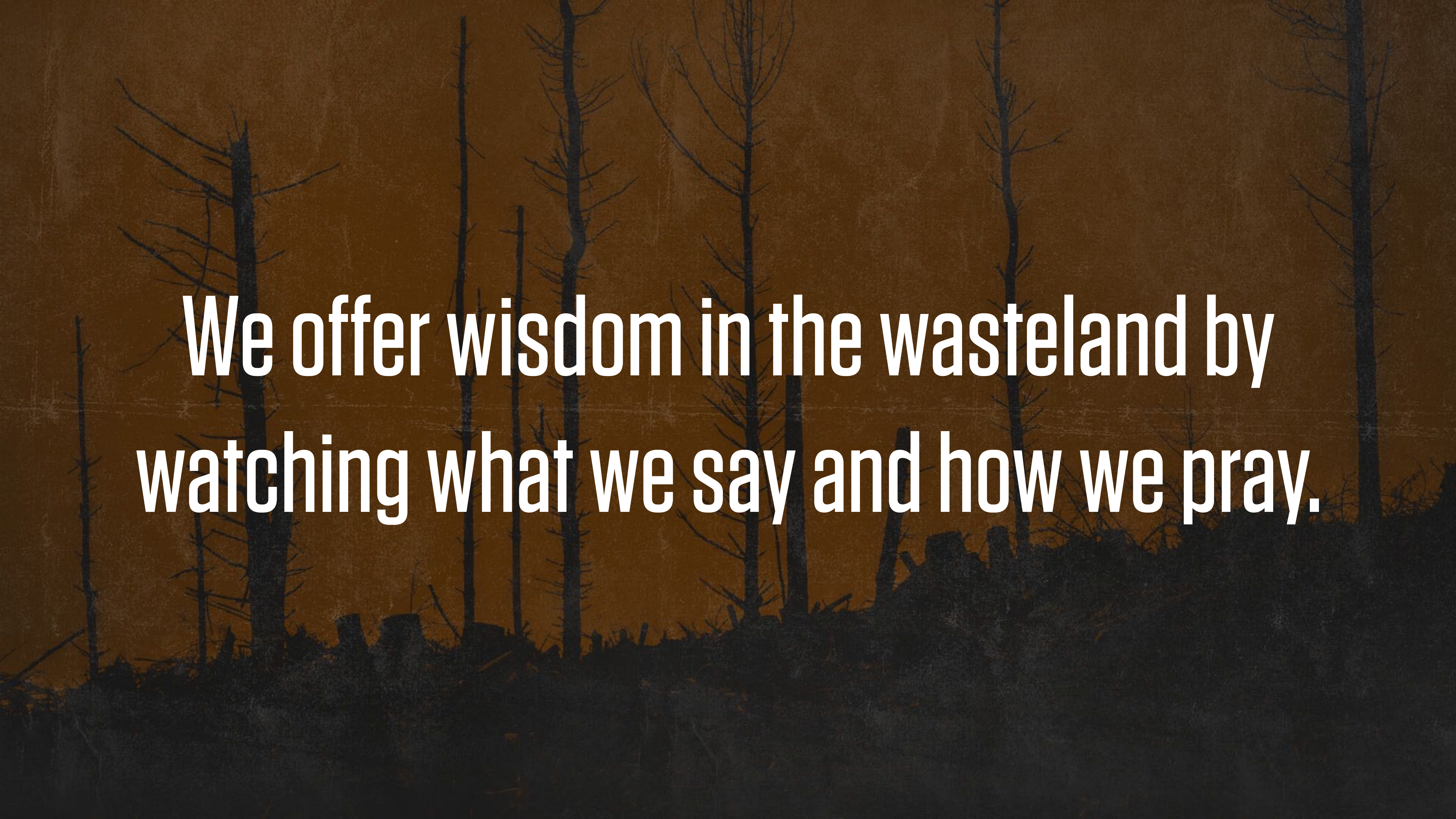


WISDOM IN THE WASTELAND

INSIGHTS FROM THE BOOK OF JOEL



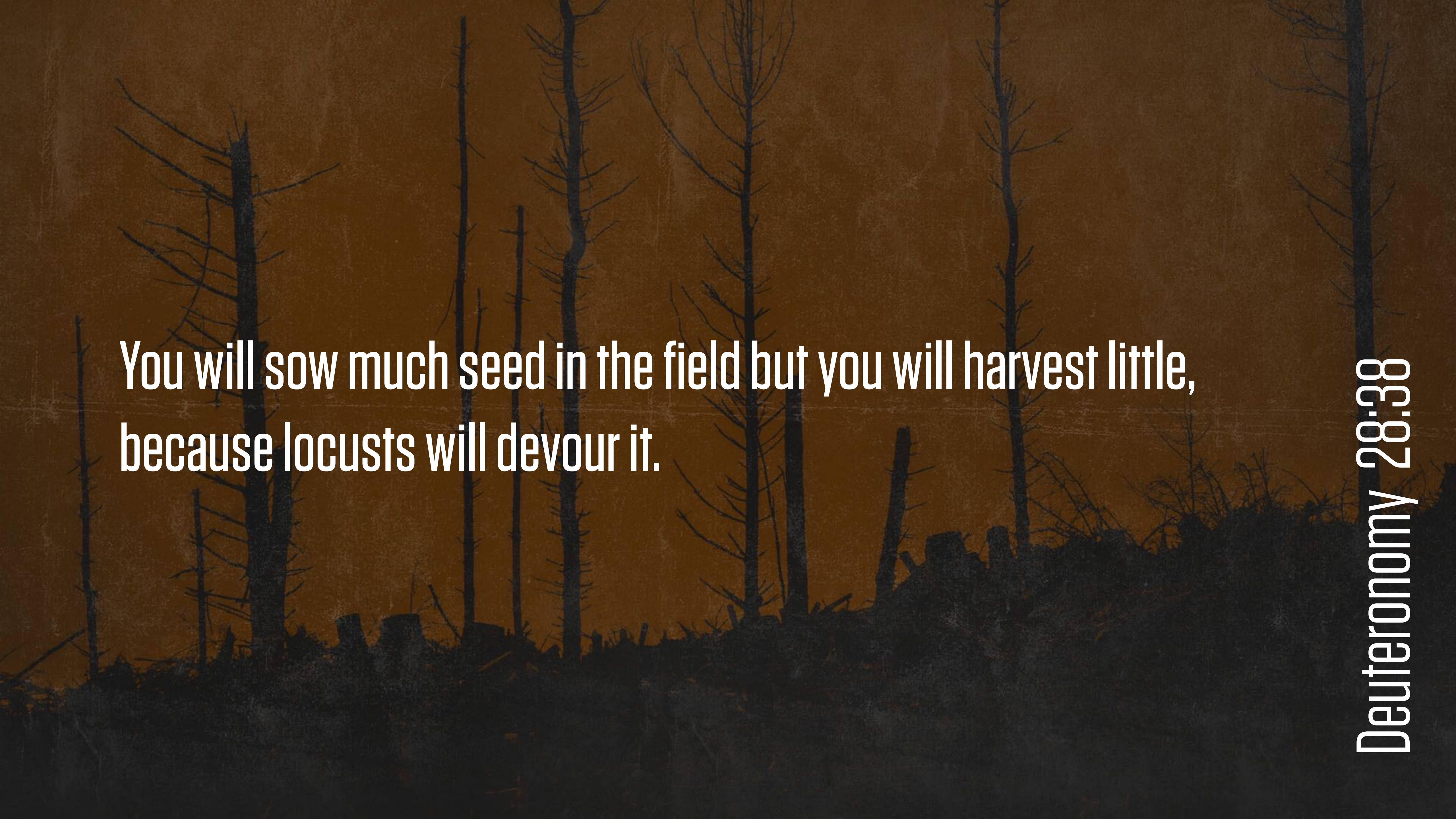
We offer wisdom in the wasteland by
watching what we say and how we pray.

What We Say

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

1. The creator judges

Alas for that day! For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like
destruction from the Almighty.



You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little,
because locusts will devour it.

Deuteronomy 28:38

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

2. The creation groans

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

Matthew 24:4-8

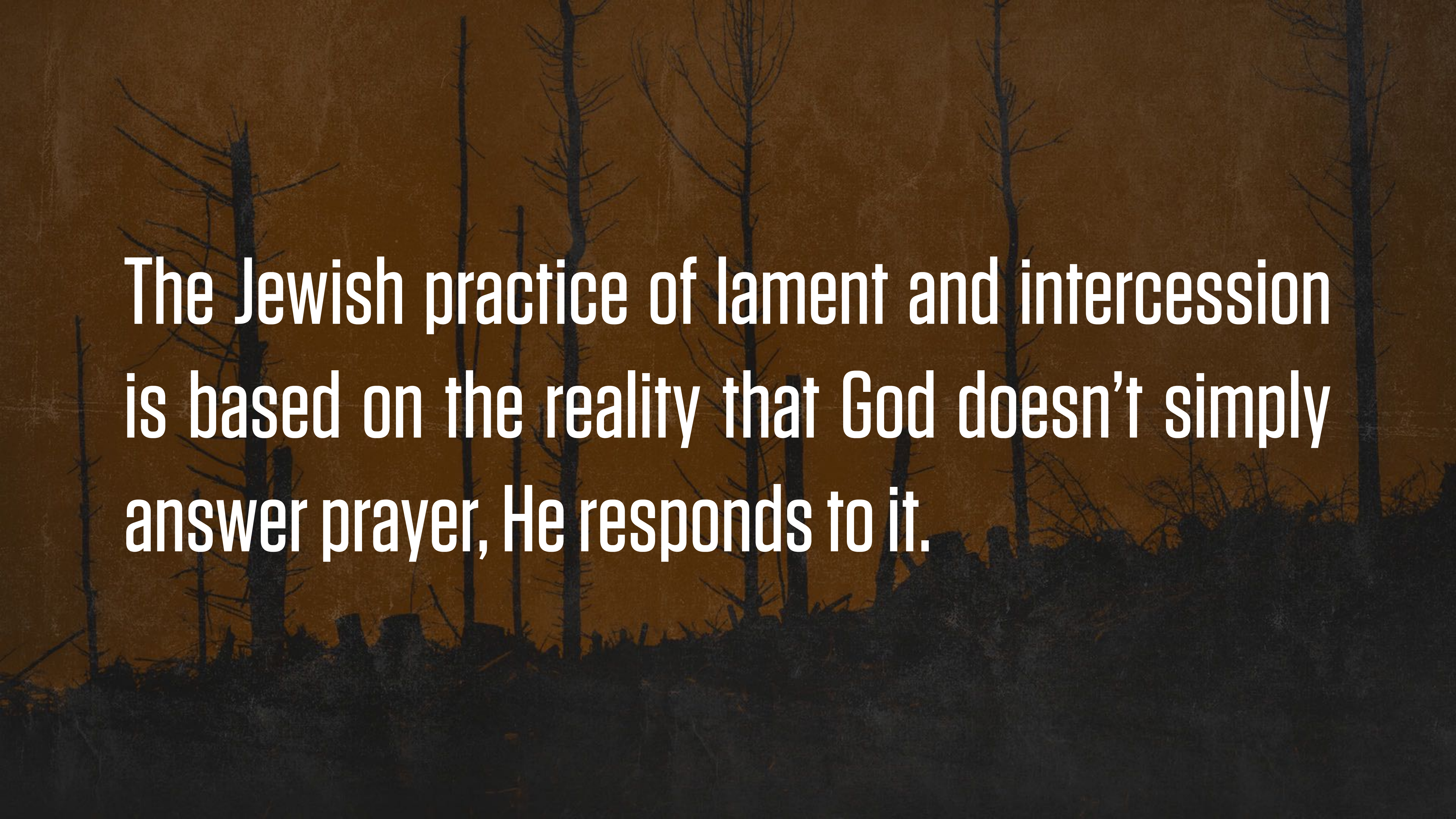
3. The created defile

The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.

Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.

How We Pray

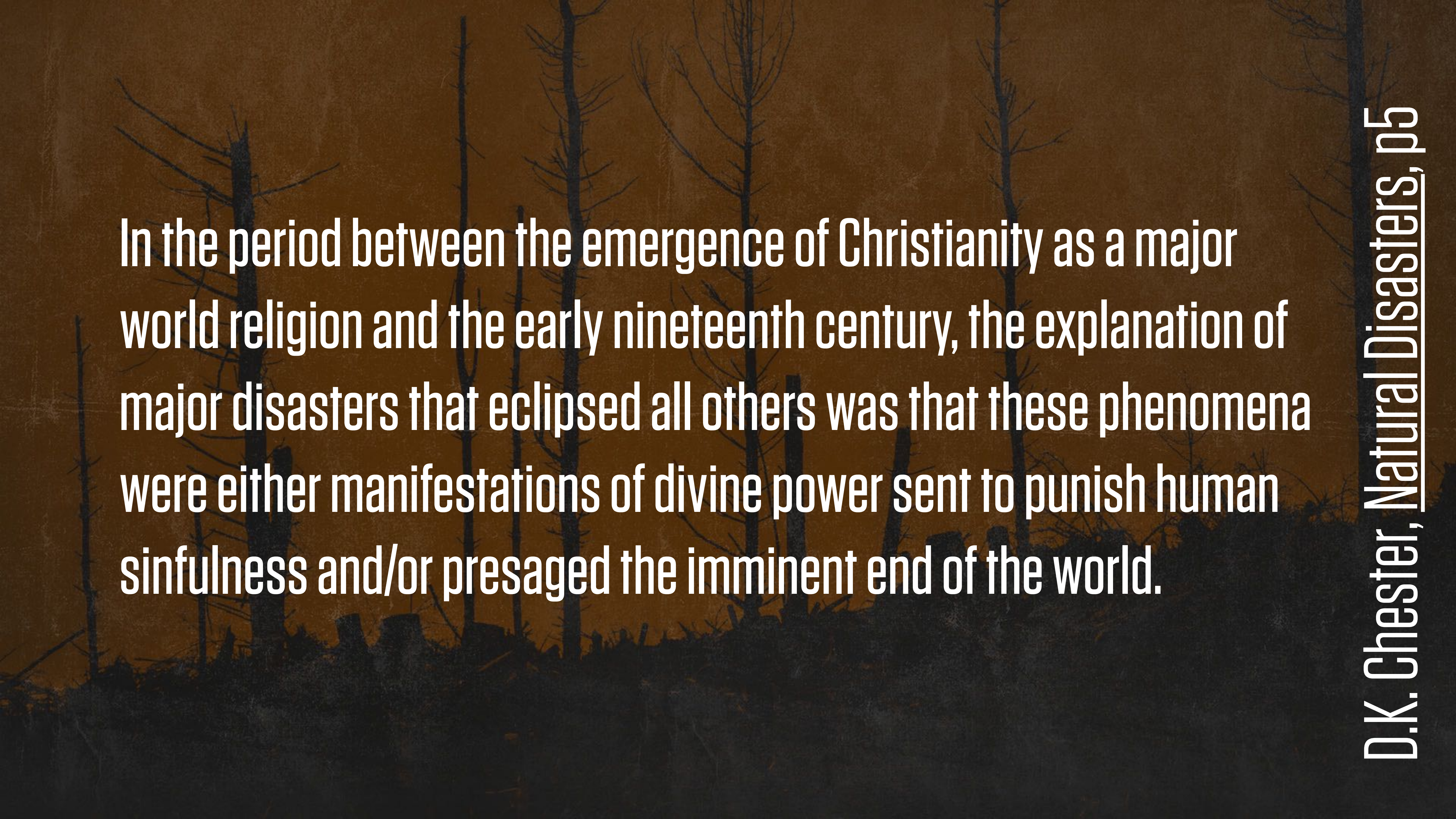
Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.



The Jewish practice of lament and intercession
is based on the reality that God doesn't simply
answer prayer, He responds to it.

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

I am amazed at how often the language of fatalism creeps into our thinking about the future. It is commonly thought that it does not make any difference what we do about, say, justice or the environment, that God has the future all mapped out, and that what human beings do is ultimately irrelevant. But it should be made clear that the future is partly settled and partly unsettled. It is partly settled, yes: there will be a new heaven and a new earth. But the future is also unsettled: our words and deeds in our world will make a difference in the shape of creation's future.



In the period between the emergence of Christianity as a major world religion and the early nineteenth century, the explanation of major disasters that eclipsed all others was that these phenomena were either manifestations of divine power sent to punish human sinfulness and/or presaged the imminent end of the world.



WAITING WISELY WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

CRAIG REES