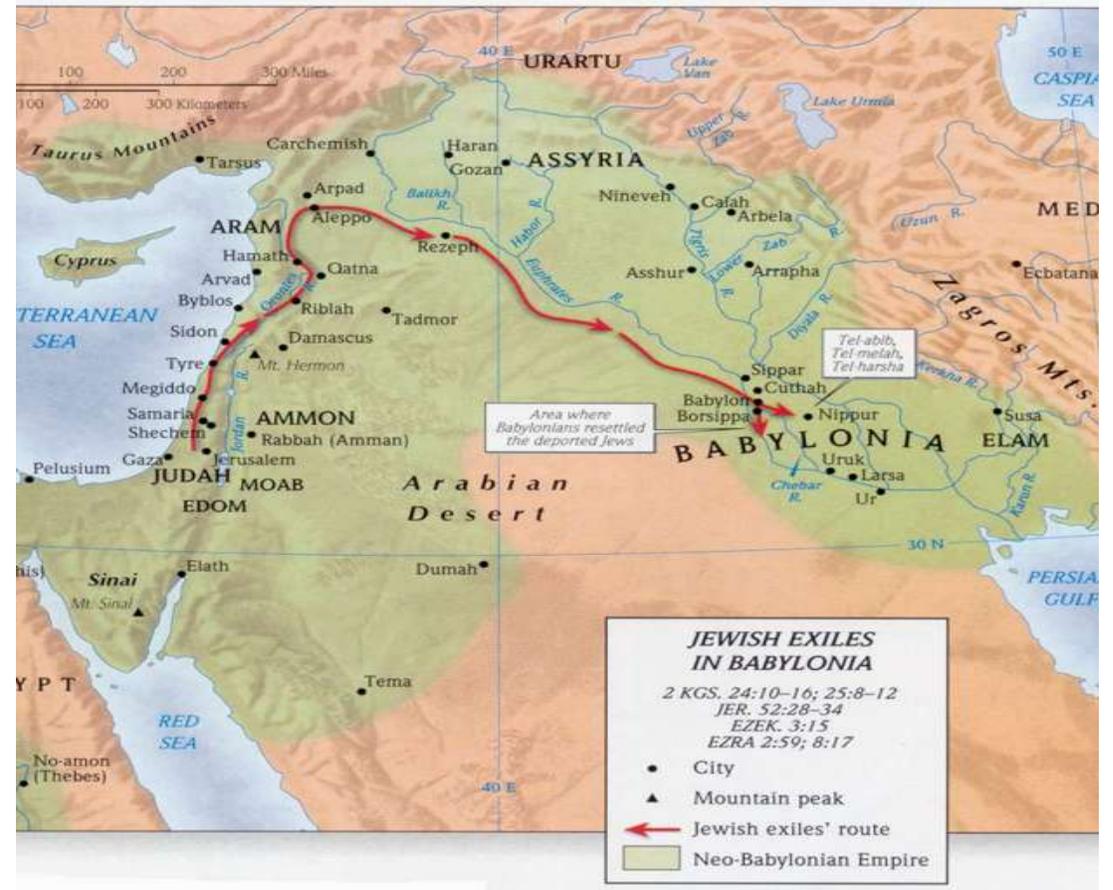
# Abraham as the ideal immigrant

“Abraham is portrayed as an exemplar of how to share the land, overcome conflict, and mediate blessing to the inhabitants of the land. The host peoples of the land live together with Abraham as a welcome immigrant in their midst.”

Norman Habel, *The Land*

*is Mine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 125.

# The two journeys



# Use of the Genesis Narratives in Colonial Expansion – the Massachusetts Puritans

‘As the ancient patriarchs . . . removed from straighter places into more roomy, where the land lay idle and waste, and none used it, though there dwelt inhabitants by them (as Genesis 13:6, 11, 12 and 34:21 and 41:20), so it is lawful now to take a land which none useth, and make use of it.

Robert Cushman, *Reasons and Considerations touching the Lawfulness of Removing out of England into the Parts of America* (1622).



# Benedictine Monasticism

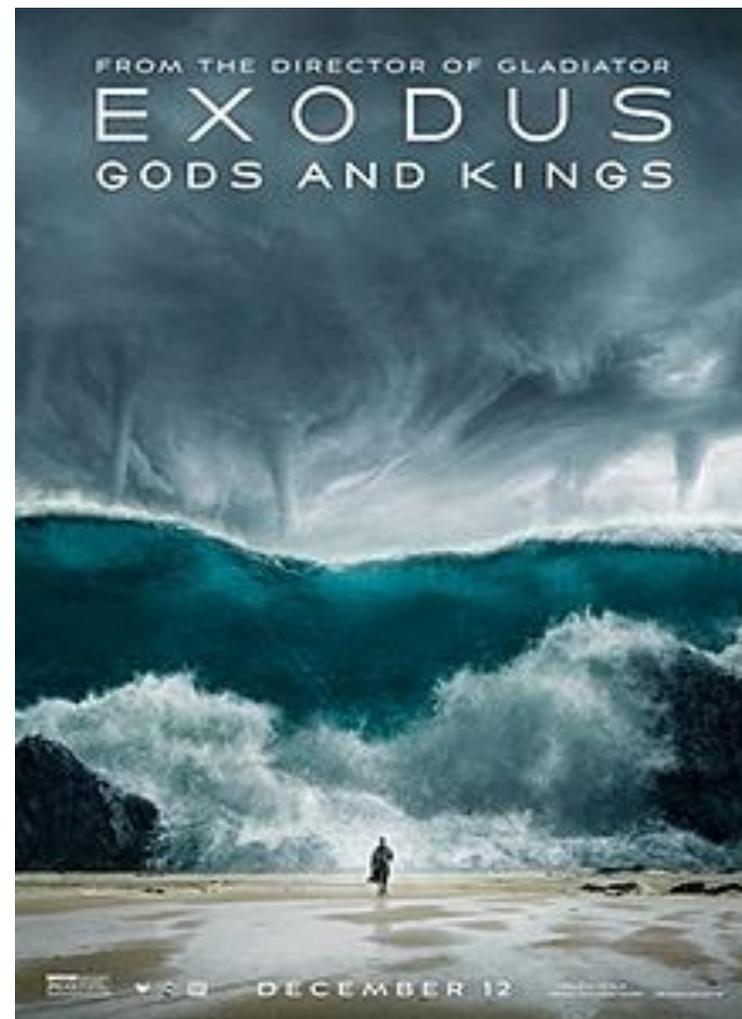
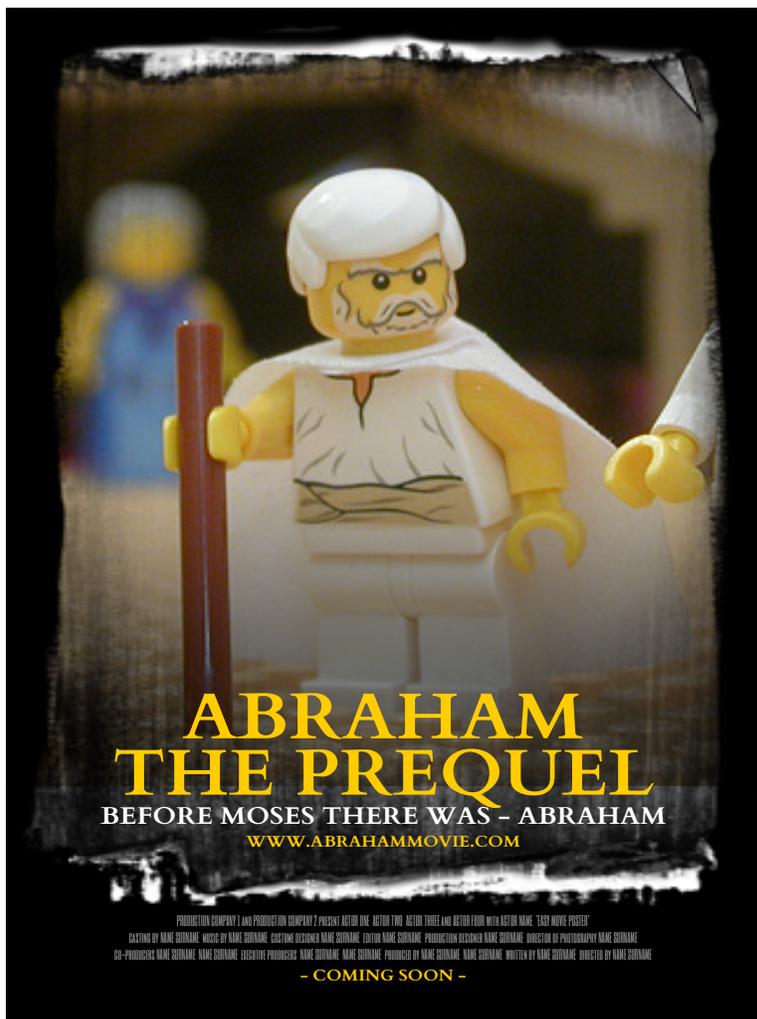
Benedictine monastics see not only their visitors but themselves as 'guests' in their monastery.



# being aliens

What difference  
might it make to  
think of ourselves as  
'aliens'?





# So What?

We have been here before.

Our Scriptures do not speak with a single voice.

Wither 'The Bible says ...'?

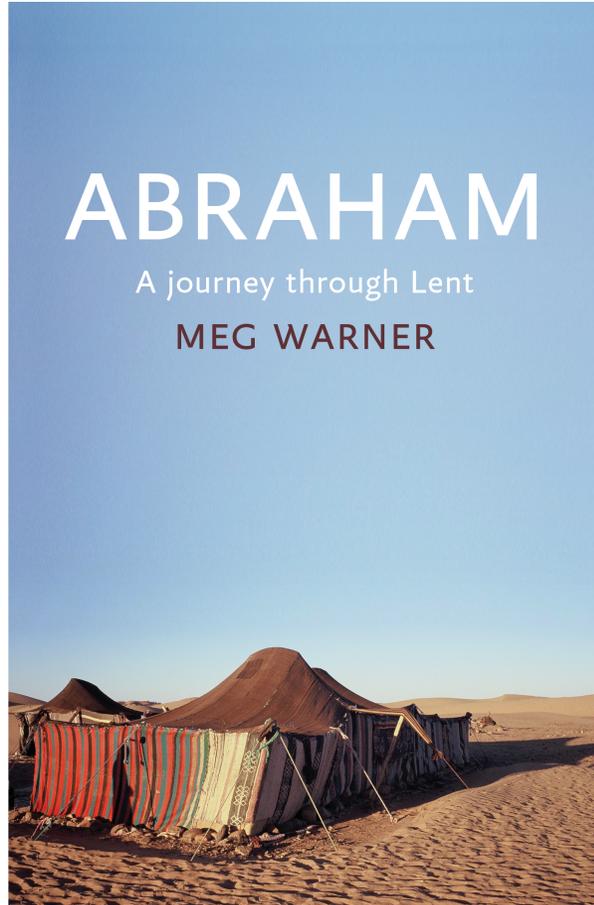
We have sometimes privileged some of the voices of Scripture over others – even to the exclusion of others.

The witness of Scripture is to hold multiple, sometimes conflicting or competing, voices together.

# Final Shameless Plug ...

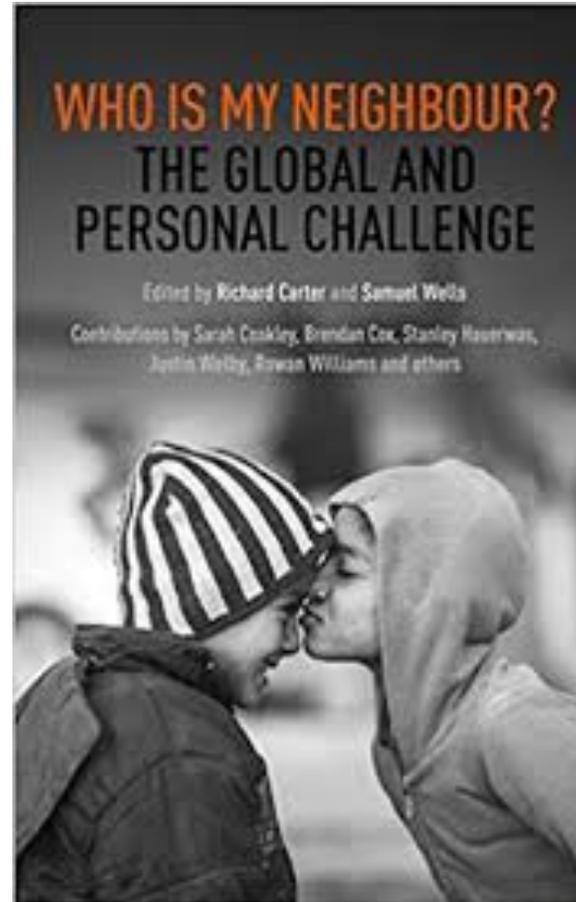
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