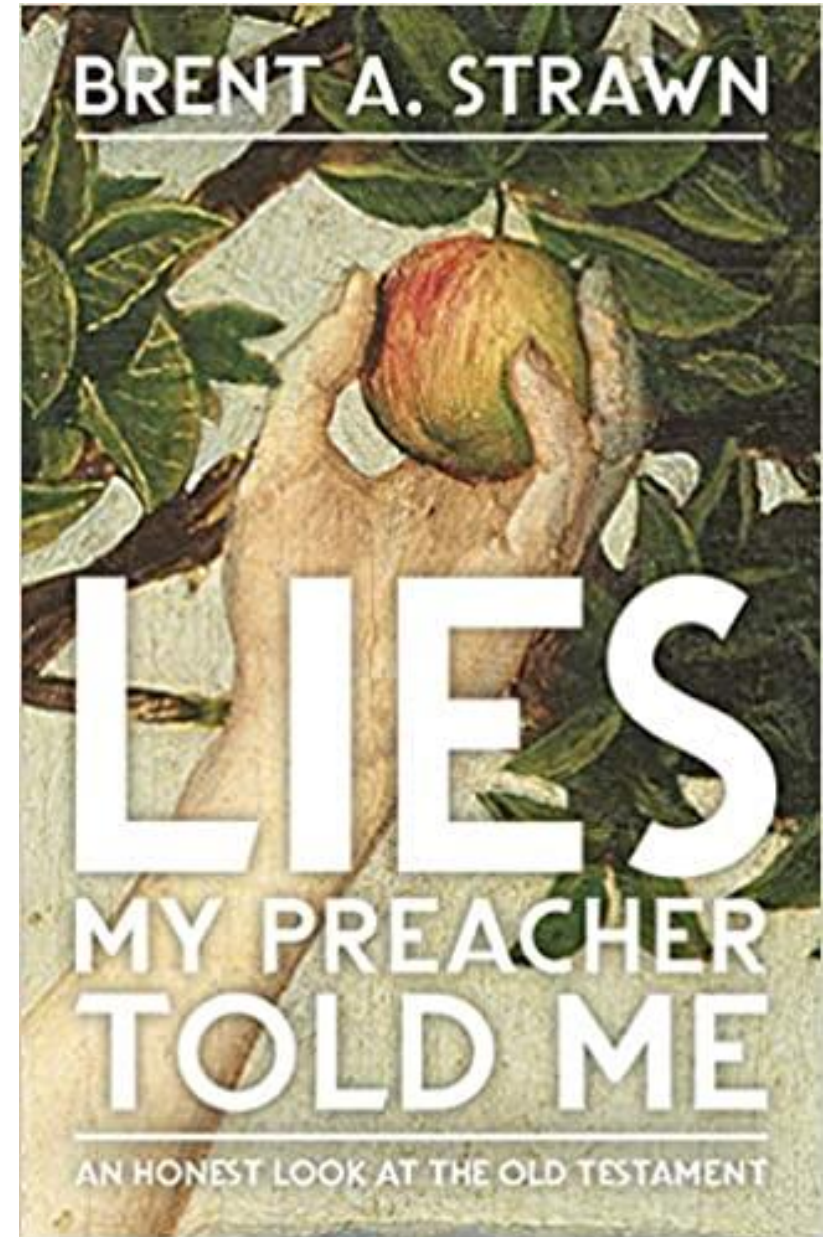




Misconceptions about the Old Testament
June 2021



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Misconceptions about the Old Testament

Unspoken mistruths about the
Old Testament –

- obsolete
- too wrath-filled
- lacks spiritual relevance
- absence of grace

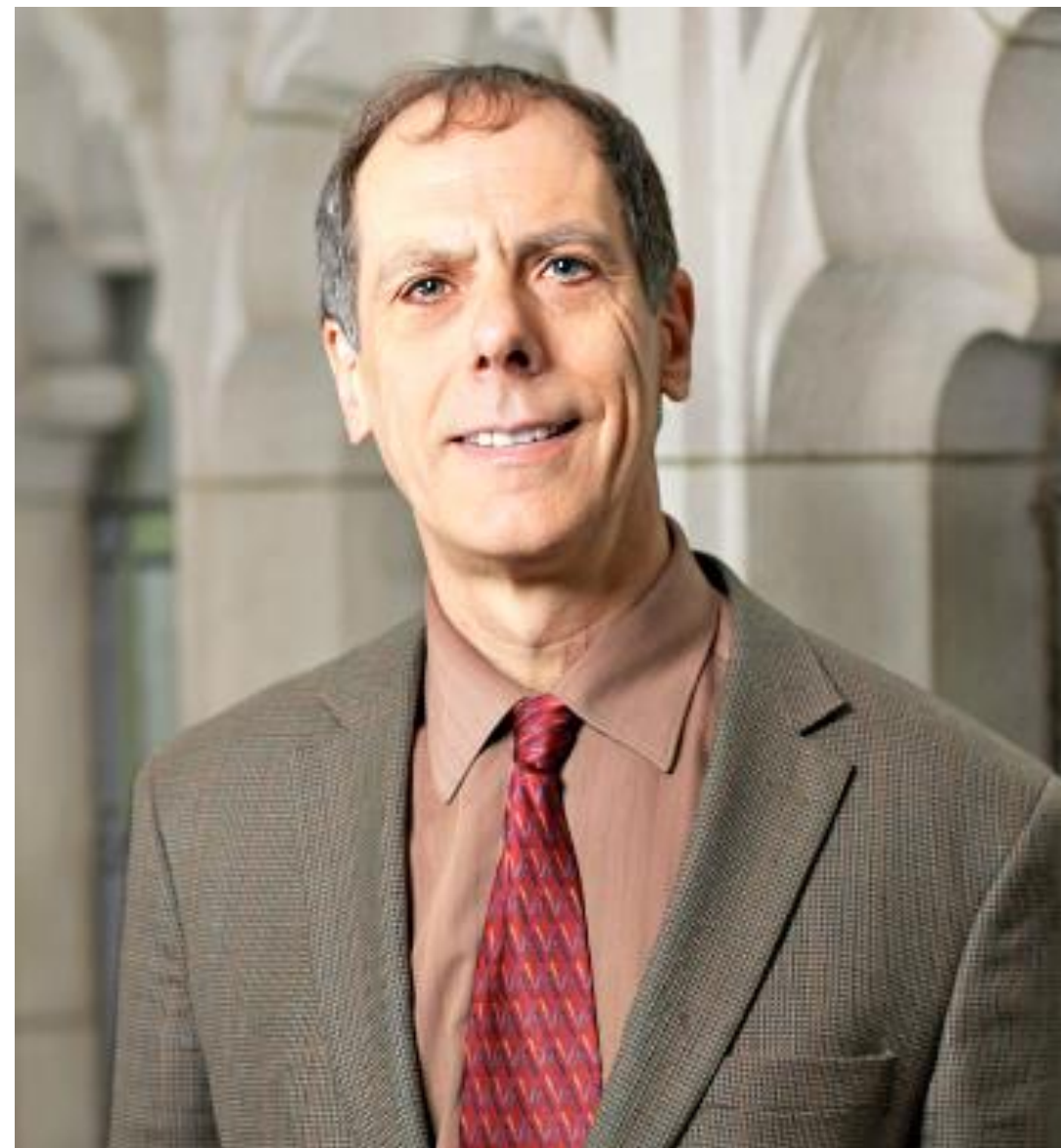
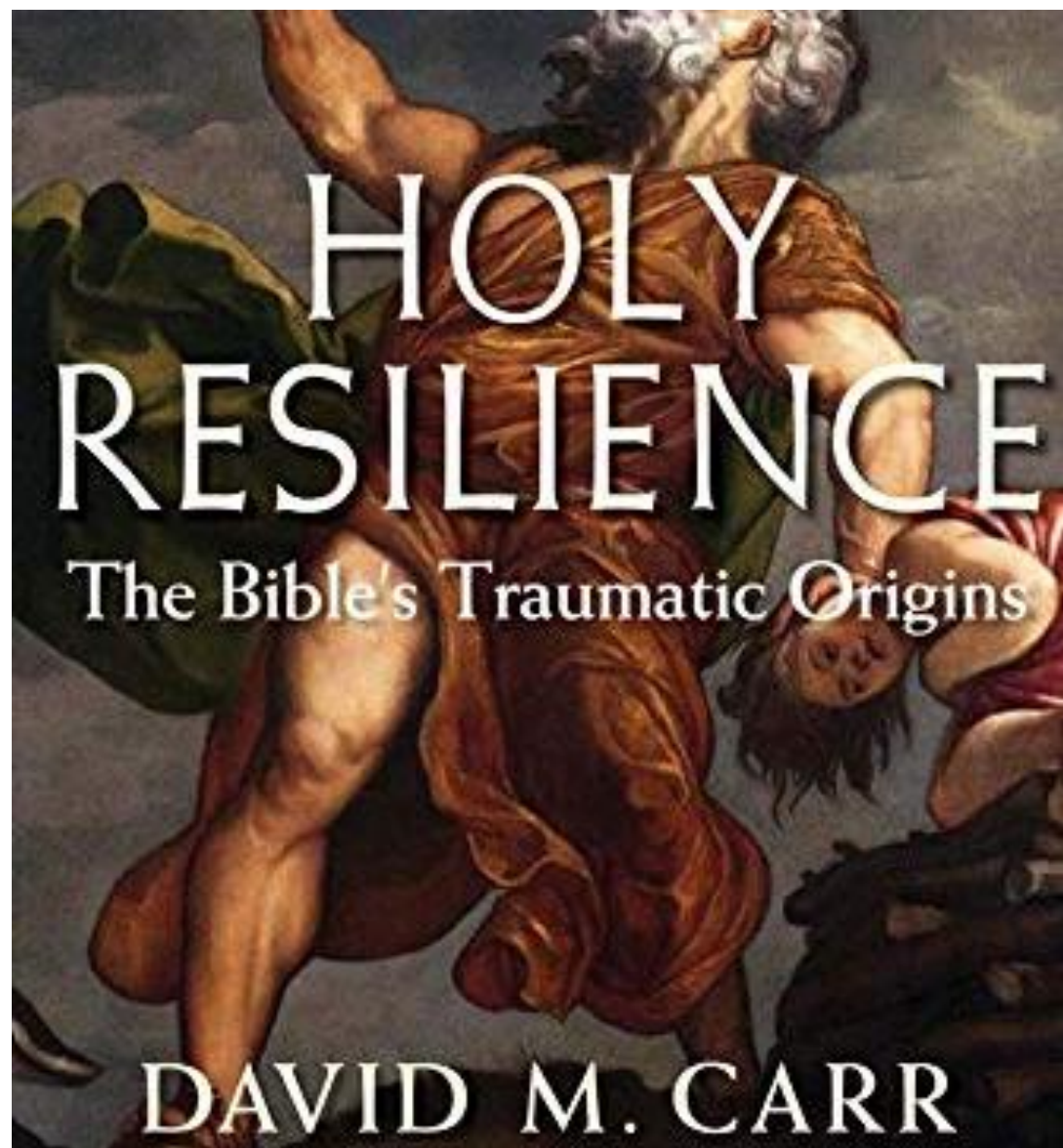
These ancient books possess
indispensable ideas to shape our
contemporary lives.

The God of the Old Testament is Really Mean

The Old Testament is Hyper-Violent



Trauma shapes
our lives and
memories.



The Bibles of both Judaism and of Christianity are a written depository of centuries of survival of suffering, (forming) communal resilience.

The scriptures offer pictures of a God who is still present when life shatters to pieces.

Pre-trauma Scriptures

- Hymns
- Instructions
- Love Songs
- Myths

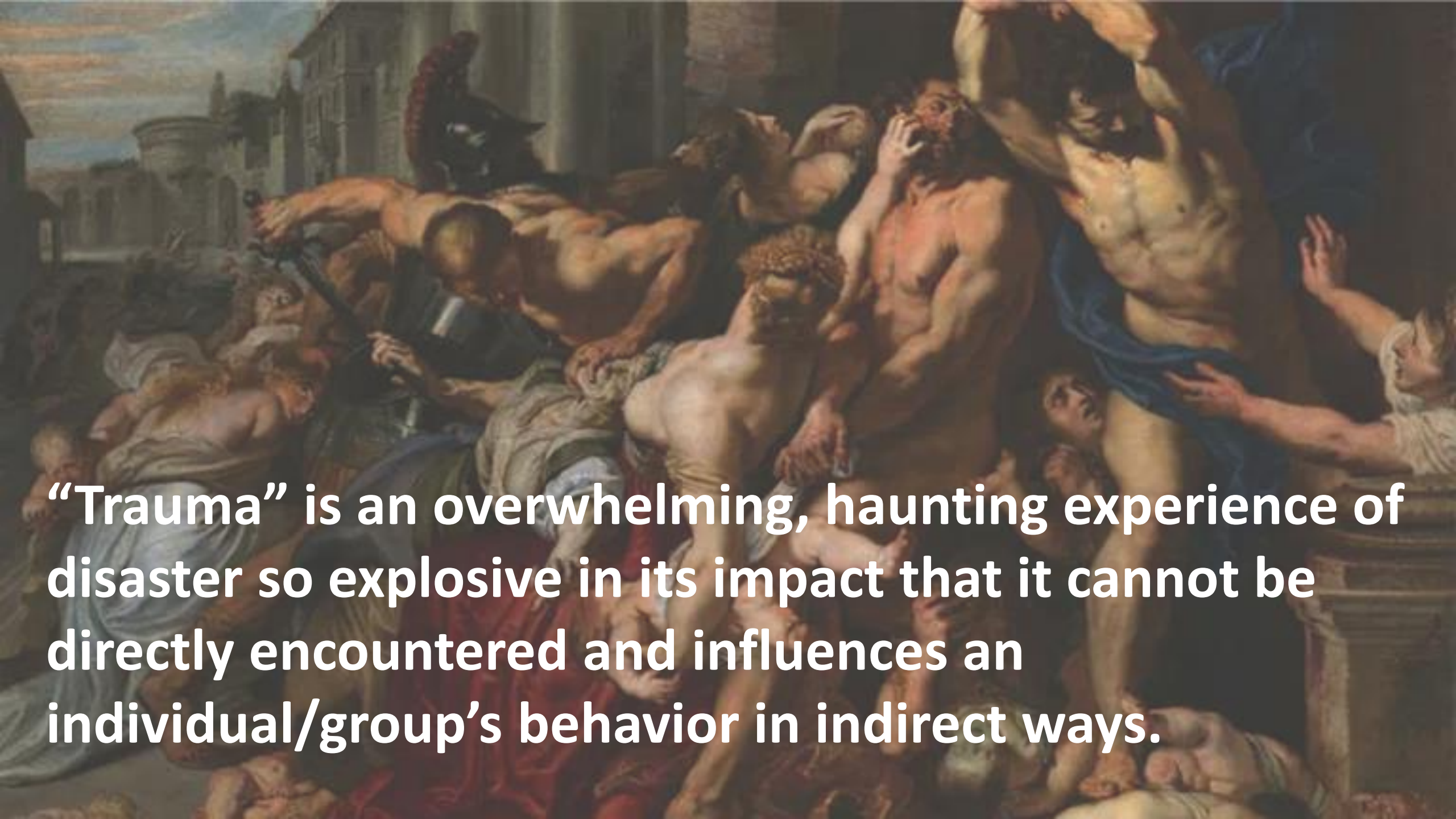
Centuries of
conflict
transformed
sacred texts to
address landless
ancestors and
wilderness
wandering

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Now the earth was formless and empty,
darkness was over the surface of the deep,
and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2





“Trauma” is an overwhelming, haunting experience of disaster so explosive in its impact that it cannot be directly encountered and influences an individual/group’s behavior in indirect ways.



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this *for* a memorial in the book and recount *it* in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, “Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

Exodus 17:14-16

Samuel said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’”

1 Samuel 15



But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

1 Samuel 15:33

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely.

Psalm 139

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

Three Strategies

Simply read past such texts and pretend they are not there

Problem of God's violence


Understand such texts as ideological mistakes: the authoring community imposed upon God such qualities that do not reflect God's character

Treat understanding God through a developmental lens as either writers become more aware of God's goodness over the long arc or God's own self becomes more loving





El Greco

A dramatic painting depicting the fall of Jerusalem. The scene is filled with chaos and destruction. In the foreground, a large crowd of people is shown in various states of distress and flight. Some are running, some are being carried, and others are lying on the ground. In the middle ground, a high stone wall is being breached by soldiers on horseback. Some soldiers are on the wall, while others are attacking from below. The background shows the city's architecture, including domes and arches, with smoke and fire rising from the streets. The overall atmosphere is one of intense conflict and tragedy.

Luke 21:24 ~ 24

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.

Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

*divine judgement and
divine wrath go together*



The wrath of God is a lamentation.

All prophecy is one great exclamation:
God is not indifferent to evil!

God is always concerned. God is personally affected by what people do to each other. God is a God of pathos. This is one of the meanings of the anger of God: the end of indifference.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*

Psalm 7:11 (KJV)

11 God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

Psalm 7:11 (NRSV)

God is a righteous judge,
and a God who has indignation every day.

Psalm 7:11 (CEB)

God is a righteous judge,
a God who is angry at evil every single day.



For a brief moment I abandoned you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer. Isaiah 54:7-8

John 3:16-17

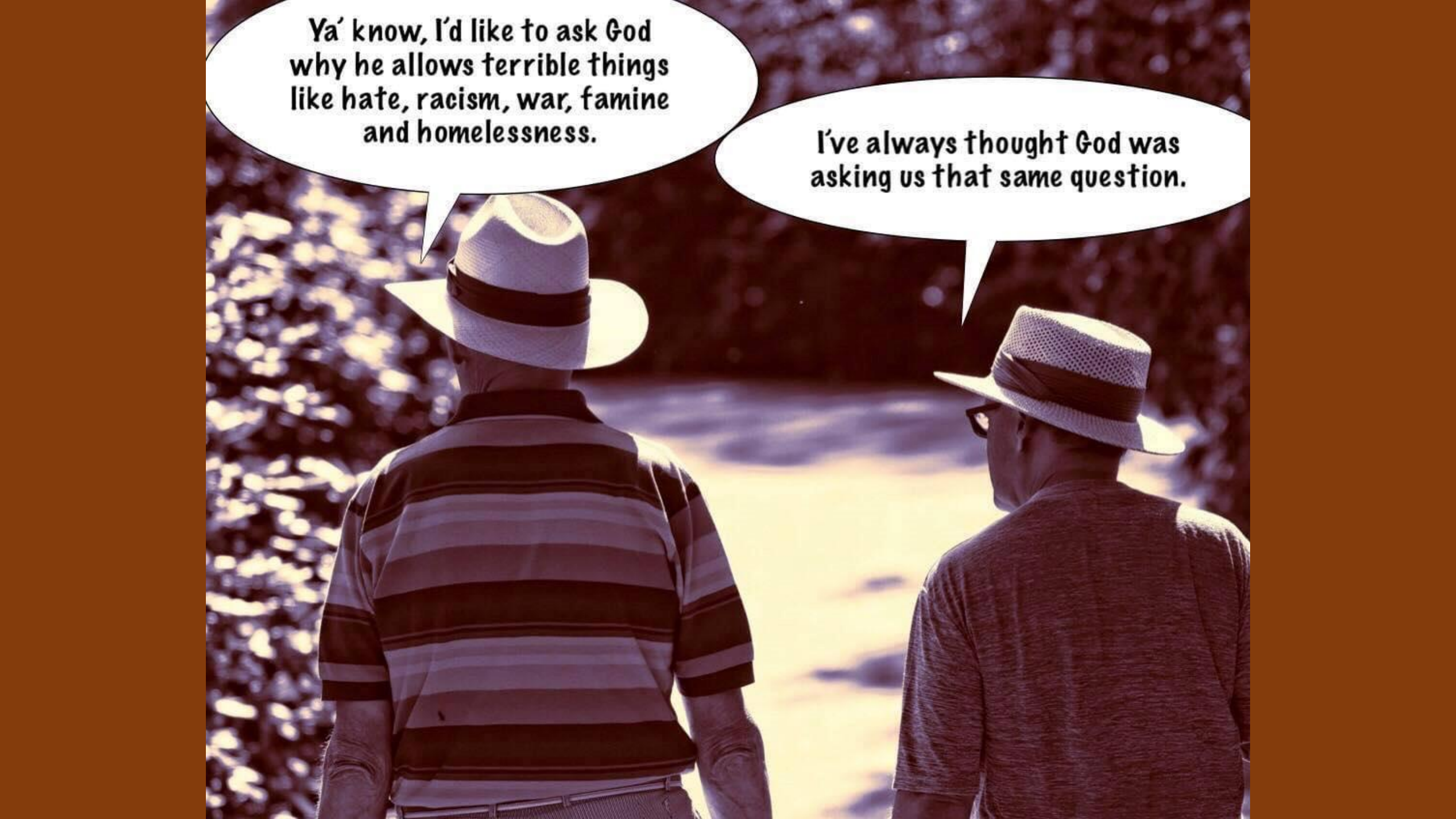
For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.





Hagar in the Desert
Marc Chagall

A photograph of two men standing by a body of water, seen from behind. The man on the left is wearing a white hat with a dark band and a striped polo shirt. The man on the right is wearing a white hat with a dark band, glasses, and a grey t-shirt. The background shows a bright, shimmering water surface. Two white speech bubbles are overlaid on the image, containing text.

**Ya' know, I'd like to ask God
why he allows terrible things
like hate, racism, war, famine
and homelessness.**

**I've always thought God was
asking us that same question.**