



# JUDGEMENT TO HOMECOMING

ISAIAH 40:1-11

# ISAIAH: A “MIGHTY ORATORIO”

- not a political story, however...
- not a work of theology, however...
- prophecy “the convergence of history and theology”

*“The task of the poet is to provide his displaced listeners news of the changed theological reality that is reflected in changed political circumstance.”*

# YHWH: THE “DISJUNCTIVE ONE”

- endlessly surprising, disjunctive and elusive
- unbearably harsh, astonishingly healing
- resolve of YHWH: the ultimate reality

*Prophecy: “The re-description of the public process of history through which the purposes of Yahweh are given in human utterance.”*

# THE “LONG PAUSE”

*between chapters 39 and 40*

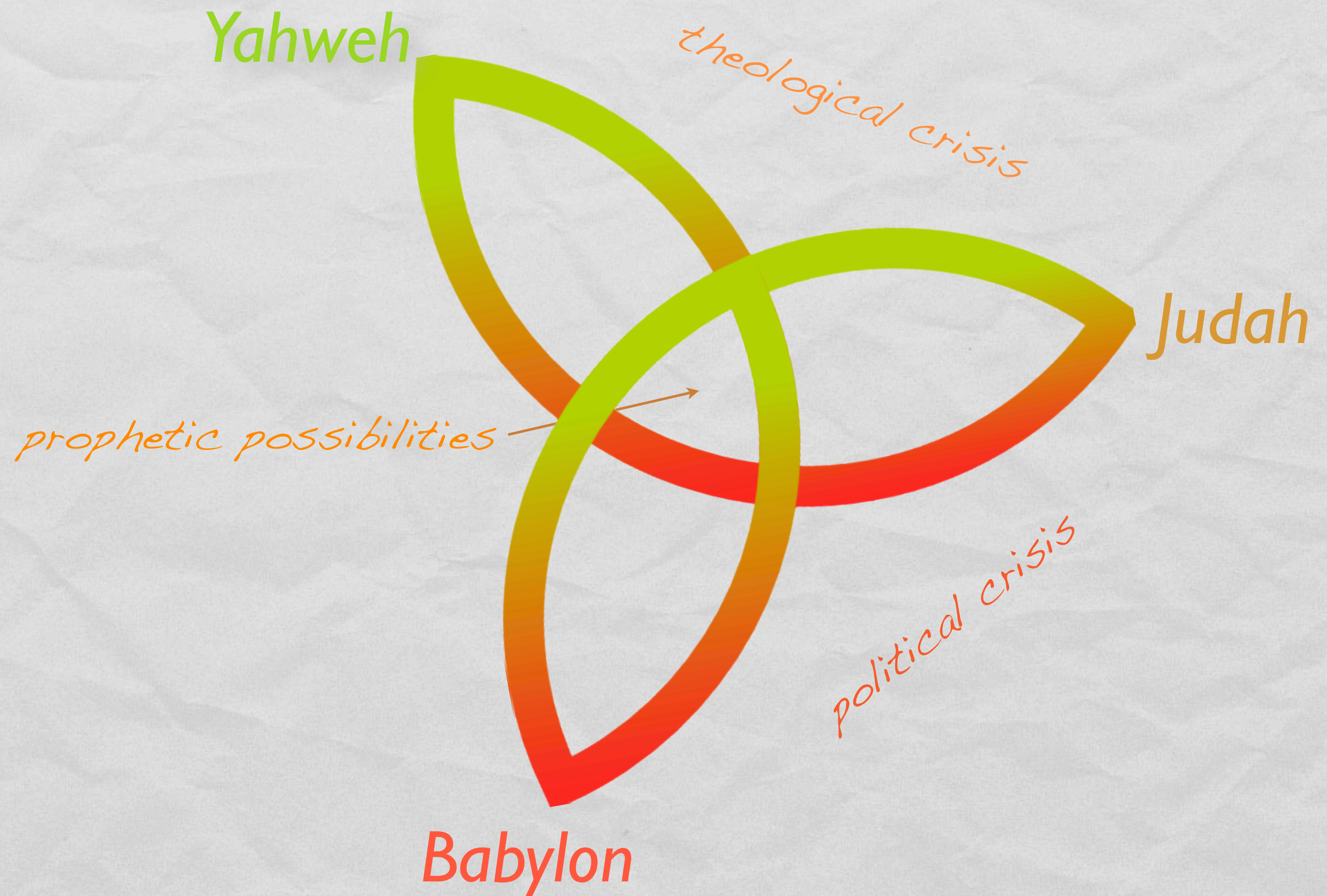
- Geopolitical disruption
- Theological displacement and anticipation
- Judgement to grace

*“Were the book of Isaiah to end at chapter 39, the episode of Israel and Yahweh would be finished.”*



# THE STORY LINE

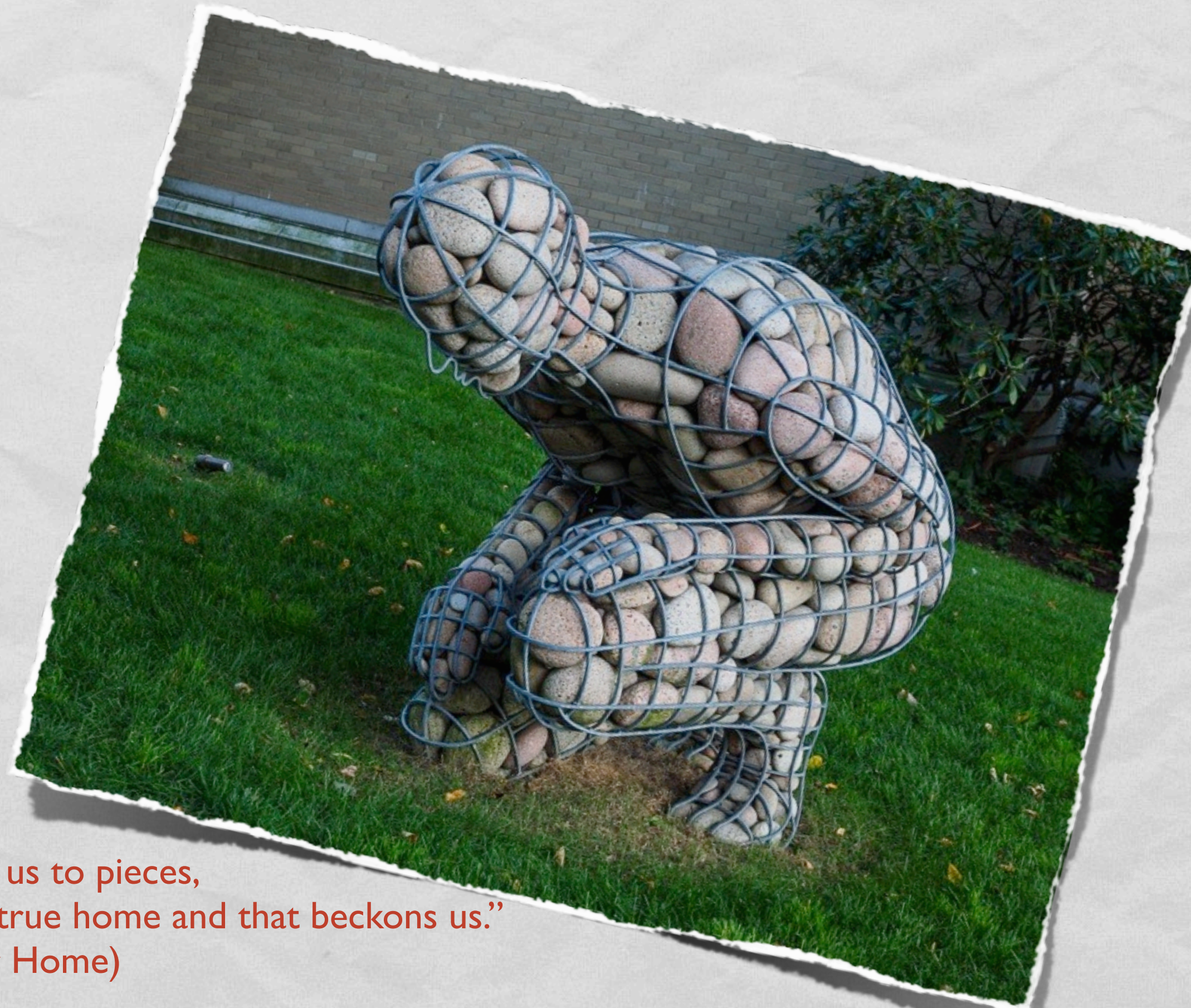
“The Poetry revolves around the contest between Yahweh and Babylon, and the passionate bid for Judah to trust Yahweh rather than Babylon. The core claim of this poetry is that Yahweh has defeated the power of Babylon and now permits Judah to leave Babylon for its joyous, triumphant return home. The poet’s primary term for this is gospel.” (basar)



# ISAIAH 40

*Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.*

*"No matter how much the world shatters us to pieces,  
we carry inside us a vision of wholeness that we sense is our true home and that beckons us."  
(Frederick Buechner, The Longing for Home)*



# BEYOND ARROGANCE OR DESPAIR

*“The rhetorical strategy of the tradition of Isaiah is to ground the future possibilities of Judaism in the government of heaven - the nerve centre of the universe. That decision then is beyond the weariness of Judah and does not depend upon Judah’s resolve. Conversely, the decision is also beyond the arrogant self-aggrandizement of Babylon and does not depend upon imperial cooperation...Yahweh has planned comfort for the exiles and none can prevent it.”*

### 3 A voice of one calling:

*“In the wilderness prepare  
the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.*

*4 Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.*

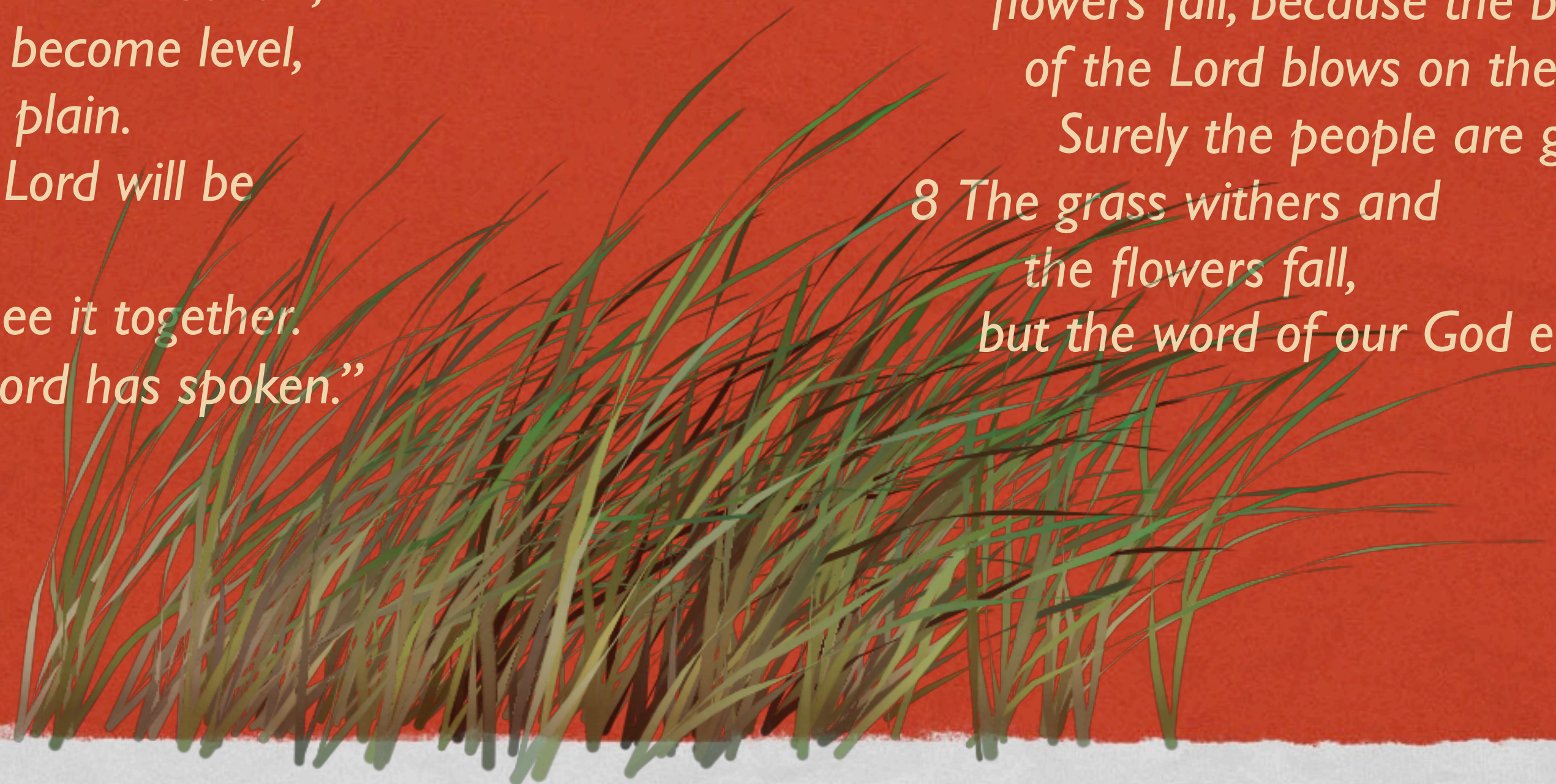
*5 And the glory of the Lord will be  
revealed,  
and all people will see it together.  
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”*

### 6 A voice says “Cry out.”

*And I said, “What shall I cry?”  
“All people are like grass,  
and all their faithfulness is like  
the flowers of the field.*

*7 The grass withers and the  
flowers fall, because the breath  
of the Lord blows on them.*

*Surely the people are grass.  
8 The grass withers and  
the flowers fall,  
but the word of our God endures forever.”*







*9 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain.*

*You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid;  
say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"*

*Jerusalem*

*10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,  
and he rules with a mighty arm.*

*See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.*

*11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:*

*He gathers the lambs in his arms*

*and carries them close to his heart;*

*he gently leads those that have young.*

# AN EXILE-ENDING LAST WORD

*“The cruciality of this opening poem for the book of Isaiah cannot be overestimated. It is a decisive decree from Yahweh’s own mouth, implemented through Yahweh’s own government, uttered in Israel by Yahweh’s own prophet. By the decree, the life of Judah is decisively altered for good. But that of course is the way of Yahweh’s gospel. The good news asserts that the world is changed by God. It is no longer the way we have long taken it to be, ordered by an arrogance that required despair. The decree is, to be sure, only a word; but it is a word enormously durable. On this word rests the future of the Jews. Writ large, on this word rests the future of the world, for it is an exile-ending word.”*