



The Bible in the Imperial Imagination

From ancient Egypt to Imperial Rome, the world of the Bible is a world dominated by empires whose actions impacted not only ancient Israel, but the biblical text itself. In this presentation we explore how knowledge of imperialism in the ancient world can both enrich our study of scripture and constructively inform our pastoral reflections on contemporary imperial discourses.

The Debate

The Ethics of Colonial History



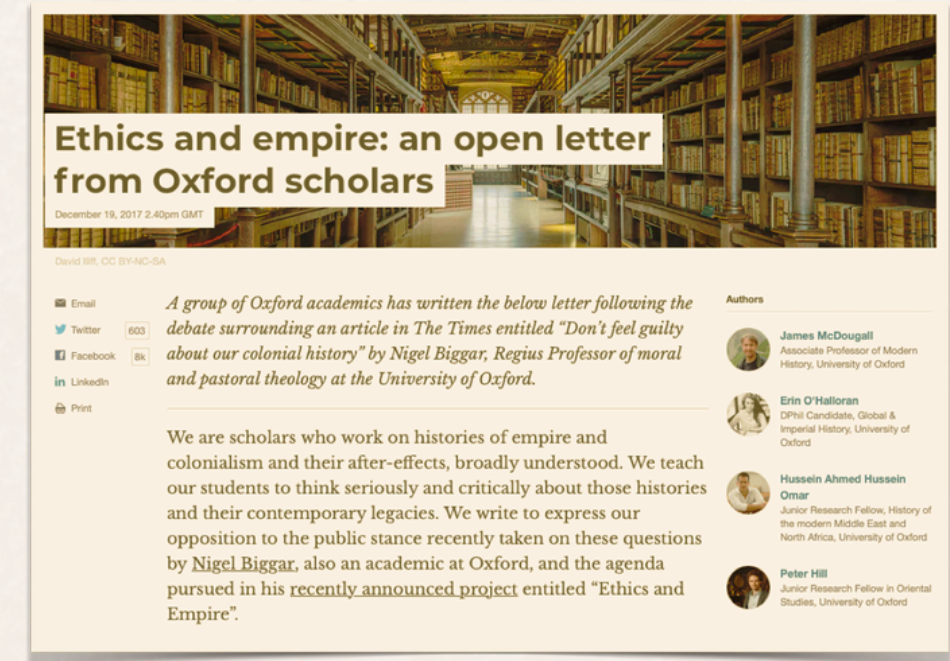
The screenshot shows the McDonald Centre website with a navigation menu (Home, News, People, Events, Projects, Publications, Media, About, Contact) and a breadcrumb trail (Home > News > The Ethics of Colonial History). The article title is "The Ethics of Colonial History" dated Saturday, 2 December 2017 - 9:30am. The text discusses an article by Bruce Gilley in the *Third World Quarterly* and Nigel Biggar's response in *The Times*. A logo for *THIRD WORLD quarterly* is visible on the left.

Our colonial history and guilt over empire



The screenshot shows a letter to the editor from The Times, dated December 2 2017, 12:01AM. The title is "Our colonial history and guilt over empire". The text reads: "Sir, Nigel Biggar's article 'Don't feel guilty about our colonial history' (Nov 30) was refreshing. Nobody wants to be subject to another, especially of different race, and greed and exploitation were part of early imperialism. For my generation, however, empire was a fact of history and, as shown by Dr John Darwin, not the original sin of Britain but the default system of human governance."

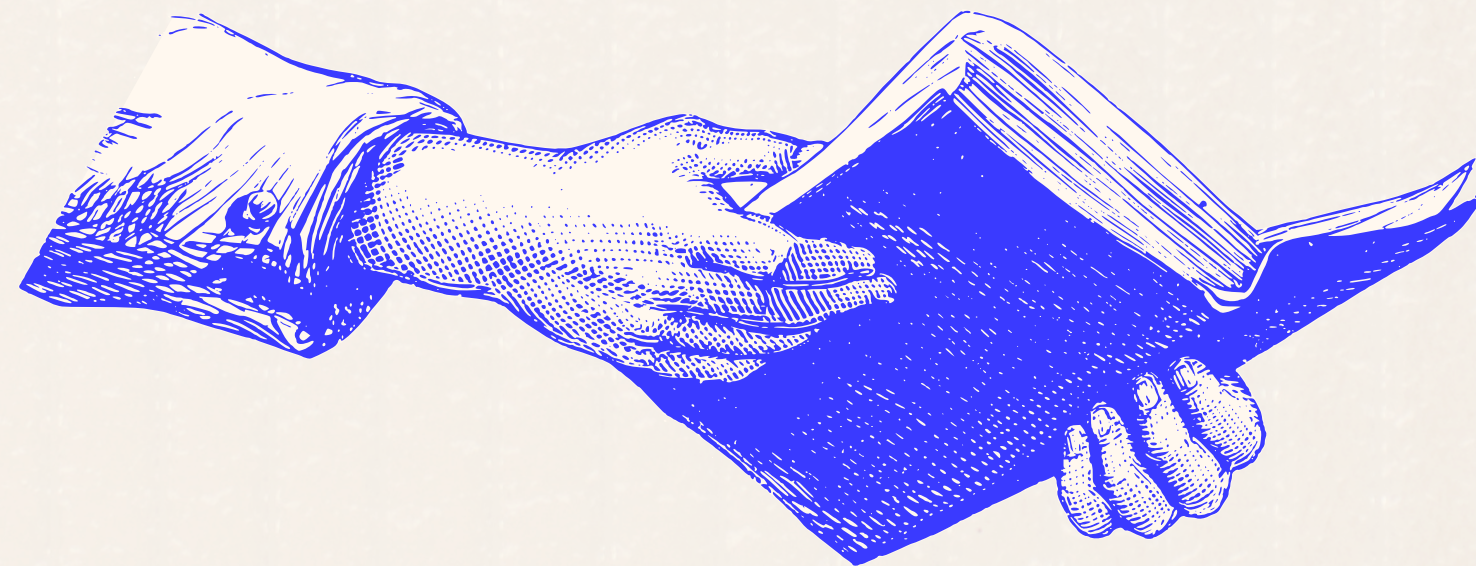
Ethics and empire: an open letter from Oxford scholars



The screenshot shows an open letter from Oxford scholars, dated December 19, 2017 2:40pm GMT. The title is "Ethics and empire: an open letter from Oxford scholars". The text reads: "A group of Oxford academics has written the below letter following the debate surrounding an article in The Times entitled 'Don't feel guilty about our colonial history' by Nigel Biggar, Regius Professor of moral and pastoral theology at the University of Oxford." The authors listed are James McDougall, Erin O'Halloran, Hussein Ahmed Hussein Omar, and Peter Hill.

“When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land.”

Desmond Tutu





Complex Legacies

David Livingstone 1813 - 1873



Imperial Footprints



40% of Africa's borders consist of straight lines

Stone Footprints

Document Clause

“In order that the mighty not wrong the weak, to provide just ways for the waif and the widow, I have inscribed my precious pronouncements upon my stela and set it up before the statue of me, the king of justice, in the city of Babylon... May any wronged man who has a case come before the statue of me, the king of justice, and may he have my inscribed stela read aloud to him, thus may he hear my precious pronouncements and may my stela reveal the case for him; may he examine his case, may he calm his (troubled) heart, (and may he praise me)...”





You were looking, O king, and there appeared a great statue. That statue was huge, its brilliance extraordinary; it was standing before you, and its appearance was frightening.

Daniel 2:31

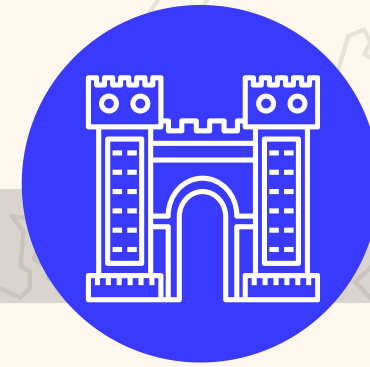
THE IMPERIAL IMAGINATION



EGYPT



ASSYRIA



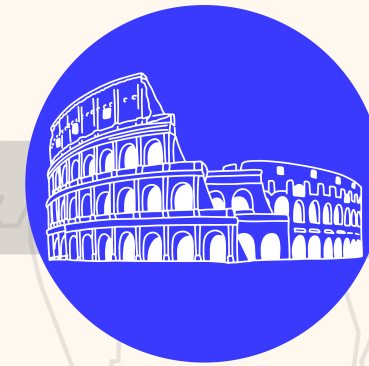
BABYLON



PERSIA



GREECE



ROME





Hermeneutical Trajectories

Focus: Empires

Representation

Retrieval of the sidelined and silenced, the written out etc.

Responses to empire

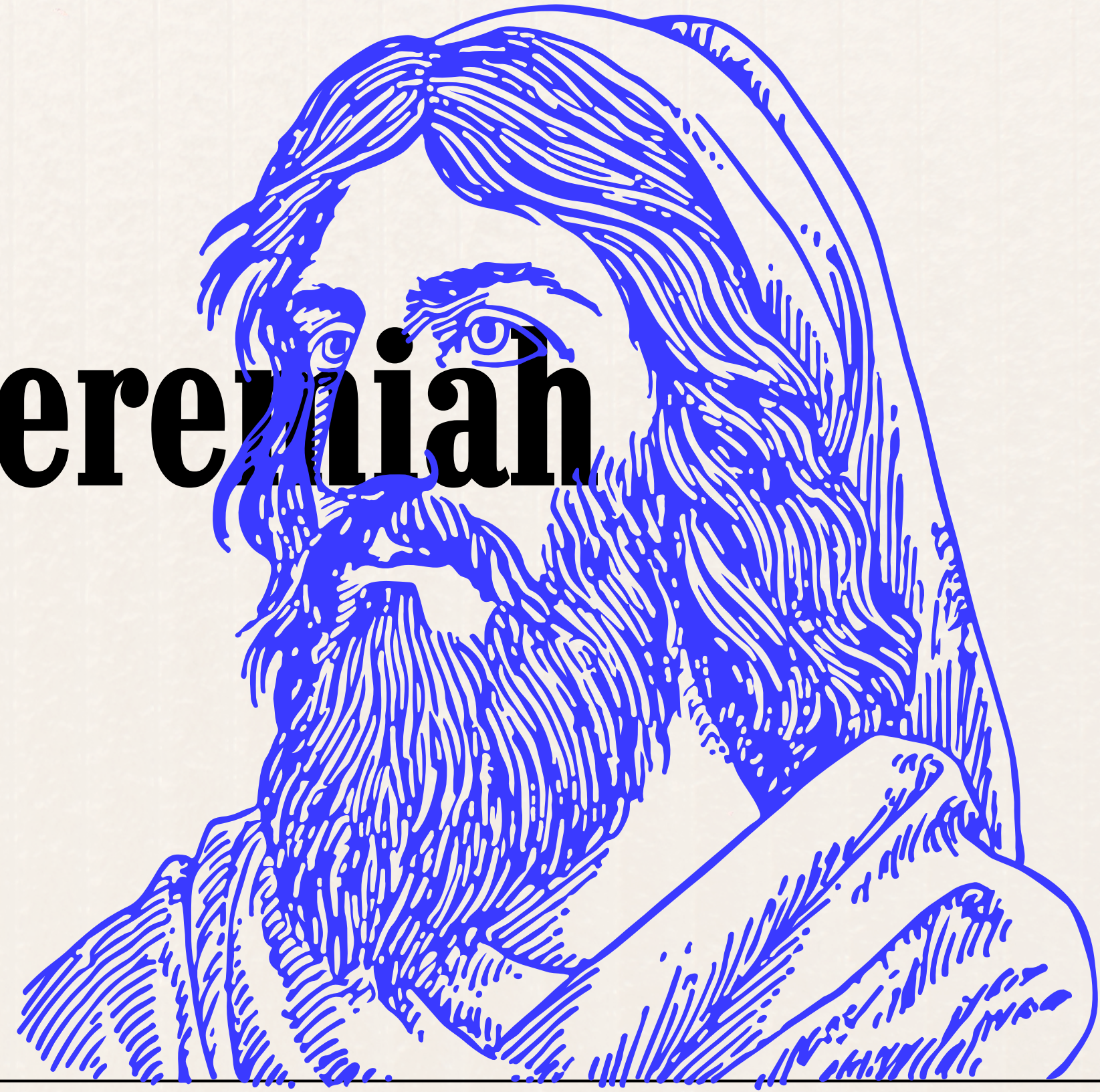
Interrogation of the issues surrounding the movement of people

Meta-critique



Marc Chagall

Performing Jeremiah



Exercise

1. Pick 1x number and
2. Pick 1x letter
3. Stick to them!
4. Share them

1	A
2	B
3	C
4	D

Agency

	Individual Status		Family Trade
1	Child	A	Agriculturist
2	Adult	B	Servant
3	Elderly	C	Merchant
4	Sick	D	Artisan

Jeremiah 24 – The Figs

Context v.1

- Identifying the good and bad figs vv. 2-3, 4-7, 8-10
 - Are you a good or bad fig?
 - What type of fig was Jeremiah?
- Reflection: Choice/Agency (Jer. 40:1-6)



Jeremiah 42 - The Survivors

Context vv.1-7

- The Message:
 - Stay! (vv. 9-12)
 - Do not go to Egypt! (vv. 13-22)
- Choice/Agency



Jeremiah 43 – Taken



Context v.1

- Accused! (v.3)
 - Taken! (vv. 5-7)
 - Social Dynamics & Groupthink
 - Choice/Agency
-





Pastoral & Theological Reflections

“The Bible ...profoundly reflects the Judeans’ experience of forced dislocation. Knowing this background is crucial for understanding the background of laments like Psalm 137 and prophecies like Ezekiel... But it also helps us understand how Judah ended up focusing its initial and most important (Torah) texts on landless ancestors (e.g. Abraham and Sarah) and wandering in the wilderness, texts that resonated with their trauma.”

Conway, Colleen M.; Carr, David M.. A Contemporary Introduction to the Bible (p. 188). Wiley. Kindle Edition.

“The realisation that those in the Book of Jeremiah had little choice whether they go or stay is perhaps a reality check also for us today to help us to have a bit more compassion regarding the difficult choices facing many people in desperate circumstances today.”

Claassens, L. J. (2019). Going home? exiles, inciles and refugees in the book of jeremiah. Hervormde Teologiese Studies, 75(3)





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www.newbold.ac.uk