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AXIAL AGE

Sawn Asunder

Josiah appeared at this time as the result of an evolving post-Sumerian awakening. His moment was a gift of the historical process, bestowing on his scribes the responsibility of filtering and unifying the diverse Jerusalem population's varied traditions—El and YHWH, Jacob and Moses, and much more all grafted into the patriarchal root, Abraham. The result was a unique perspective, the Hebrew Bible, a coherent alternative to Mesopotamian mythology, and a work of possibly unparalleled influence.

This is not to diminish what brought them here. There is no doubt that their traditions and the real heroes of the past paved the way to this milestone. Those YHWH devotees of Midian, the Judahite and Israelite kings and ancestral Canaanite patriarchs, the land itself—it was all leading to this.

Josiah's scripture is a record of social evolution that gives notice of a very important adaptive breakthrough that occurred in human consciousness. And he is not alone. At exactly this time, independent of one another, prophets and philosophers from dissimilar places reported similar innovations. The centuries that gave us the Hebrew Bible's sophisticated view of a transcendent faith also gave us the works of Plato and the teachings of Buddha.

Happily, their era reveals the next step after Göbekli Tepe and Eridu. It is to be an age of critical awareness—a cognizant recognition of socially constructed reality and skepticism toward the powers of imagination. In

short order, teachers and writers began to remember what had been forgotten: that we were the authors of our reality. We had choices. What we created, we could dismantle, and we could create something else.

We call this awakening the Axial Age, a term coming to us from philosopher Karl Jaspers. In short, the Axial Age was another watershed in the way thinkers think. It occurred between 800 and 200 BCE, occurring across many unconnected cultures. While we should be careful in applying such a broad brush too liberally, it's hard to argue with Jaspers' observation that there was a widespread cognitive breakthrough demonstrated by the great minds of the period. We can think of Isaiah, Buddha, Plato, and Laozi as exemplars. They all appeared in this relatively brief period with revolutionary ideas that challenged the prevailing concept of what was real.

Among the Jews, the tide turned when teenaged Josiah ascended the throne. He revived prophet Isaiah's blacklisted anti-Mesopotamian cosmology—the idea of the ineffable Divine, so beautifully represented by YHWH, who had no form and no speakable name. (Notably, Josiah's predecessor, wayward King Manasseh, had Isaiah sawn in two, a not very subtle critique of the prophet's theology of universal unity.)¹

Under Josiah, it was a brave new world but fraught with prickly questions: What does it mean to foreign relations if there is a transcendent and universal God for all? Should a borderless and universal identity be assumed that will unite all peoples? Does this become a necessity, meaning that the champions of YHWH should launch a jihad to impose the truth on other nations, destroying their false gods just as was done at home? Or, if fundamental reality is indeed beyond form and explanation, why bother with any of this—why even have a religion and priests in the first place?

To help us think about these questions, we will turn to some of the other Axial Age notables. But first, for context, let's quickly recall what brought us to this the third major turning point in human thinking.

First, we had the example of Göbekli Tepe, where we observed a marked change in consciousness that led humans to begin to settle in towns. This was the hinge upon which humanity turned from its long prehistory as hunter-gatherers to our settled phase.

Then we witnessed the next turn in Sumeria. There, our ancestors conjured a Cosmic Order to justify a hierarchical system. This was civilization, which materialized an imagined heavenly realm into a concretely conceived, unquestioned cradle-to-grave sociopolitical system. It relied on the newly invented primary schools that programmed young minds as they developed, mimicking in each life what had occurred over the evolution of

the species: from innocence, to anxiety, to imposed fictional reality and social conformity. Although imagined, this programming executed its processes in our educated minds as unalterably real, out-and-out "the way things are," as if culture was natural law.

Now, in the Axial Age, the consciousness of a few advanced thinkers like Isaiah began to differentiate between imagined reality and the unconstructed Real. It was as if an observation tower were built above recursive consciousness that allowed them to peer into its inner workings. This was the ability to think critically about thinking itself, when our Axial Age pioneers began to realize that society was not like gravity: it was mutable, moldable, and changeable—every aspect of it could be questioned.

To illustrate, let's go far afield and consider Buddha. At first glance, he might seem too far removed from our story, living in a distant corner of remote India; in fact, he lived within the same Mesopotamia-based system as every civilized person did. Sumeria's reach by the 1000s BCE was far indeed. In fact, the first thing we learn about Buddha is that he is heir to a Mesopotamia-style city-state, the kingdom of Śākya. Depending on the source, he is either the crown prince of a conventional monarchy or the heir-apparent in a mafia-like oligarchy. Whatever his position, Buddha was at the pinnacle of a wealthy and powerful city-state hierarchy.

Apropos of our understanding of Mesopotamian society, it is notable that Buddhism describes its founder's lofty status mostly in terms of illusions. Indeed, his relationship to those illusions is the key feature of Buddha's biography and message.²

In Buddha's example, civilization had constructed around him a universe where everyone was happy and healthy, with no hint of poverty or death. It was the materialist world as advertised: No pain! No suffering! You might even live forever! It was good to be Buddha.

Approaching his thirtieth birthday, Buddha happily set out on what was supposed to be a carefully stage-managed tour of his dominions. All was fine, business as usual, until his driver made a fateful wrong turn—or in computer science terms (since this is really about social programming), he executed the wrong path, accessing data that until now was forbidden to the prince. It recalls Mr. Anderson in the film *The Matrix*, who took the Red Pill and found himself unplugged and unceremoniously flushed out of virtual reality into the shocking realization that the whole world was enslaved.

What hit Buddha first was the sight of a toothless, wrinkled, nearly blind old man. Dressed in rags, and with trembling hands, he begged for food in the street. Unable to make sense of it, Buddha questioned his driver: "What

is that? It can't be a man?!" The driver explained that this was indeed a man, and that he was once as young and vigorous as the prince, that he had grown old, and that this is the fate of all who live, the prince included.

When Buddha returned home, he could no longer enjoy his privileges. He was waking up to the Real. Everywhere he looked he saw people gripped by delusions. The young revelers in his court were growing old, and one day would be unable to care for themselves; they'd be beggars and supplicants. (Which reminds us of Jesus' comment to the founder of his church, Peter: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.")

Needing to get to the bottom of it, Buddha made plans to go out again, despite his father's objections, and this time in disguise. Now unshielded, his next outings exposed him to the sight of a sick man, and soon thereafter a rotting corpse.

This was only the beginning of his deconstruction, for though he was disillusioned and depressed, he was not fully awakened; falsehoods were shattered, but truth was unknown. Unable to return to his illusions, he renounced his right to the throne, his wealth, his palaces, and all his comforts to live as an ascetic; he devoted himself to the monk's path, having understood that nothing else mattered.

Years later he had his awakening, a direct experience of fundamental Reality. His biography attests that in this moment, Buddha saw the ego unravel. "In the end there is no 'I' or 'mine,' just as fire is extinguished when the firewood is consumed."³

That which all modern humans experience as a separate self was upon examination found to be non-self—a continuum of interdependent phenomena, nothing of permanence. "Whatever suffering arises in the world, all is caused by consciousness," Buddhist teaching tells us. "Look at this world with its gods; enmeshed in reified things, considering self in what is not-self, they imagine, 'this is real.' Whatever they think it is, it becomes something else. That is false. For transient things are delusory."⁴

Buddha sat for seven days, "looking into his own mind... reflecting that on that spot where he had obtained liberation. 'What I had to do, is done. I have obtained the path of right awakening.'"⁵

Then, before arising to begin teaching others, he composed a verse about the grinding terror of history. It was about "the round of many births" and mentions repeatedly the "house-builder," a poetic reference to constructed

reality. "House-builder, you are seen! You will not build a house again. All your rafters are broken, the ridge pole dismantled!"⁶

Buddhist texts give a much fuller account of his enlightenment—a life-long study for those so inclined. We will leave it there, but I can't resist adding one more thing. The Buddhacarita records that upon Buddha's awakening, nature responded with rejoicing. The sky shone bright, a pleasant breeze blew across the land and trees dropped flowers and fruit out of season "as if to do him honor." Best of all, "At that time, just as in Paradise, mādārava flowers, lotuses and water-lilies of gold and beryl fell from the sky... at that moment none gave way to anger, no one was ill or experienced any discomfort... the world became tranquil, as though it had reached perfection."⁷ In Buddha's consciousness, the doors of Paradise opened.

Meanwhile, far to the West, another Axial Age hub had formed in Athens, where philosophers proactively sought disillusionment. That's right, the Greek philosophers intentionally practiced critical thinking to deconstruct their own delusional houses. All premises were questioned, and then questioned again.

With respect to our subject of Paradise, Plato's idea of anamnesis ("to call to mind again") is especially helpful.⁸ Anamnesis is the recovery of a deep universal memory. To the profound questions of existence, the answers, Plato said, are already within us in our original consciousness. Anamnesis suggests that Paradise nostalgia is not a nagging question but a nagging answer—a solution awaiting our attentive recollection. So, to our inquiry about lost Paradise, Plato would say the answer is buried beneath many layers of constructed illusions; we have only to uncover it, to remember it. This accords well with Buddhism, where anamnesis might correlate with "unborn awareness"; it also fits YHWH's radically paradoxical "fundamental transcendentalism," the unveiling of the realist Real.

In the Axial Age, apart from cultural context, Buddha, Plato, and Isaiah complement and affirm one another, and all the more effectively because they use different terms and philosophical frameworks to the same ends. For all these teachers, there is a deconstructive drive, an impulse brought to bear by our next prophet, who focused his attention upon unmasking Jerusalem's most sacred ideas.

The Jewish Buddha

Among the people of Judah, the Axial Age's most Buddha-like representative has to be Jeremiah. Mentored by Isaiah, his theological technique was

radical even by today's standards. Rather than try to define the Divine, Jeremiah pursued a theology of presentation. For him, theology's task was nothing but to frame its subject and illuminate it, so that it might be seen directly. Jeremiah practiced theology as Buddhist meditation.

Lesser theologians aspire to tell us precisely what God is. The problems there are well-known to us: first, the definitions get in the way, obscuring our vision; and second, any definition is doomed to inaccuracy. Theologians are part of creation. They cannot objectively see the divine so as to comprehend it in definitive terms. This is the same problem that physicists admit to: we are part of the physics, so we can't objectively stand outside it to measure it.

But we can experience physics—for example, we can feel the warmth and hope of a sunrise. Jeremiah works on that basis. He submits to his position as a human being who is conceived by reality rather than as the master theologian who conceives of it. He cannot define God but believes God can express divinity through him, and through anything and everything.

Jeremiah is an artist, a singer, a poet. Truth is available in the living notes and words of his song. When he says, "Thus saith the Lord..." it isn't a proposition—it is an inspiration. He bows before the indefinable to guide the listener toward a direct experience of the Divine—he points to the rising sun.

For example, Jeremiah evocatively likens the Divine to a "source of living waters." We can feel what this means, but one can't quite put it in a dictionary—no one is going to think of God literally as a mountain spring. There is no danger of our hearing this expression and making a statue of it to worship. It is the mystery of the metaphor that makes it so effective; it says nothing in particular and yet everything we need to know at the same time.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah's denunciation of idols reverses his technique. They are "broken cisterns, that don't hold water." This time his image is relentlessly mundane; everyone had use of water cisterns, could easily visualize them, and could quite easily manufacture them—there was nothing mysterious about it all. So idols, he says, are no different from any other clay object made in a corner shop, except the former don't work as advertised—they are broken.

It is a very effective argument. Divine reality is living water, while the pretentious stone and wooden gods of the Cosmic Order are broken cisterns. Take your pick. Furthermore, Jeremiah says, idols are not limited to statues; they are anything we might think of as a sure thing—any object, any idea, any system, any person.

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Professor of Jewish Studies, summarizes Jeremiah's message: "He assails the hypostatization of icons, of ritual, of the temple, of the ark, of the law, and of the seeming manifestations of YHWH that are understood to be his divine armies..." and "avoids anthropomorphism in thought and in language." This extends to the idea of angels, too: the prophet "never mentions or implies the existence of angels (false manifestations of YHWH)." ⁹

And don't try to locate God in a specific place, either. For Jeremiah, God must "fill heaven and earth." When his prophet colleagues reported visions of a locatable divinity or talked about having entered the physical space of God's supernatural court, Jeremiah mocked them: "Who has stood in the council of YHWH and seen and heard his word?" Jeremiah never reports such visions or visitations. ¹⁰

With due apologies to Indiana Jones, Jeremiah even hints at getting rid of the Ark of the Covenant. As all movie buffs know, this wasn't an anthropomorphic idol at all, but rather an empty box, a sublime reference to the idea of Reality if there ever was one. It was way ahead of its time; emptiness as a notion of ultimate reality was nearly patented by Buddhism a few centuries later. And yet, in Jeremiah's eyes, the box had become a fetish. Addressing the already-converted monotheists of Jerusalem, the prophet lays it out: "They shall no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made." ¹¹ Jeremiah wanted to get rid of it!

The prophet doesn't even dignify his targets by allowing them a sacred status—he just says they are stupid: "They burn offerings to a delusion." ¹² Like Buddha's arguments, Jeremiah's are scientific; just look, he says, observe it for yourself.

The customs of the peoples are false: a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an ax by the hands of an artisan; people deck it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor is it in them to do good. ¹³

When he says the word "delusion," Jeremiah employs a Buddhist turn of phrase. Delusion is a state of the mind and the key term by which Buddhism will later diagnose the cause of human suffering. Jeremiah identifies delusion not as a religious failure in the traditional sense, but as Buddha did, as a

problem of consciousness: "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse—who can understand it?" said Jeremiah.¹⁴

Jeremiah's logic was razor sharp and so was his tongue. As you can imagine, he infuriated adherents of the old-time religion. He made people uncomfortable. Then as now, people took solace from the status quo. The prospect of admitting that their securities were no better than a broken water pot or stick of wood took more courage than many people could muster.

I find him a constant challenge. Writing this now, I can't help but look across the room where I keep a 4,000-year-old household idol. I don't pray to her and have never believed in her; she means something to me as a symbol of those ancient times. I chose her, frankly, because I think she is beautiful, and because she reminds me of the modern idols that I am tempted to put my faith in, temporal securities such as my retirement account. If Jeremiah insisted on taking these securities away, I'd want to resist, and the people of Jerusalem did, too.

Really, it is amazing that Jeremiah got away with what he did. With poor sawn-asunder Isaiah's fate standing as a warning, he nonetheless persisted in taking away the people's crutches no matter what. His patron Josiah couldn't live forever to protect him, and the circumstances that afforded Jerusalem its autonomy—namely, Assyria's weakening position—would soon be his undoing.

Nebuchadnezzar

Josiah's problem was Egypt. As the desperate Assyrians called upon the pharaoh for help, Jerusalem found itself once again in the spotlight. Egypt wanted a piece of the olive oil action, and Jerusalem now sat as a strategic necessity. Josiah lost his life resisting the encroachment, and Jerusalem came effectively under Egyptian rule, eventually installing Josiah's older son as a puppet ruler.

Through it all, there stood Jeremiah, now rejected and thoroughly out of favor. The new foreign-controlled leadership returned in desperation to the gods of the old world. Unbowed, Jeremiah held fast. He said exactly the same things while out of favor as he had said under Josiah's protection, and adopting his mentor Isaiah's language, he assailed King Jehoiakim's trust or "security" in military fortifications and foreign armies and gods. This took guts considering what they'd done to Isaiah. His message verged on the treacherous, saying in effect, "Last time, we destroyed your shrines and idols;

this time Jerusalem and the Temple itself will be destroyed." When Jeremiah went up to the Temple specifically to deliver this divine communiqué, the religious leadership's response was a terse prophecy: "You must die!"¹⁵

But they were wrong; it was Jehoiakim who died, for as it turns out, he played the dangerous game of international intrigue badly. His fatal mistake was provoking Assyria's successor, the revived Babylonian Empire. Thinking Egypt would protect him, the greedy monarch refused to pay tribute to the new regime, upon which Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's notoriously brutal king, decided he'd had enough—what Jehoiakim would not volunteer, Babylon would take by force.

To that end, the Babylonians marched on Jerusalem, laying siege with an expertise that put Assyria's earlier attempt to shame. Before all was said and done, Judah's playboy king was dead, his rotting body unceremoniously dumped over the wall like garbage by his subjects, who were too hungry and terrified to bury him. Jehoiachin, the heir presumptive, assumed the throne for three painful months before finally raising the flag of surrender.

As the Bible dutifully records, Nebuchadnezzar

carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD... He carried away all Jerusalem, all the officials, all the warriors, ten thousand captives, all the artisans and the smiths; no one remained, except the poorest people of the land.

The exiles included the king and his wives, his mother, and his court officials: "the elite of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon."¹⁶

He did not destroy the Temple however, deciding to leave Zedekiah, Josiah's remaining son, in charge. We might have hoped that young Zedekiah, having witnessed all this, would listen to Jeremiah who'd yet to be proven wrong. But no; Zedekiah tried to re-arm and re-forge the Egyptian alliance, putting all of his faith in Egypt's gods, to whom he pledged loyalty, despite emphatic warnings from Jeremiah of dire consequences.

In fact, it did not require a prophet to foresee Nebuchadnezzar's reaction. Twice betrayed by the Jewish kingdom's none-too-bright rulers, he was incensed; so for the second time in a decade, Jerusalem's walls faced an unstoppable Babylonian siege. This time there was to be no mercy. Babylonian general Nebuzaradan was ordered to burn and raze the Temple along

with the palace and every single house in the city. Jerusalem's walls were dismantled stone by stone.

Then they "carried into exile the rest of the people who were left in the city—all the rest of the population." Even the poor were hauled away. As for the royal family, "They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah; they bound him in fetters and took him to Babylon."¹⁷

Guess whom they spared: Jeremiah. Allowed to stay behind, he declared that the Temple's destruction and the exile of the people was for the best: they were idols anyway, and at last they'd be free of them. This was a necessary purge, he said—it was meant to discipline, not to destroy. "Our ancestors have inherited nothing but lies, worthless things in which there is no profit... Therefore I am surely going to teach them, this time I am going to teach them..."¹⁸

Jeremiah tells it as a story of death and rebirth. There will be a lengthy stay in Babylonian rehab ("because you have behaved worse than your ancestors... I will hurl you out of this land") but after Israel sobers up, he promises restoration ("I will bring them back to their own land"). It is a new narrative of redemption, befitting a new age, and it is superior to the tale of Egypt and Moses: "...it shall no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the LORD lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of the north.'"¹⁹

There is more to it than that, however, and it comes as an answer to the question, "What does it mean to foreign relations if there is a transcendent and universal God for all?"

As an Axial Age visionary, Jeremiah sees something universal and profoundly interrelated in the saga of Israel and Babylon. Israel's loss of the Temple becomes a metaphor for the loss of the Garden of Eden for all humanity. Her punitive captivity in the land of falsehood and slavery is the whole world's enslavement to the Mesopotamian order.

Likewise, Israel's restoration will represent Paradise restored, not only for Israel, but for all humankind, Babylon included. As YHWH promised to Abraham, "All the clans of the soil will find blessing through you!"

We read the same vision of global reckoning and salvation in Isaiah. There too, a prophesied exile echoes estrangement from the Garden of Eden so that all nations—Babylon included—may return to the Garden through the mysterious metaphysics of Judah's restoration: In the end, all will be judged, and all will be saved, and the key figure in that story is not a Jew at

all, but an Iranian whose ancestral faith is one of the most important and neglected stories in all of history.

The First Messiah

Isaiah is no conventional chronicle. It comes across as a series of ecstatic interjections, sometimes indubitably hallucinatory, and notoriously difficult to translate. And yet, among the outbursts, there are certain passages so catholic that they hardly need translation at all, as if Isaiah speaks the Adamic tongue that resides in our deepest Chomskyan genes. A handful of these have affected the course of history as few words have, beginning with a short declaration right at the beginning of Isaiah's collected works.

"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains, and all nations will stream to it." It is a universal message to be sure, but not at all pluralistic. The purpose of this unexpected Gentile pilgrimage to Jerusalem is deprogramming, as if the nations must reciprocate Judah's foreign chastisement by going to Zion to have their own period of rehabilitation. The nations say as much en route: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."²⁰

Here, then, is Abraham's promise to spawn a people to bless the nations, and again modern liberalism will struggle with the premise that Jews might have the truth that everyone else needs. But that reaction forgets that Isaiah's idea stands at the root of any liberalism the West might hold to today. The plain fact is that our concern for human life and rights was tutored by the words of Jerusalem, just as Isaiah envisioned, and our inclusive values begin here with this gathering of all ethnicities, a redemption of the judgment at Babel and a restoration of the Edenic ideal of one flesh. As we shall soon see, it was a vision developed hand-in-hand with Gentiles. This is simply the Jewish version of the dream; it just so happens that it was theirs that survived to influence the world in which we live. It isn't chauvinism—it is simply the way history ran its course. Or, if you prefer, it is God's chosen instrument of communication, for history and God are functionally indistinguishable.

Isaiah's next words present a picture of what the perfected world looks like. His lines are delivered so incredibly well that it would be difficult to find a literate person who could not paraphrase them from memory. In the last days, Isaiah says, when all the nations have come together, "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."²¹ A little bit later he underscores it: "There shall be endless peace."²²

After two and a half millennia, no one has described the ideal world more effectively. Isaiah's words are ever-present across cultures and ideologies as an aspiration for the world we want. Even history's first atheist empire, a most unlikely pilgrim to Zion, found itself unable to do better. In 1959, at the peak of the Cold War, the Soviet Union left its everlasting mark on the United Nations through the gift of a massive bronze statue, a magnificent angular *nový Sovětský* (New Soviet) man, heroically pounding away at his massive sword with the hammer of communism. Meant to represent Soviet values to the assembled nations, its pedestal unabashedly evangelizes Isaiah: "Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares." That's because the Marxist vision is not original—it is derived from the Paradise dream, and nobody evokes the Workers' Paradise better than Isaiah. Truly the nations have come to Jerusalem and learned the ways of the LORD.

Another of Isaiah's unforgettable images might still be better known. It is so pervasive as to become a contraction: "The lion will lay with the lamb." What he wrote in full is far better than that:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters cover the sea.²³

It is in light of this beautifully composed eternal hope that we must read the blistering prophecies of judgment against both Jerusalem and Babylon recorded by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Jerusalem's destruction was to be the means of liberation from the clinging stupidity of idols, a divine spanking. Now Babylon will face cleansing destruction, too, freeing it at last from the old Sumerian system. Very soon, the prophets believed, we will be one big, happy, unarmed, and idol-free family—cobras and children, lions and wolves and lambs all included.

For that to happen, we need an instrument that serves two purposes: judgment on Babylon and restoration for Judah. Jeremiah names the Medes of the Medo-Persian Empire as just the right tool: "The LORD has stirred

up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it."²⁴

Isaiah, for his part, pinpoints an individual leader, characteristically extending the idea of Judah's restoration to eternal and universal proportions:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace.²⁵

What does this person, whom Christians will readily identify with Jesus, have to do with Jeremiah's Medes and Persians? Well, Isaiah (the second Isaiah) identifies him by name, designating him the "anointed" or "messiah"; and he is none other than Cyrus, the king of the Medes and Persians:

Thus says the LORD to his anointed [*māšīah*—"messiah"] to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings... I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron... I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free.

And elsewhere: "Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the Temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"²⁶

Because English speakers know the word "messiah," it would be entirely correct to translate "his anointed Cyrus" as "his Messiah Cyrus." This might be clearer to our ears if we read from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that was widely used by Jews in the last half of the first millennium BCE, and certainly used by Jesus and the Apostles. There, the word "anointed" or *māšīah* is translated from Hebrew for Greek-speaking Jews as *χριστός* or *christós*—or as we say it in English, Christ. "Thus says the LORD to his Christ, to Cyrus..." How does that sound? This is how the passage read to most Jews in the final 300 years before Christ Jesus.

Further to the point, as a Medo-Persian ruler, Cyrus held the title "King of Kings." So the savior who will judge Babylon and redeem Israel is no less than Christ the King of Kings—a fellow named Cyrus.

None of this is incidental. Cyrus' kingdom and religion form the prototype of the eschatological Messiah and the Kingdom of God as it came to be understood before the birth of Jesus and beyond. He is the archetype of salvation.

Moreover, the philosophy of Cyrus' ancestral people will give definition to what billions of people imagine today when they think of salvation or of world peace. Isaiah's own ravishing vision of national delegations streaming to the throne of wisdom is directly modeled on Cyrus and his religious philosophy. I'll try to show exactly how over the next several pages.

Already, however, at Cyrus' introduction, we begin to see a problem: the reader may ask how the magnificent vision of universal welfare, global peace, and a transcendent deity can be embodied in the objectified force of a warrior-king acting on behalf of a deity who literally takes him by the hand. Throughout history—and today more than ever—we have holy warriors who promise to emerge victorious to finally beat all the swords into plowshares. How can peace come through violence? Isaiah's scathing denunciations of Ahaz for his trust in weapons do not square well with his praise of this Iranian jihadist.

It is disturbing. And this is the problem with the idea of progress, the danger that we will construct a new dominating ideology out of progressive awakenings, much like the Eridu priests did with the otherwise helpful history houses that became dominating temples. All the evidence from this point indicates that we took the transcendent visions of the Axial Age and again hammered and chiseled them into hard impossible objects. The New Soviet man, heroically pounding away at his massive sword with the hammer of communism, literally does this: it constructs a new idol, a new false reality out of the best of transcendent visions.

It's the fantasy of one last apocalyptic war to win all wars, a final act of history giving birth to a golden age. I and my Muslim Brothers and our Jewish and Marxist cousins and many an American president have fallen for it. But it doesn't mean we have to make that fatal mistake. And it does not mean that Paradise consciousness is impossible. As Buddha and Abraham show, we can truly wake up and simply live. Keep reading!

For now in our story, we are at a stage where the Paradise dream is taking shape in a form still cherished by anyone hoping for a better world. But we must take care to remember that it is also cherished by holy warriors and totalitarian despots who think that they can deliver this world to us. It is not only liberals who see themselves as the last stage of evolution; Adolph Hitler did, too.

How does it go so wrong? Simply by reifying and politicizing the memory and dream of Paradise, by ignoring the consciousness of the Garden of Eden, which is transcendent, transpersonal, unconstructed awareness. There is a sure litmus test: just ask if the intention will result in reconciliation or alienation.

This means it isn't enough to know what Paradise looks like. Mesopotamian civilization knew what it looked like and delivered a perverse fake. And in Isaiah's days, the revelation, while clear, was still a work in progress in terms of how we get there. There is suddenly a clear perspective on the nature of civilization's reality, with its idols and virtual universes, but then seemingly a plan to construct again yet another simulacrum. We get lengthy flashes of transcendence and then words that indicate that those revelations were not fully processed. That's just fine. We are here to consider it all, and to grapple further with these questions. We need to know more; we must fill in the missing pieces of the Persian Messiah's ancestry and philosophy and meet the man who gave us the word "Paradise."

Paradise Promised

Cyrus was an Iranian of whom modern Iranians are still proud. Although Iran today is a theocratic Islamic state, the nation still celebrates Newroz, or New Day, the pre-Islamic religious holiday of the ancient Iranians. This is possible because of Islam's enthusiastic embrace of the Paradise idea, which Newroz represents. Islam, we must always keep in mind, is a variation on Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity. In fact, the Quran preserves the word "Paradise" in its original Persian form: "Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds—they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging, wherein they abide eternally."²⁷

Here, the Arabic word *firdawsī* is not a translation—it is a transliteration from the ancient Persian *pairidaēza*, a liturgical Zoroastrian term. The /f/ in the former is the result of a common consonantal shift from /p/ that is familiar to every linguist, as is the shift from /z/ to /s/.

In English, the word's popularity is due to Jesus: "Paradise" is the word he used on the cross in his final statements, a promise that a thief would be welcomed in that place with him. As in the Quran, the Gospel's Greek word, *παράδεισος* (*paradeisos*), is a transliteration, not a Greek translation. In Hebrew, we find the same thing: it is written as a transliteration, too, from *פַּרְדֵּיז* to *par'des*.

If I may state an obvious conclusion, these great religious traditions

directly borrow the word "Paradise" and do not attempt to translate it because their own native languages did not have a word that meant the same thing. The content and meaning of "Paradise" are Persian conceptions.

We see this again in the Septuagint (LXX), whose translators were tasked with producing a faithful Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures for the majority of Jews, who at this time lived in a predominantly Greek-speaking world. Textual comparisons between it and the Dead Sea Scrolls, along with Talmudic commentary, show that the LXX was believed by Jews of this period to be authoritative and inspired.²⁸

When the LXX translators came to the phrase "Garden of Eden," they decided not to translate it word-for-word into Greek, which they might easily have done. Instead, they went with the Persian word, giving us the Greek transliteration that is the same word Jesus used on the cross. This means that Jews of this early prophetic era believed the original Persian word *pairidaēza* was the best philosophical representation of primordial Eden.

They weren't alone; during that influential period leading up to the birth of Jesus, *pairidaēza* in its various transliterations became shorthand for the world to come—for heaven, for restoration—not just for Persians, but for Jews, Muslims, Christians, and many others.

To really understand why this old Persian word came to represent our hopes, we will want to meet the man who made the word and the concept popular in the first place—the man who defined Paradise for Jews, Christians, Muslims, Marxists, Neoliberals, and other dreamers. He was Zoroaster, an ethnic cousin of Cyrus, who lived somewhere in the borderlands of Central Asia and northern India among the people who would later be the Medes and Persians of Iran and Mesopotamia.

Exactly when he lived is still a puzzle. Early tradition places him in the 600s BCE, but modern scholarship pushes the date back as far as 1500 BCE. One clue is the language that preserves his teaching, which is unmistakably of the older period. I'll settle on a safe 1000 BCE for the sake of discussion. This makes him an early Axial Age philosopher, likely the very first one, and a man of Abraham's time (some even speculate that Abraham might be based on Zoroaster).

His context is Indo-Aryan, a large branch of the prehistoric Indo-European language family. When Zoroaster lived, Indo-Aryan was just beginning to separate into its own branches. Back in his day, the two branches were Avestan, the language of Zoroastrianism's oldest texts, and Vedic Sanskrit, the tongue used in the Rig Veda, the oldest of Hindu texts. They were practically the same language, to a large degree mutually intelligible, as

they'd only just begun to drift apart. Today the drift is far more pronounced, expressed in many smaller offshoots: Farsi, Kurdish, and Pashto on the Aryan side; and Hindi, Nepali, and Punjabi, to name a few, on the Indo side.

This is important to know if we wish to place Zoroaster in a particular location and point in history, for it tells us a lot about Zoroaster's culture and society. To get a real feel for what Zoroaster's life was like, we can simply refer to the ample evidence that remains of the culture that produced both language families—that is, we can simply look at the trunk of the family tree.

We refer to that mother culture as Vedic. It is not Hinduism and it is not Zoroastrianism—it is the parent of both. The details of Zoroastrianism's emergence from Vedic cosmology are complex and still hotly debated. It is enough to know that Zoroaster regarded many aspects of his mother culture as destructive and set out on a radically different course.

We can get a more intimate feeling for Zoroaster's milieu by looking at the features it held in common with Western languages. As it turns out, Europeans (and North Americans) carry with them a large legacy of Vedic culture; that's because all of Europe belongs to the Indo-European language family, too. In other words, Europeans share their origins with the Iranians and Indians through a still older part of the family tree.

Many of the key words from the Vedic languages are familiar to modern-day English speakers. An important one from Sanskrit is *dēva* and the related Zoroastrian Avestan form, *daeava*. Its root is the origin of the Latin word *divus*, from which we get "divine." The Latin word for God, *deus*, also descends from that root. We see it again in the Greek *theos* (/th/ and /d/ being a common consonantal shift). And we see it yet again in "diva," our popular word for extravagant singer-superstars.

For that matter, "star" itself is derived from the same linguistic trunk, traceable to Proto-Indo-European, the parent tongue of all these languages. The link is Greek, *astēr*—hence the name of the star symbol in English, "asterisk," which comes from the primitive root, **ster-*. Other examples include the words for mother, brother, daughter, and corn (**b^hréh₂tēr*, **méh₂tēr*, **d^hugh₂tér*, **kérh₂*) and hundreds of others, including most of our personal pronouns. All to say that we have a deep-seated connection to the culture that produced Zoroaster.

Such is Zoroaster's context, which Mary Boyce, the pioneer of Zoroastrian studies, helps us understand in relation to the world of *daevas*:

[Zoroaster] spent years in a wandering quest for truth; and his hymns suggest that he must then have witnessed acts of violence, with war-bands, worship-

pers of the Daevas, descending on peaceful communities to pillage, slaughter and carry off cattle. Conscious himself of being powerless physically, he became filled with a deep longing for justice, for the moral law of the Ahuras to be established for strong and weak alike, so that order and tranquillity could prevail, and all be able to pursue the good life in peace.²⁹

These *aburas* (*asura* in Sanskrit) were spiritual powers like the *dēvas* and Zoroaster's *daevas*. As religious thought developed in early Vedic culture, the two types of heavenly powers came to stand for opposing influences of benevolence and exploitation, peace and violence. In Zoroastrianism, the *aburas* are the positive force, while for their Hindu cousins, it was the *dēvas* who represented the higher aspirations.

Tradition says Zoroaster underwent a spiritual purification after his thirtieth birthday (like Buddha and Jesus), when on the spring equinox he ritually entered the waters of a river—a baptism—and emerged to see a vision, a shining presence who said to him, "I am Vohu Manah," which means "Good Thought." This emanation of good thinking then guided Zoroaster's entranced consciousness into the presence of another being: Ahura Mazda or "Omniscient Divine." The illumination he experienced was so great that Zoroaster says the light did not even allow his shadow to be cast on the earth.

This was Zoroaster's Axial Age moment. He awakened from his vision to realize that the cosmology that conditioned him and his people was false. He saw in its place something called Asha, a single universal creative presence that was sewn into the fabric of existence, something like the Greek Logos or the Buddhist ground of being. In Zoroastrian thought, Asha is characterized by truth and justice.

I should make a small confession: I've translated "Ahura Mazda" unconventionally. "Lord Wisdom" is the most common translation. I understand its appeal, as it is succinct and allowed traditional scholars to use familiar terms. But it also is weak. Zoroastrianism was boldly monotheistic; there is one Creator and one seamless universal impulse behind creation. To call that merely "Lord Wisdom" just doesn't cut it. Neither is it very accurate. An *abura* is divine, so "Lord" is a passable translation so long as we understand that it is a universal deity. But translating "Mazda" as "wise" is just bad: in Avestan it is *Maz-da'ab*, which is literally "he who places all in his mind."³⁰ As far as I know, the word for that in English is "omniscient." Thus, Ahura Mazda = Omniscient Divine.

So Zoroaster realizes an Axial Age deity like YHWH, a universal reason

for existence, that replaces the cosmos of the anthropomorphic gods and the system sustained by it. But Zoroaster understands too that there is a reason for suffering—Creation, he says, is in distress because of Druj, meaning "deception" or simply "the Lie."

Zoroaster learned that Druj was a force running counter to Asha, and that it emanated from Angra Mainyu, the cause of suffering, violence, and destruction. Sometimes you will see this translated as "destructive spirit," but I will contest that, too. Angra Mainyu is best translated as "destructive mentality" because the word *mainyu* has a direct cognate in the English word "mind." Both derive from the very same root, Proto-Indo-European **men-*, upon which many European words related to the mind are based. A very striking English example is "mania" and, of course, "mental."

We might even translate Angra Mainyu as "Angry Mania" because, as you no doubt noticed, Angra shares a Proto-Indo-European origin with "angry." Angra Mainyu is an "Angry State of Mind" or, in Buddhist terms, an aversive state of consciousness.

We can look at the etymology of "Druj," too. In Zoroastrian ethics and eschatology, it is the opposite of the divine principle of Asha. Druj means lie, but it must be "Lie" with a capital "L" because there is more to it than a simple judicial notion of truth or lie as fact and falsehood. It helps to know that Druj is related to our English word "drug." Druj is therefore a mind-altering agent that alters consciousness to the point of losing touch with reality or truth, such that all who are infected by it live in a state of delusion.

Suffering, therefore, is caused by a viral delusion—as Buddha and Jeremiah would certainly agree.

So what's the antivirus? According to Zoroaster, Angra Mainyu can be vanquished by Spenta Mainyu, the "Progressive Mentality" or "Evolved Consciousness." In the Zoroastrian sense of *spenta*, this means the original primordial creative force, which gave rise to everything and progresses through the flow of life. Spenta Mainyu is always life in the best sense of the word. We recognize it in that which makes us joyful, healthy, whole—in short, what makes life good. It is Good Thought and Good Mind.

Thankfully, says Zoroaster, Spenta Mainyu will cure all that ails us. Zoroaster enjoins us to take part in the victory of life by thinking Good Thoughts, speaking Good Words, doing Good Deeds, and above all, devoting every effort to awakening from the Lie, the drugged state of delusion that causes suffering. "Through good thinking the Creator of Existence shall promote the true realization of what is most healing."³¹ Thus said Zoroaster!

Last Days and the Escape from History

Zoroastrianism is popularly described as a dualistic religion, but it is dualistic only in an ethical sense—namely, regarding the battle between destructive and progressive consciousness. It is not theistic dualism, where a literal Good God and literal Evil God fight over humanity's fate. At the most, Angra Mainyu is analogous to Satan, whom Jesus defined exactly like Angra Mainyu as "the father of lies" who "deceives the whole world."³²

Zoroaster's battle of minds will one day end. Creative, progressive truth will defeat the deceptive, destructive mentality, and upon its defeat, creation will know liberation to be completely renewed. This will spell the end of suffering and the despair that catches up with everyone in time-bound existence.

He told this as a story with a linear plot that has a beginning, middle, and end, full of dramatic twists and turns and populated with a colorful cast of characters. It may be the most popular, influential, and plagiarized story of all. Almost everyone has heard it: it's the one about an eternal battle between light and dark, truth and lie, heaven and hell.

In Zoroaster's original version, enlightenment does not come easily, and when it does come, it is not cheap. It will seem, he said, as though Druj is winning the battle against Asha. Compassion will be all but eliminated; despair and deception will increase. There will be signs in the heavens and the earth, and pestilence and famine. When all seems lost, Asvat-ereta will appear, meaning "Incarnation of Truth." Just as light dispels darkness, Asvat-ereta dispels Druj; with truth's appearance the lie will vanish. This Asvat-ereta bore the title Saoshyant.

The name may look exotic but once again it has close European cousins. The suffix *-ant* is very familiar to English speakers from words like "particip-*ant*" where it means the one who does something. The term *saosh* relates to a Proto-Indo-European root meaning "to save," as in to preserve or keep from decay. The Greek words Σῶς (*sōs*) and σωτήρ (*sōtēr*) derive from that root. That's significant because the ancient Greek version of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament use these words, which we translate as "save" and "savior." Saoshyant is the world savior in the sense that the New Testament regards Jesus as Savior, and like Jesus, the Saoshyant is to be born miraculously to a virgin.

Zoroastrian scriptures tell us that at the end of time, glory will descend upon Saoshyant Verethrajan—the Victorious Savior:

He will make existence brilliant, not aging, imperishable, not rotting, not putrefying, enjoying eternal life, enjoying eternal benefit, so that the dead will rise again, (so that) imperishability will be bestowed on the living... Imperishable will be, the world of truth... Deceit will be done away... Beholding (them) with the eyes of (personified) intellect, Saoshyant will view all creatures. After the fading (of deceit) of evil origin he will look at all the corporeal existence with the eyes of (personified) abundance, and by his look he will make imperishable the entire corporeal world.

This eschatological event is *frashokereti*, which means "to make new again," although we might see it translated as "make wonderful" or "make brilliant." There is good reason to translate it as "refreshening," because the term *frašō* comes from a Proto-Indo-European root, **preysk*, that is shared with the English word "fresh." As in English, this is a conspicuously flexible word, and its deeply ancestral Vedic version *prkṣá* meant something like "strong," in the sense of being fresh and ready—in prime condition. And that's really what the root meaning gets at through all its many forms in dozens of languages. It's about being in original condition, good as new—*made fresh*. At the end of time, all of creation will be returned to mint condition—a Druj-free universe to which we can, if you'll pardon the pun, "just say no."

It is here that Zoroaster introduces the resurrection of the dead. This and the final judgment will coincide with the refreshening of creation. There is a logical connection that may not be obvious. Eternity means the absence of any experience of the progression of time. There will be no more experience of time, because *frashokereti*, the refreshening force, may be understood to reset the cosmos to its original, fresh state, and without the expansion of the universe and entropic transfer of energy, there is no ticking of the clock.

Of course, none of these ideas were familiar to Jews until we heard them in the mouths of the later prophets. Obviously then, the Jews had some kind of late connection with Zoroastrianism, which brings us back to the history of Judah and Babylon, and God's anointed savior Cyrus—it is here that the Zoroastrian-Jewish relationship begins.

If there is a key idea that carries the Zoroastrian message into Judaism, it is "the end of time." From a modern standpoint, we usually mean the conclusion of a linear progression of time—that story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. But again, we find the biblical authors capable of more nuance than we give them credit for; they were able to allegorize, make allusions,

amplify, metonymize, or satirize as well as anyone. In this case, they were even able to dip their prophetic toes into quantum physics.

Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel often use the "end times" or "last days" just as Zoroaster did, including the notions of renewal, redemption, and judgment. But it is not as simple as it looks. The two words in Hebrew are *'ahārīt* and *yāmīm*. *Yāmīm* is easy on its own; it means "days." Its partner, *'ahārīt*, means literally "backside of"—that is, the posterior or behind. We need not think, then, that the "last days" must mean "after a long succession of all the days." The phrase carries a sense of "behind and beyond days." It suggests that the linear story is again a parable, a way of seeing something not tangible in our dimensions. If I said, "behind the wall" or "in back of the house," you would think in three dimensions, not two. Why should we conceive of time's end, when time is already a fourth dimension, as occurring on a two-dimensional line?

Let's use our imaginations and reflect on "behind the days," not as the end of a line, but as a dimensional space in consciousness accessible from any point in perceived time. It is an exit from time, from the flow of days, to a dimension behind it. It is behind and beyond the day, our most fundamental measure of time.

This has been the longstanding human aspiration from the beginning of consciousness—to be free of the weight of time, which closes more tightly around us with every passing day. The promise is to go behind the passage of days to another metaphysical space. It is not the end of history; it is escape from history.

Thus, the End of Days signifies a wormhole from the present moment directly to a phase of consciousness that is outside the moment. This is not achieved by waiting it out until history is exhausted and finally gives up, which is an impractical solution anyway, since almost all of us will never live to see that. Rather, it describes an experience of transcending our constructed reality, even our temporal physics, into the Paradise consciousness. The question of how this can be achieved is better left until the "end time" of this book, after my own parable is completely told.

Of course, until the resurrection, I can't ask Zoroaster if he intended his eschatological story to be taken literally or as an allegory, but there are clues aplenty to suggest it is the latter. Firstly, it fits an obvious literary genre typical of over-the-top Vedic parables. In his home culture, surreal cosmic plays were part of a long tradition of storytelling. Why would he use that device? The same reason we make movies, write novels, and tell fairy tales: not everything can be effectively expressed literally. He reminds me of physi-

cists who write books about time—they rely on metaphor and allusion because there is no other way to convey such things to people without the requisite training.

Zoroaster's plainspoken ethical teaching corroborates this. It shows that he could teach non-metaphorically when that was most suited to the task. When he did speak plainly, it was to instruct his followers on what they should do to make the truth victorious in their own current experience. He instructed his followers to cultivate truth, to free themselves from delusion by adhering closely to what is real. He insisted they treat others as they would want to be treated. He includes the environment in this golden rule, too: Zoroaster's followers were taught to be scrupulously clean, to never pollute the land or rivers or air. Greek historian Herodotus marveled, "Rivers they especially revere; they will neither urinate nor spit nor wash their hands in them, nor let anyone else do so."³³

Moreover, Paradise is not remote in Zoroaster's ethics. There is an immediate link between the present and Paradise for the individual. Zoroaster states,

The first step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Good-Thought Paradise; the second step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Good-Word Paradise; the third step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Good-Deed Paradise; the fourth step that the soul of the faithful man made, placed him in the Endless Light.³⁴

He is not telling them to wait out history—he is telling them to transcend it now. How? Good thoughts. Good words. Good deeds.

In Buddhist terms, the terror of history is *samsara*, the ever-turning wheel of suffering. Buddha fought Zoroaster's battle extremely well: he practiced scientific observation of reality in the present moment to vanquish delusion, Zoroaster's *Druj*, with the intention of leaving the world of suffering. The Paradise state of being in Buddhist terms is "unconditioned reality," meaning the most intrinsic state in physics possible; it is not deliberate in any way, not "made by" anything or any process. Being without conditioning logically means also that it must be beyond space and time. This resonates very well with "in back of time," *'aḥārīt bayāmīm*, "The Last Days," or "End Time," whose characteristics in the Bible are invariably eternal, a passage out of ordinary time.

Hard to imagine? That's the point. It cannot be imagined. But it can be

experienced. Zoroaster, Buddha, Plato, and Jeremiah ask us to rigorously question constructed reality. They demand we dismantle our idols' shrines, particularly those that make us feel most at ease.

The record is quite clear that the vast majority of people since the Axial Age have simply been too lazy to follow their example, preferring instead to read their great thoughts through a literalist political lens that purports to turn the transcendent into some kind of perfection of the mundane. In short, I believe, this is what is wrong with the world.

So goes the Axial Age, a time marking the advent of critical thought, the capacity to judge our mental processes and conclusions rather than being swept along by them, unawares. We might think of it as a developmental stage of post-Göbekli Tepe consciousness, a passage into adolescence—we aren't children anymore, but not quite adults. If that's true, this developmental stage will likely take time to run its course. We live only 3,000 years after entering our Axial Age adolescence, while childhood lasted about 8,000 years. That would put us at the volatile and dangerous age of about sixteen—we can operate heavy machinery and revel in our car, but we are prone to accidents and poor choices.

If the Axial Age began with a bar mitzvah, we would do well to remember that this is when a Jewish boy becomes fully accountable. It is a message to grow up, saying, "you are responsible now." The Axial Age represents a giant caution sign, too, warning us of the dangers of continuing to indulge our imaginations in the manufacture of false worlds. What we need is true maturity, to simply take responsibility for ourselves and come to grips with life as grownups, a maturity woefully lacking in the political sphere.

The next chapters discuss the perils of half-awakenings and immature spirituality, along with how Isaiah's Zoroastrian-inflected dream spread, and how it was applied and mainly misapplied, depending on your point of view. It is a story of Babylonians, Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Persians that to this day is unfinished. Many of the plotlines remain unresolved and can be followed in our daily newspapers.

We resume our journey on a lesser-known leg of the Paradise road that begins and ends with Magi.