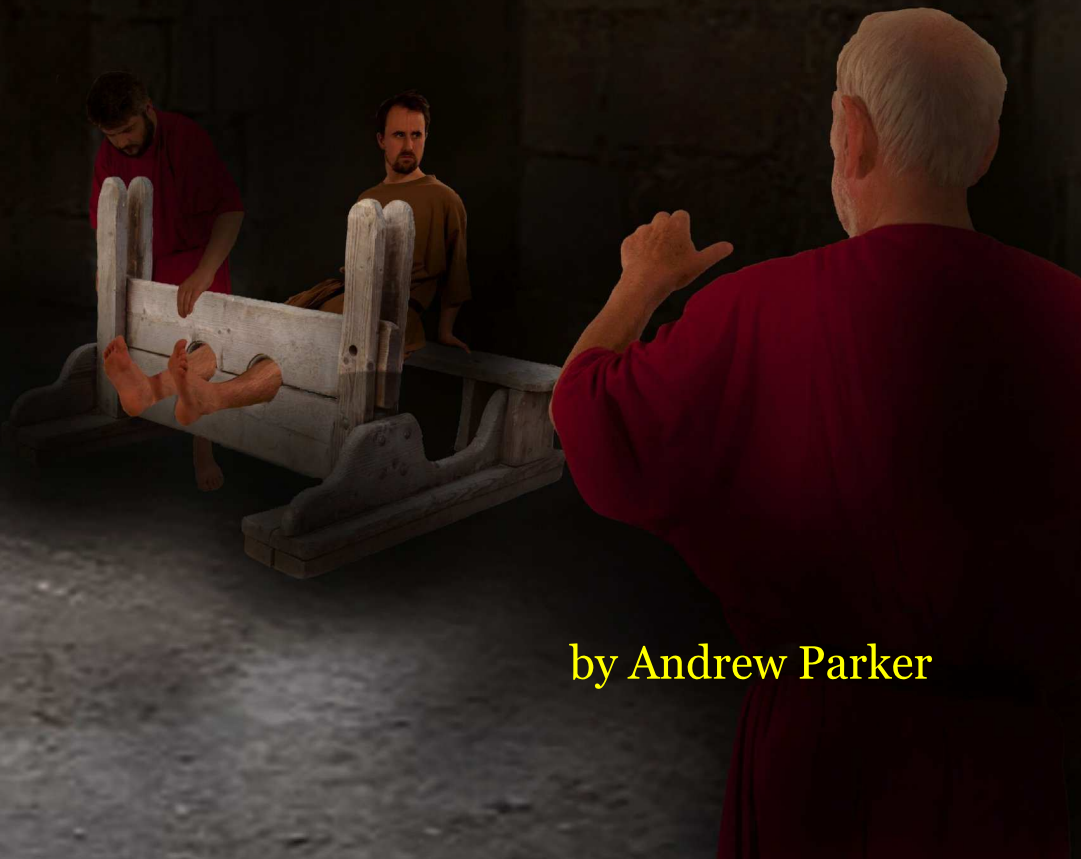


Politics Before and After the Exile

Part 1. Kingship



by Andrew Parker

Politics Before and After the Exile

Part 1. Kingship

Hard copies of *Politics Before and After the Exile* can be purchased on <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore>.

Politics Before and After the Exile is Volume 3 in the Bible in Cartoons series. Volume 1 *Thinking About the Bible* (Parts 1&2) and Volume 2 *God of the Marginals* (Parts 1&2) can also be purchased on this website.



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INTRODUCTION

This book is from my 'Bible in Cartoons' series.* It constitutes Part 1 of Volume 3 which is entitled 'Politics Before and After the Exile'.

Volume 1 entitled 'Thinking About the Bible' examined the mythical texts from the ancient Near East which the Bible itself mirrors and found that, though couched in religious language, these texts are in fact political works designed to sell the conservative and authoritarian world-views of their priestly authors.

Volume 2 entitled 'God of the Marginals' then examined the Genesis and Exodus stories with a view to ascertaining their political perspectives. It found them to be revolutionary anti status-quo texts that put forward the worldview of a bunch of losers or 'Hebrews' (as the civilisation-bureaucrats had disparagingly labelled them). Unfortunately, it also found evidence that conservative priests from within the community had later edited these marginal texts using a blanket of religion to try and hide their unsettling marginal perspective.

In this book we now examine some other pre-exilic texts (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Jeremiah) to determine whether they are also revolutionary marginal works or, alternatively, conservative revisionist contributions.

*All of the cartoon books in this series can be found on my website at: <http://bibleincartoons.co.uk>

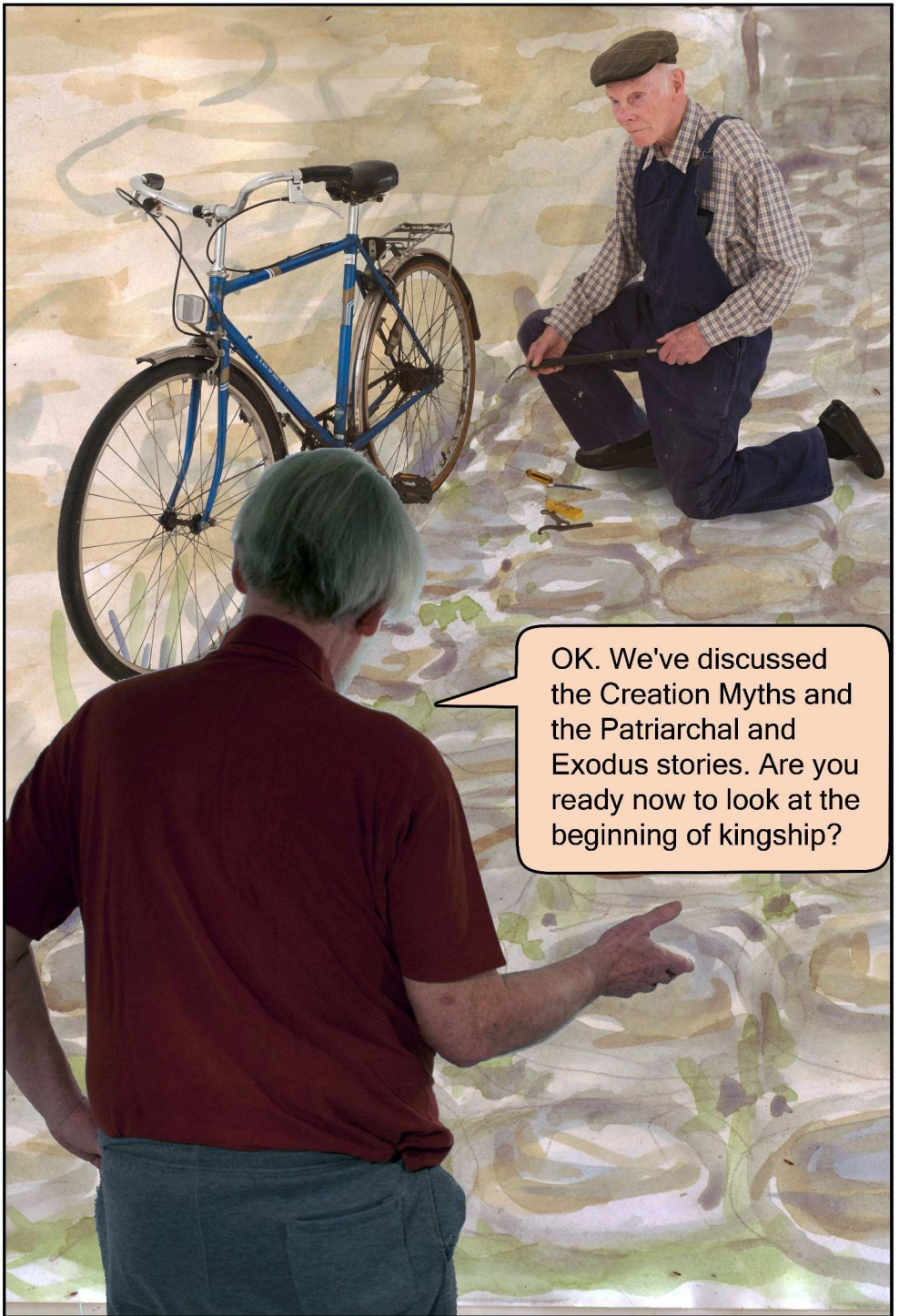
The central feature of all of these books is an extended 'Socratic' dialogue between my old friend John and me with John continuously advocating a religious interpretation of the Bible whilst I argue for a down-to-earth political understanding.

In order to make this central dialogue stand out I have coloured it in pink thereby distinguishing it from the biblical citations which are in brown, the notes which are in blue and other casual utterances which are presented against a normal white background.

Further to this, the reader will note that a few biblical characters are presented in black and white whilst the majority are in full colour. This is simply to distinguish individuals meant to be understood as representations from those intended to be seen as regular historical personalities whether they ever actually existed or not.

1

HISTORICITY



OK. We've discussed the Creation Myths and the Patriarchal and Exodus stories. Are you ready now to look at the beginning of kingship?

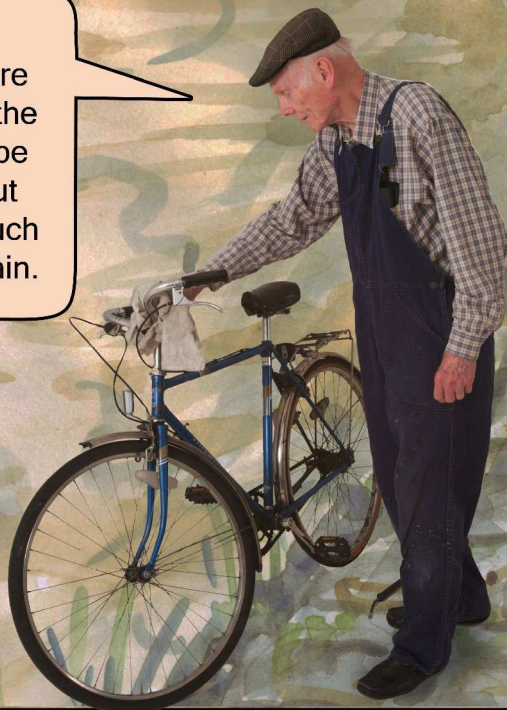
Not quite. You told me the Patriarchal stories describe the struggle of the Hebrew marginals to transform the world and the effect this had on their political relationships with their neighbours.



You argued that later priestly editors presented these stories as conservative religious history in an attempt to hide their disturbing marginal perspective.

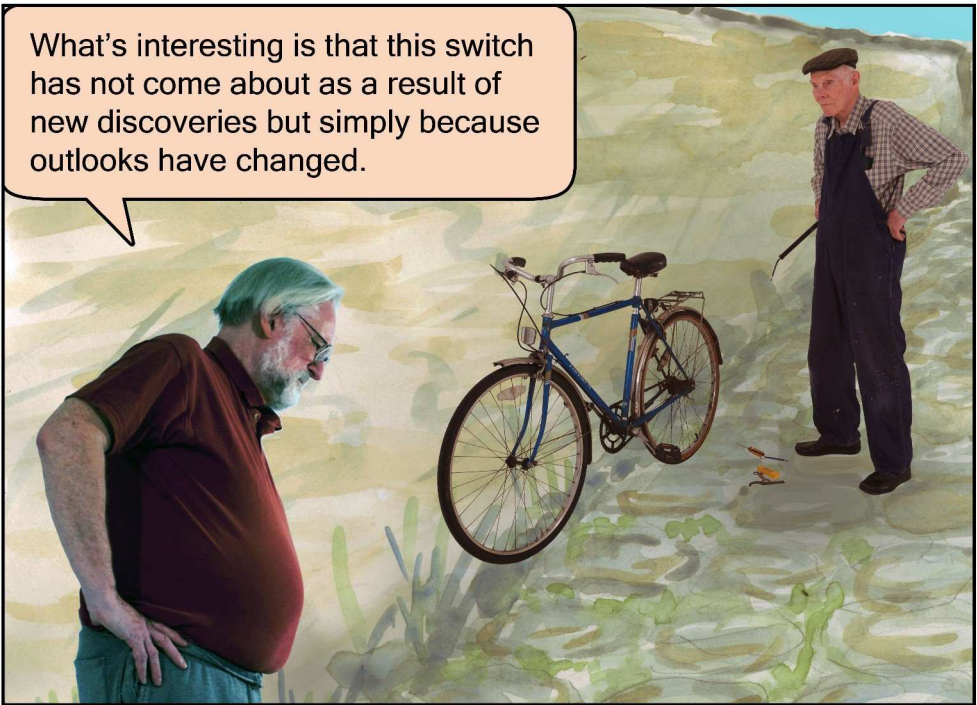


However, you did admit the Moses stories in Exodus were basically historical - even if the plagues themselves had to be seen as representations - but you haven't yet said how much true history the stories contain.

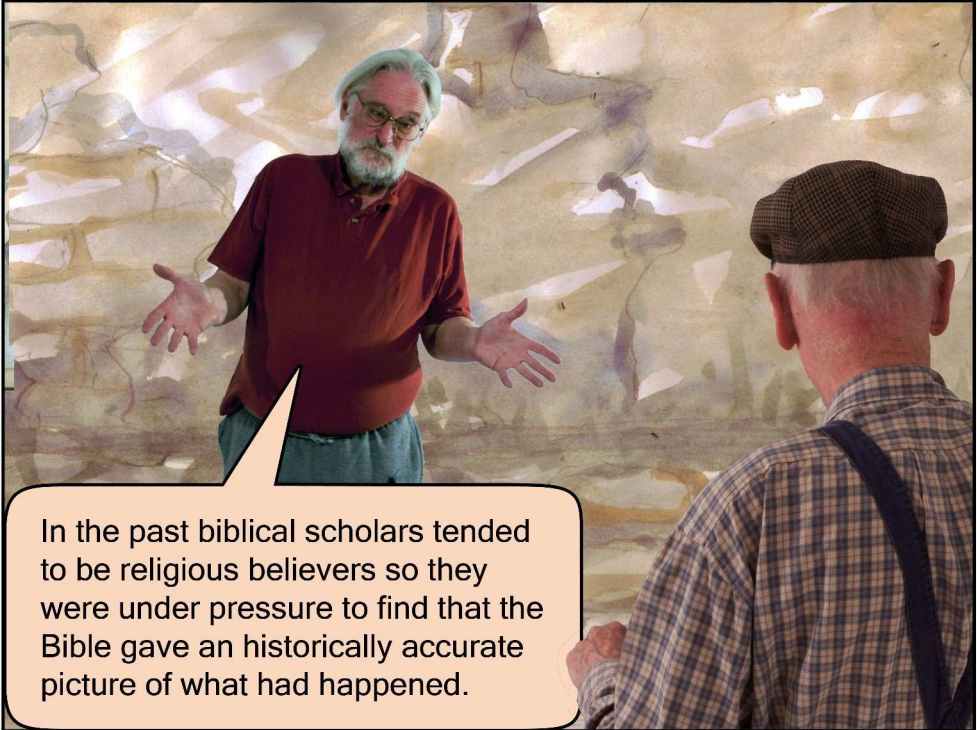


When I was a student in the 60's some still argued there was a fair amount of true history to be found in the Moses stories but things have moved on since then and nowadays most critical scholars claim they were all made up.

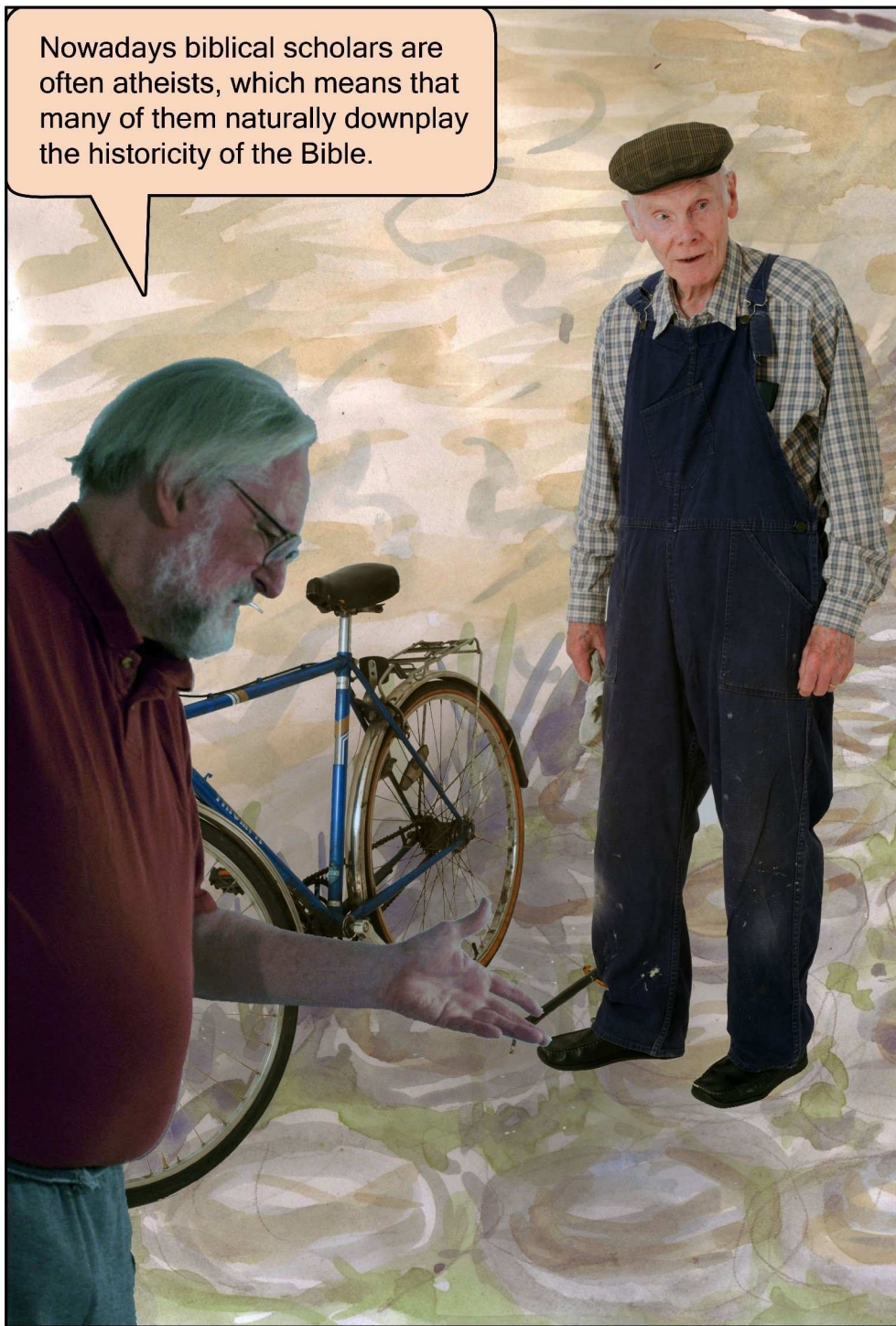
What's interesting is that this switch has not come about as a result of new discoveries but simply because outlooks have changed.



In the past biblical scholars tended to be religious believers so they were under pressure to find that the Bible gave an historically accurate picture of what had happened.



Nowadays biblical scholars are often atheists, which means that many of them naturally downplay the historicity of the Bible.





However, I am not interested in the changing perspectives of scholars, for there's no reason to suppose any modern perspective - apart from a properly scientific one - will help us understand what the biblical writers were up to...

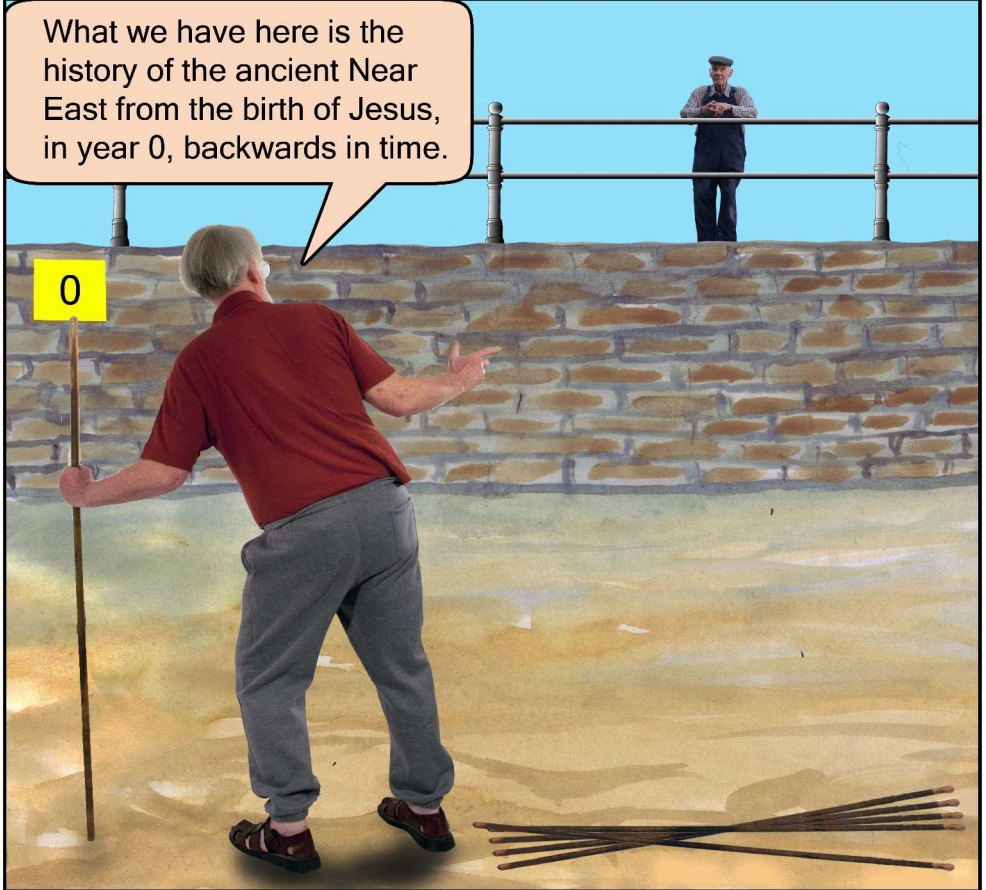


... and, let's face it, we're never going to be able to measure the historical accuracy of the stories until we work out what the ancient writers were trying to say with them.



So come with me
to the beach and
we'll take a cool
look at the facts.

What we have here is the
history of the ancient Near
East from the birth of Jesus,
in year 0, backwards in time.

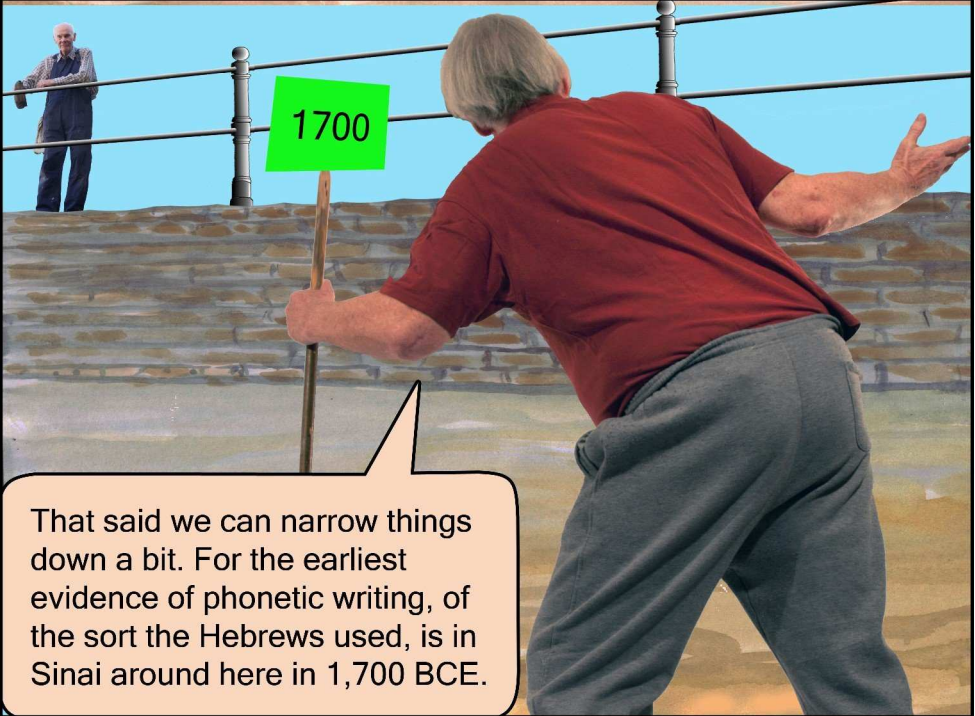


The earliest evidence of writing is in Mesopotamia, around here in 3,000 BCE, which means we can forget everything prior since what we are discussing, at the moment, is written history.

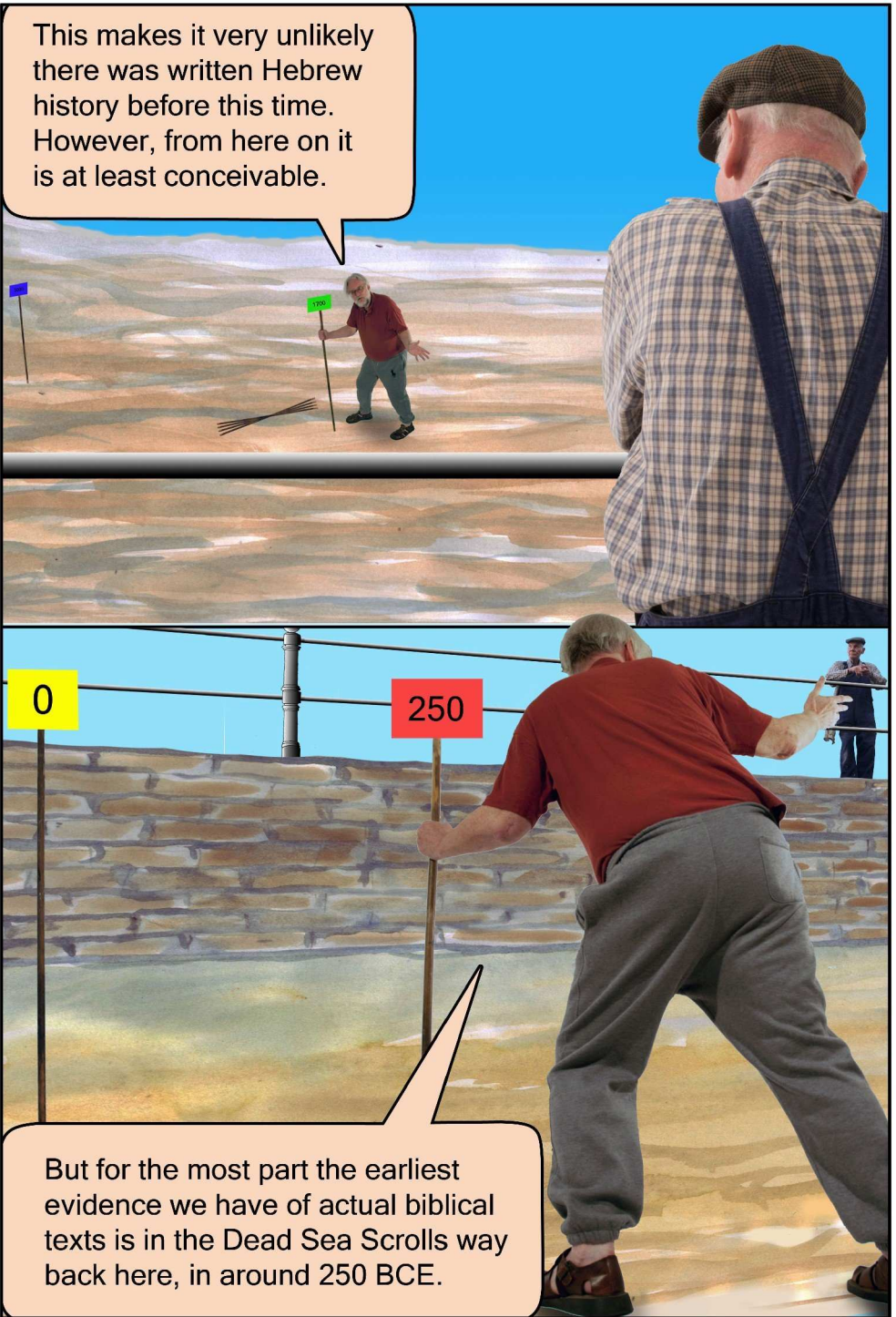


1700

That said we can narrow things down a bit. For the earliest evidence of phonetic writing, of the sort the Hebrews used, is in Sinai around here in 1,700 BCE.



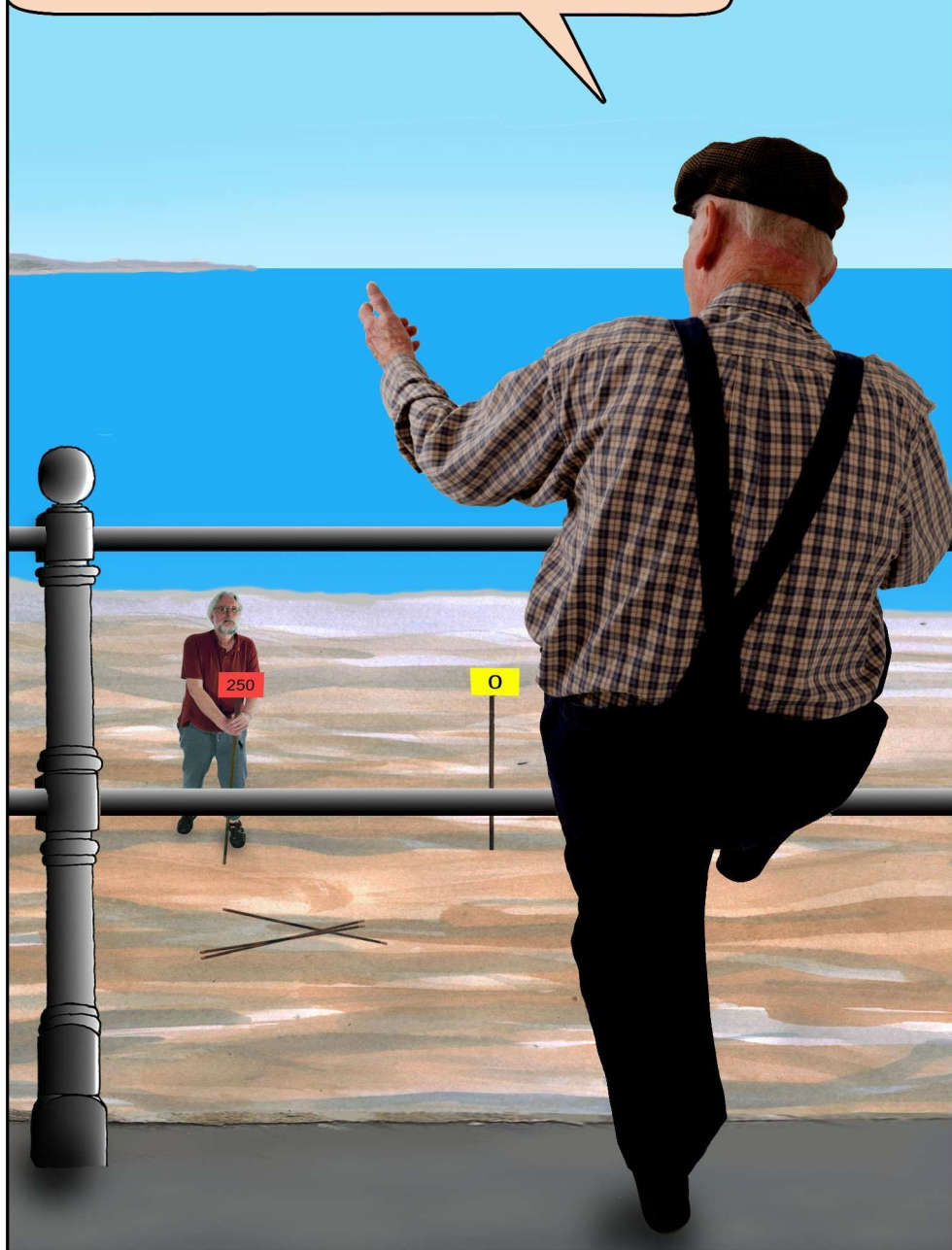
This makes it very unlikely there was written Hebrew history before this time. However, from here on it is at least conceivable.

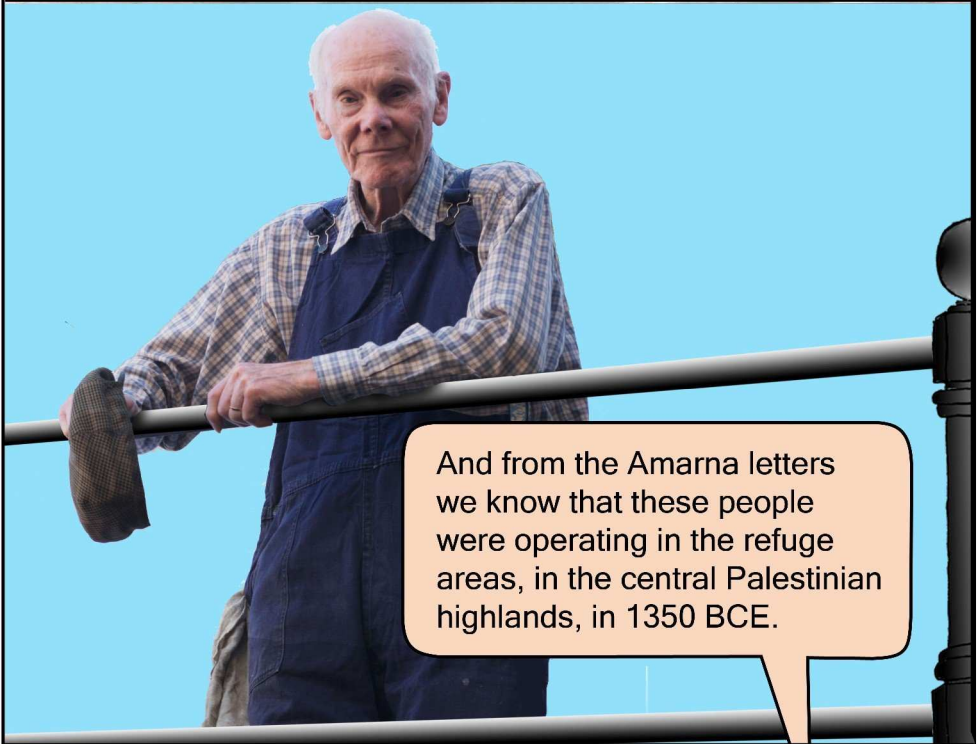
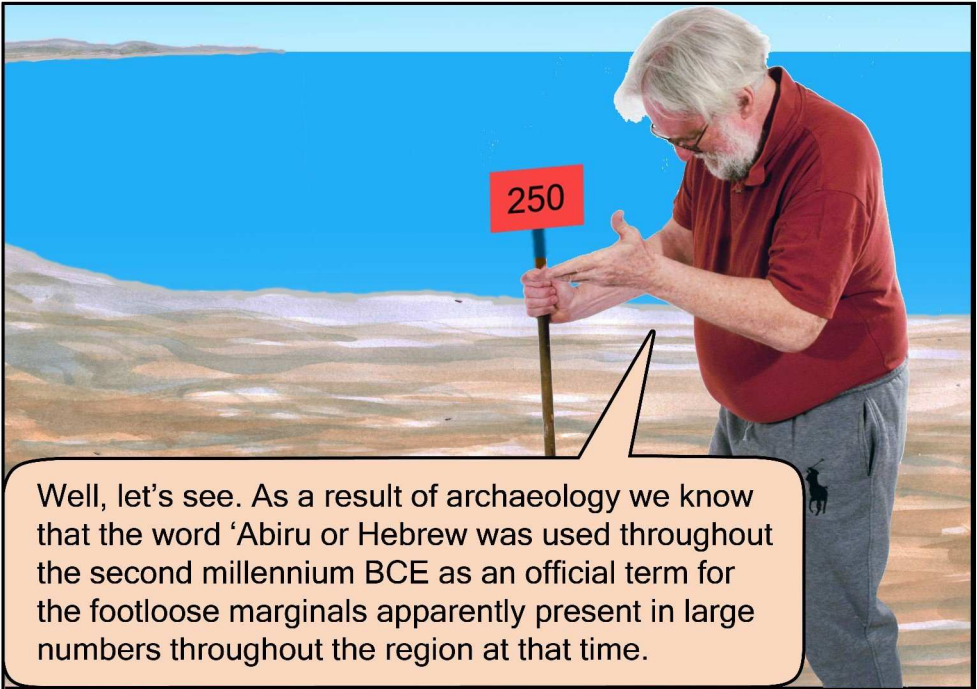


So we are presented with a huge problem, for all of the hypothetical events the Old Testament writers speak about are situated in this 1,500 years or so when Hebrew writers could conceivably have written things down. But if they did then nothing of any consequence has survived... except in the biblical tradition itself.

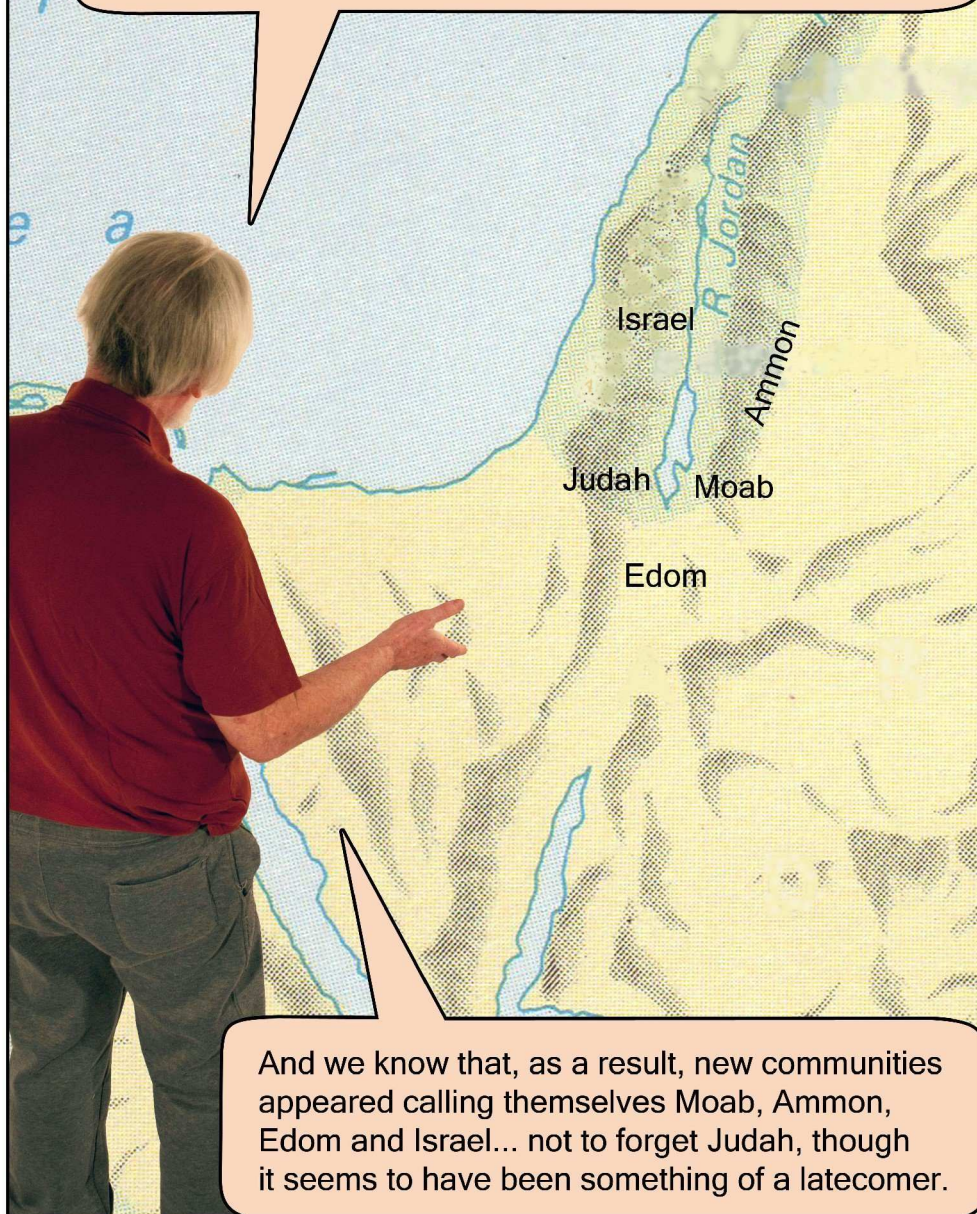


We may have no surviving texts from this period
but surely archaeology has made discoveries
enabling us to verify what the Bible says?





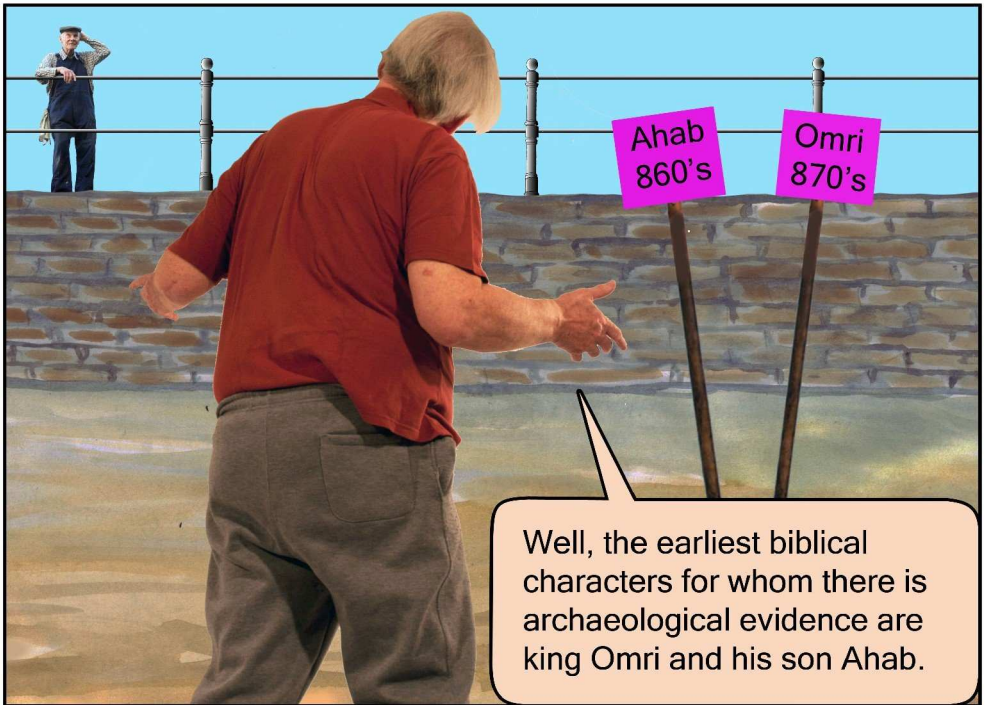
We also know that toward the end of the Bronze age (circa 1,000 BCE) this region, including the Transjordan, which was densely wooded in those times, was beginning to be repopulated not by foreigners but by people from within the general region, who were looking for a place to live.

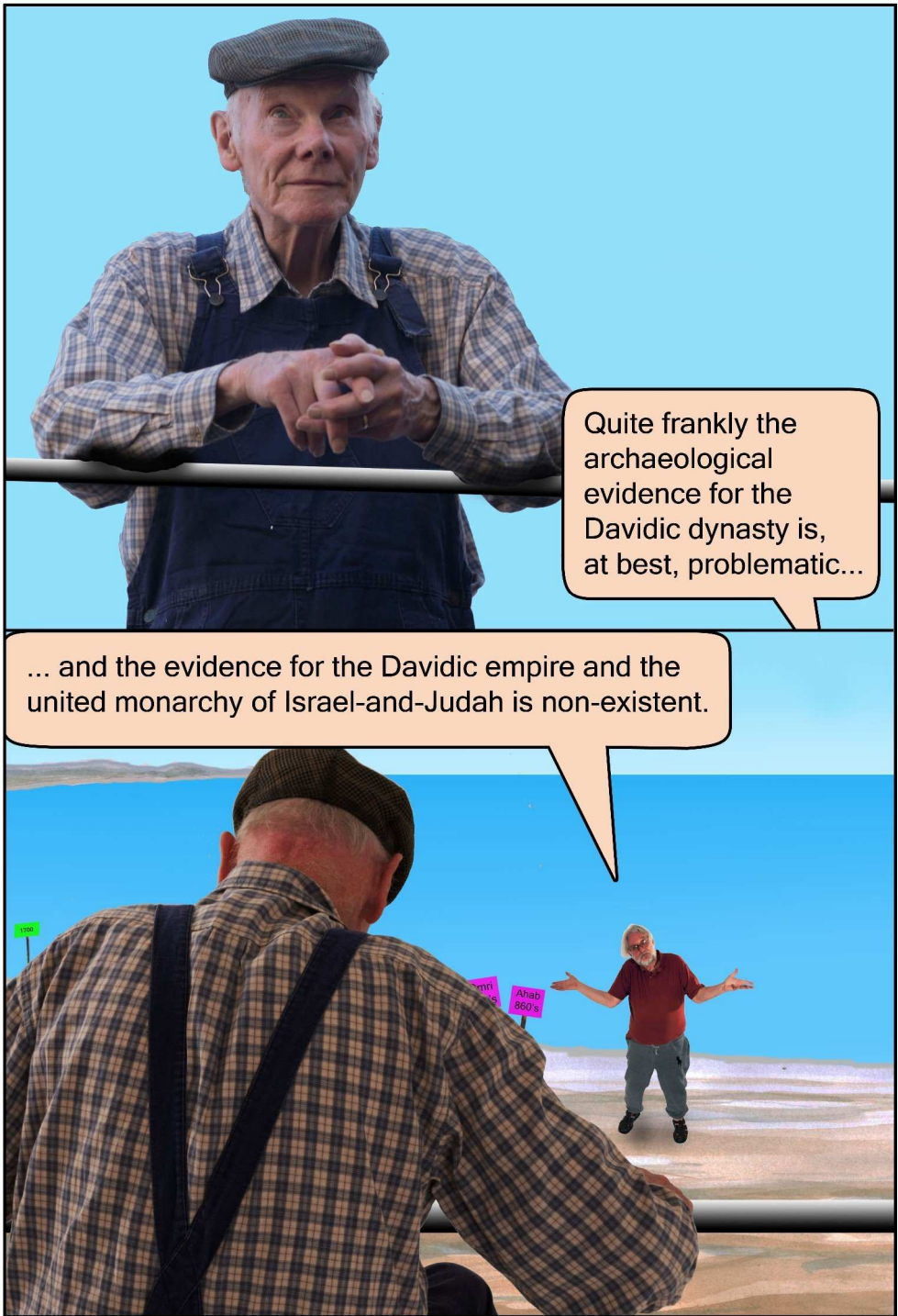


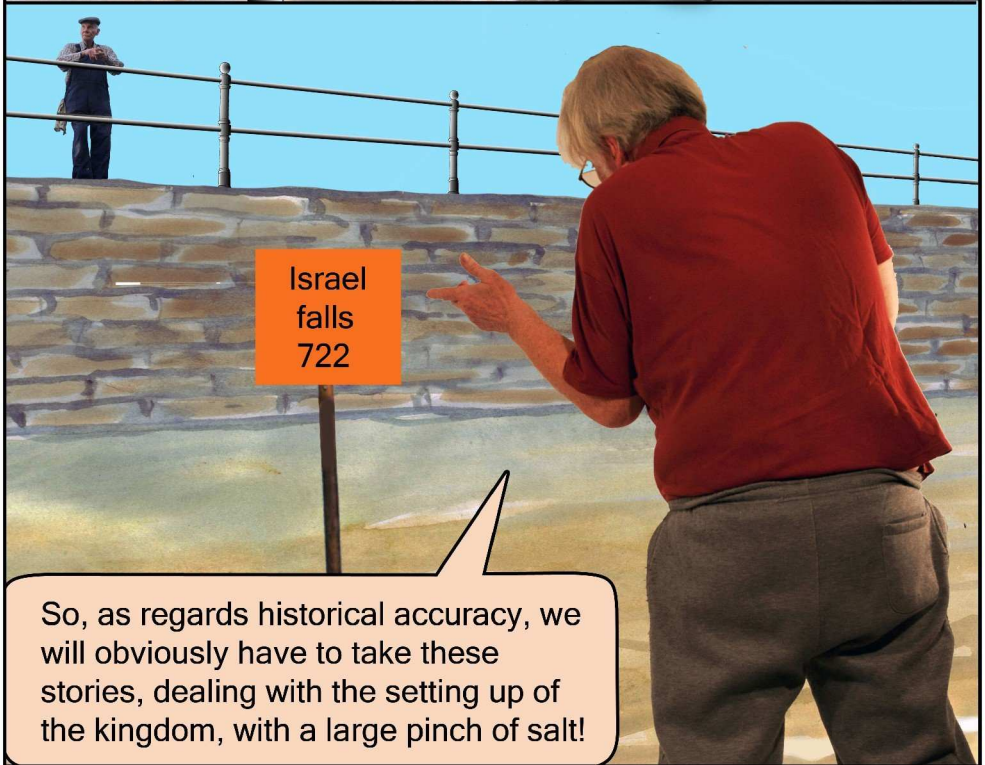
And we know that, as a result, new communities appeared calling themselves Moab, Ammon, Edom and Israel... not to forget Judah, though it seems to have been something of a latecomer.

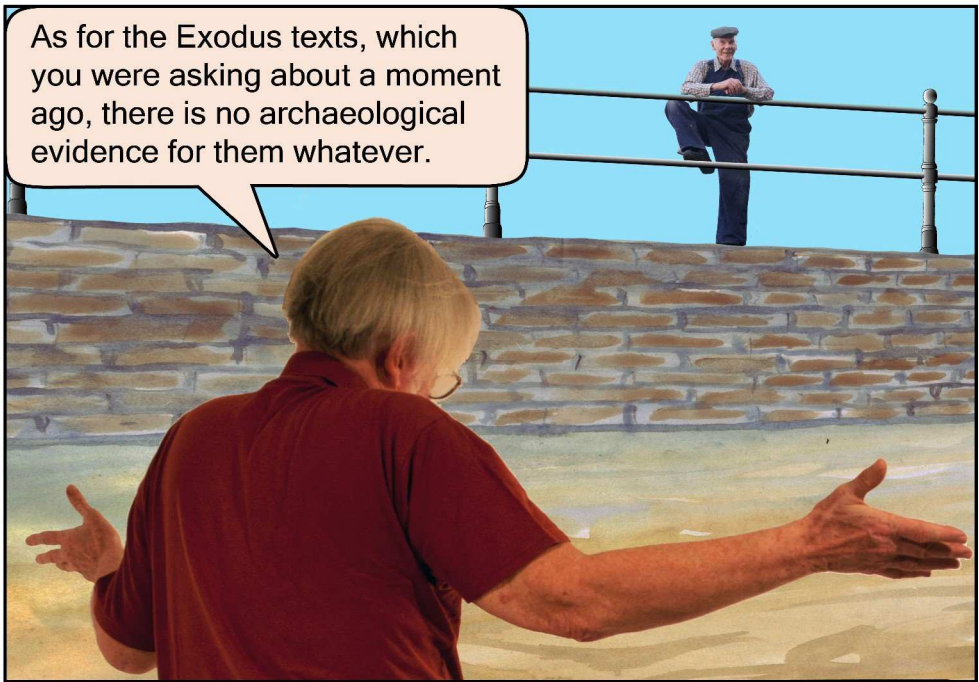
Added to this there is also archaeological evidence from as far back as the 14th century BCE in Egypt, of a god called Yahweh worshiped in southern Canaan (the territory of Moab and Edom) and evidence, that this same Yahweh was worshiped, along with other gods, in Israel.

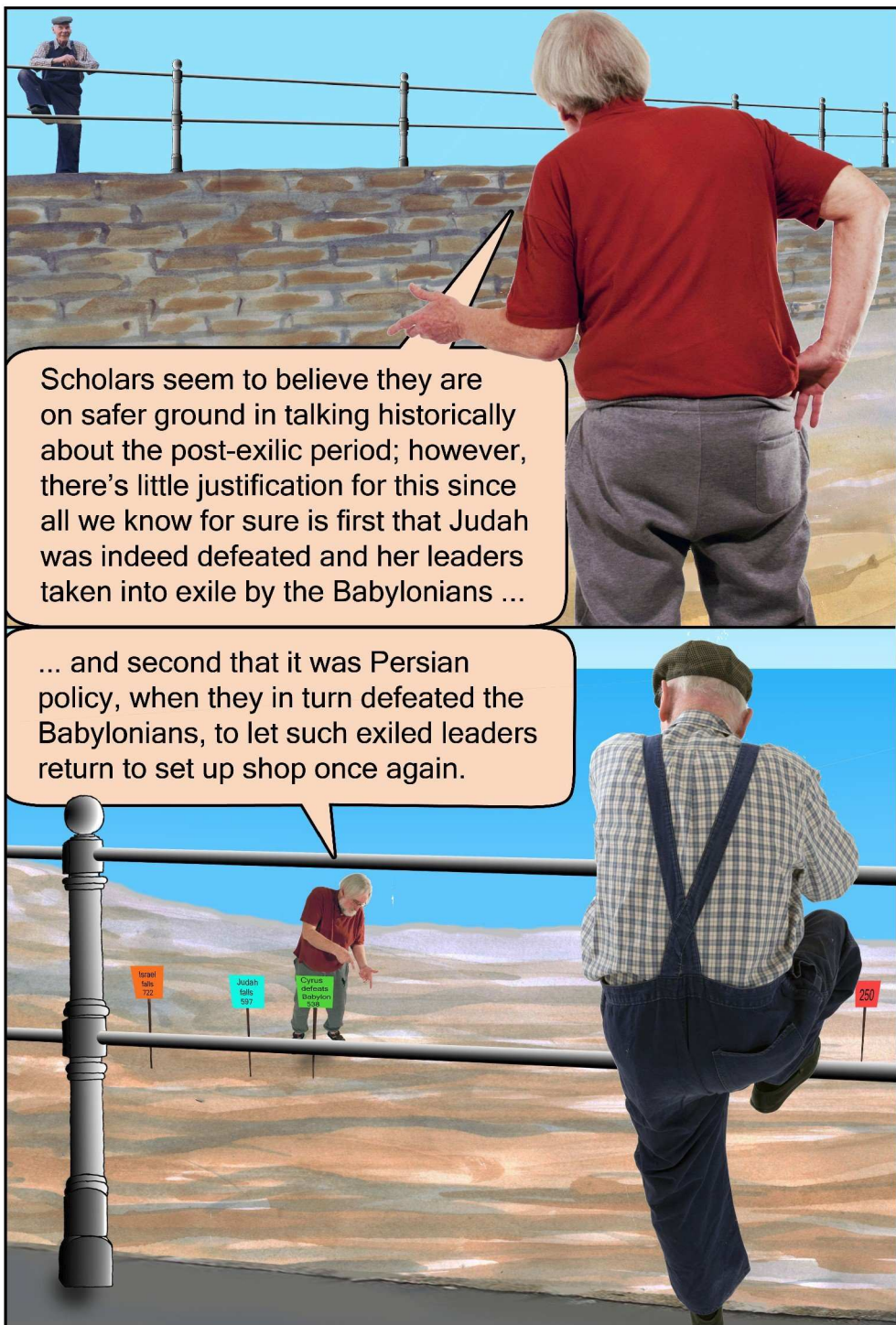












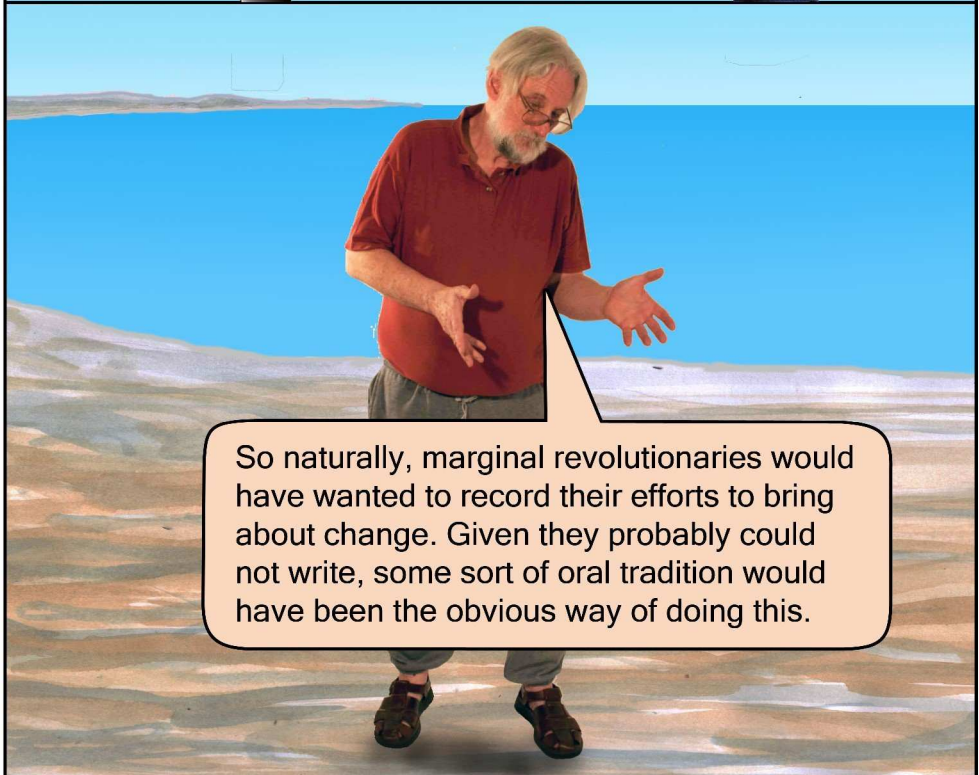
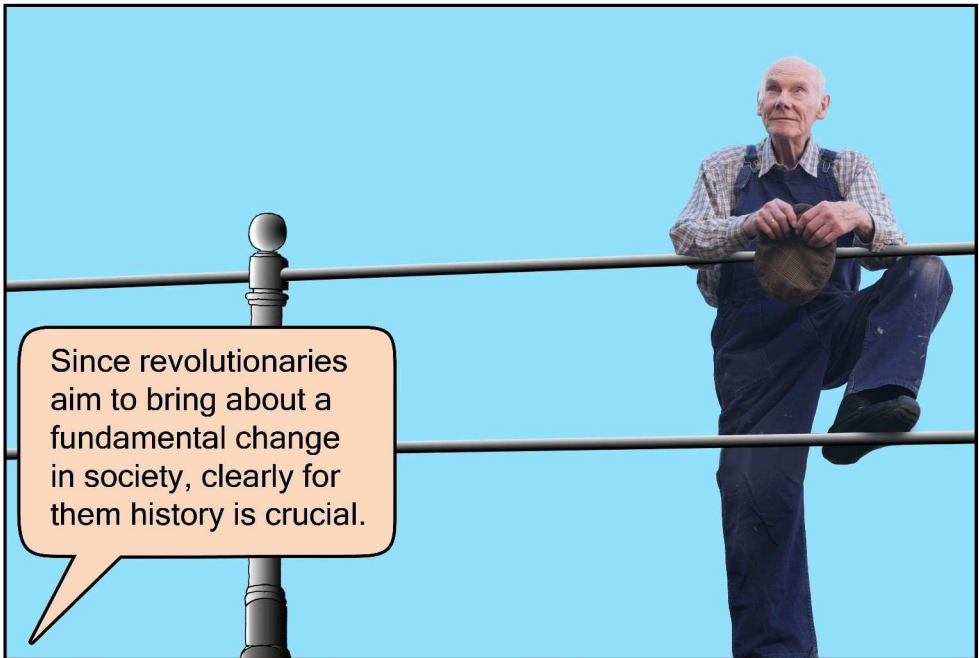


We seem to have drawn a blank with written history but what about oral tradition?

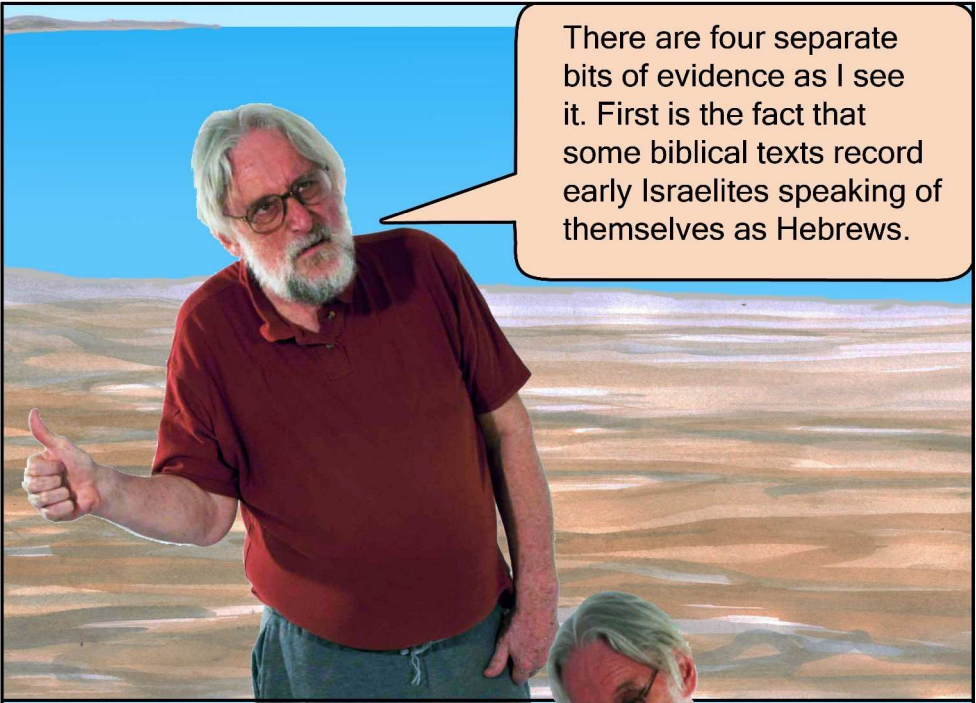
That's an interesting point. 50 years ago all debate about the formation of the Bible involved discussion of oral tradition. However, today scholars are sceptical, believing such talk to be simply a way of pretending the Bible is historical when, truly speaking, it isn't!

However, I believe this is only partially true. We need to take a new look at oral tradition, not because we want to invest the Bible with bogus historical credibility

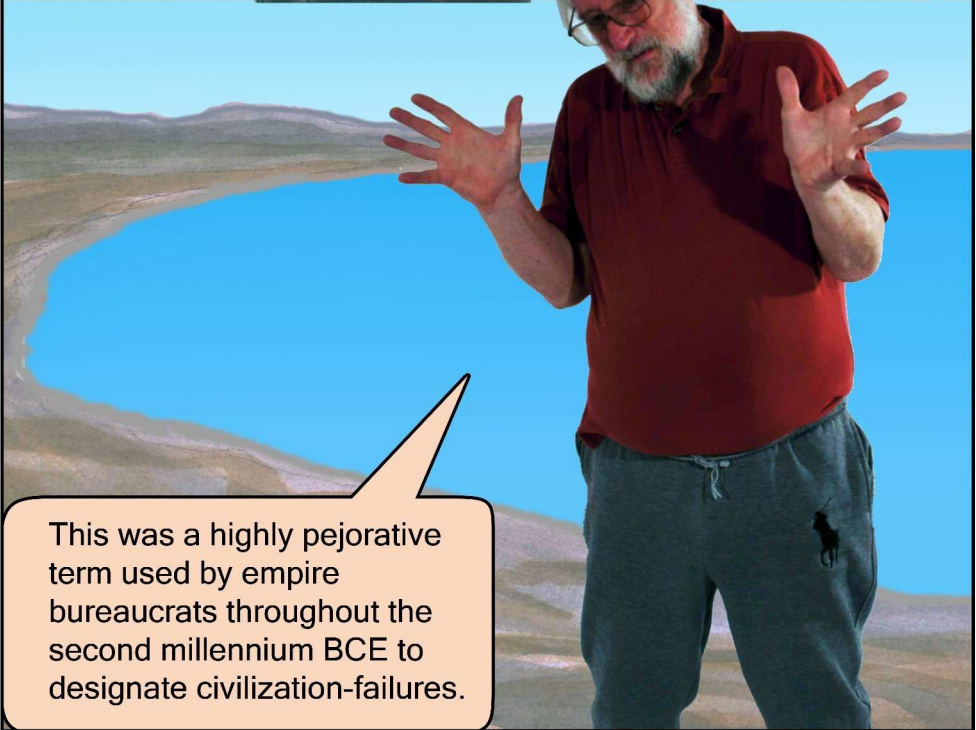
... but rather because everything suggests the Bible is the product of a revolutionary Hebrew or marginal endeavour.



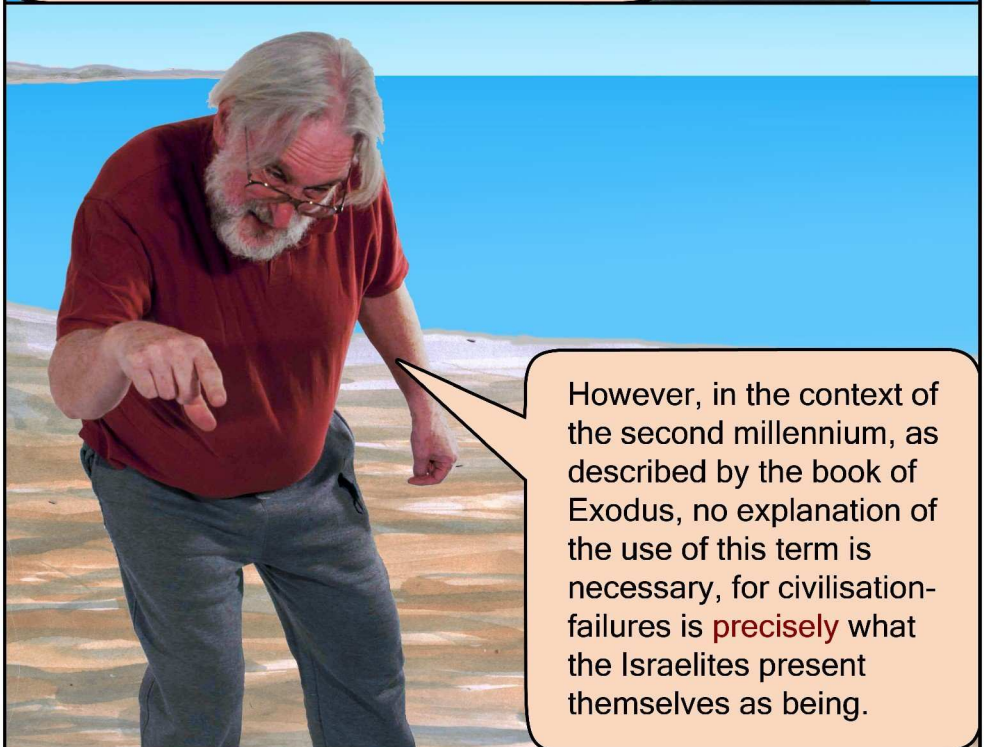
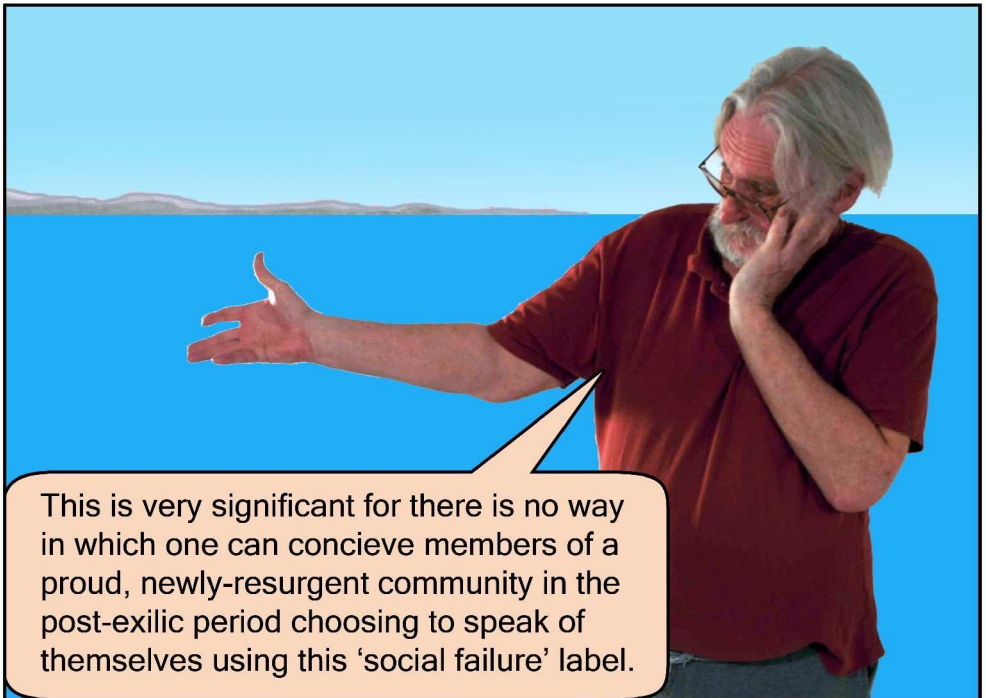


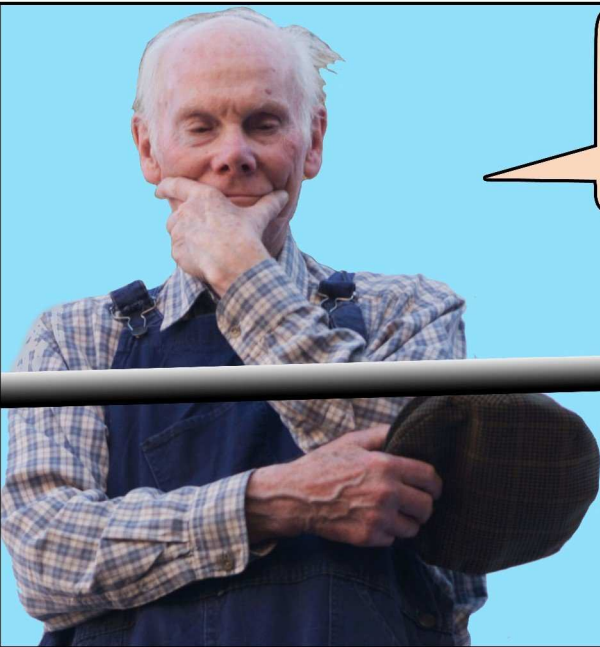


There are four separate bits of evidence as I see it. First is the fact that some biblical texts record early Israelites speaking of themselves as Hebrews.



This was a highly pejorative term used by empire bureaucrats throughout the second millennium BCE to designate civilization-failures.





Isn't it surprising they chose to use such a derogatory label to describe themselves?

Not really. Adopting a disparaging appellation with pride is a great way to neutralise the opprobrium and such a practice has by no means been unusual throughout human history.

Black power!

USA 1965 Malcolm X




We are all
German Jews!

France May 1968.
Daniel Cohn-Bendit








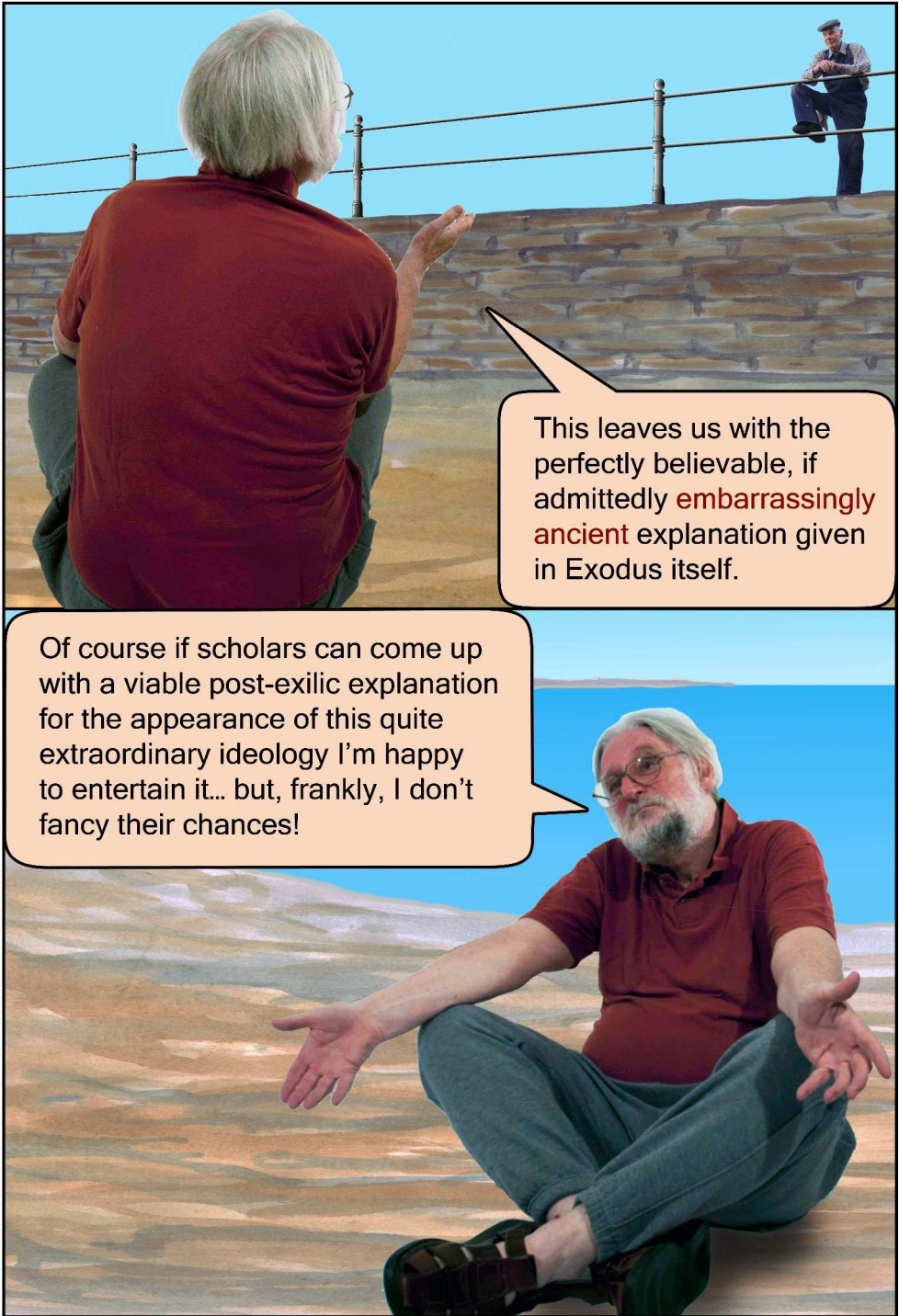


And your final
bit of evidence?



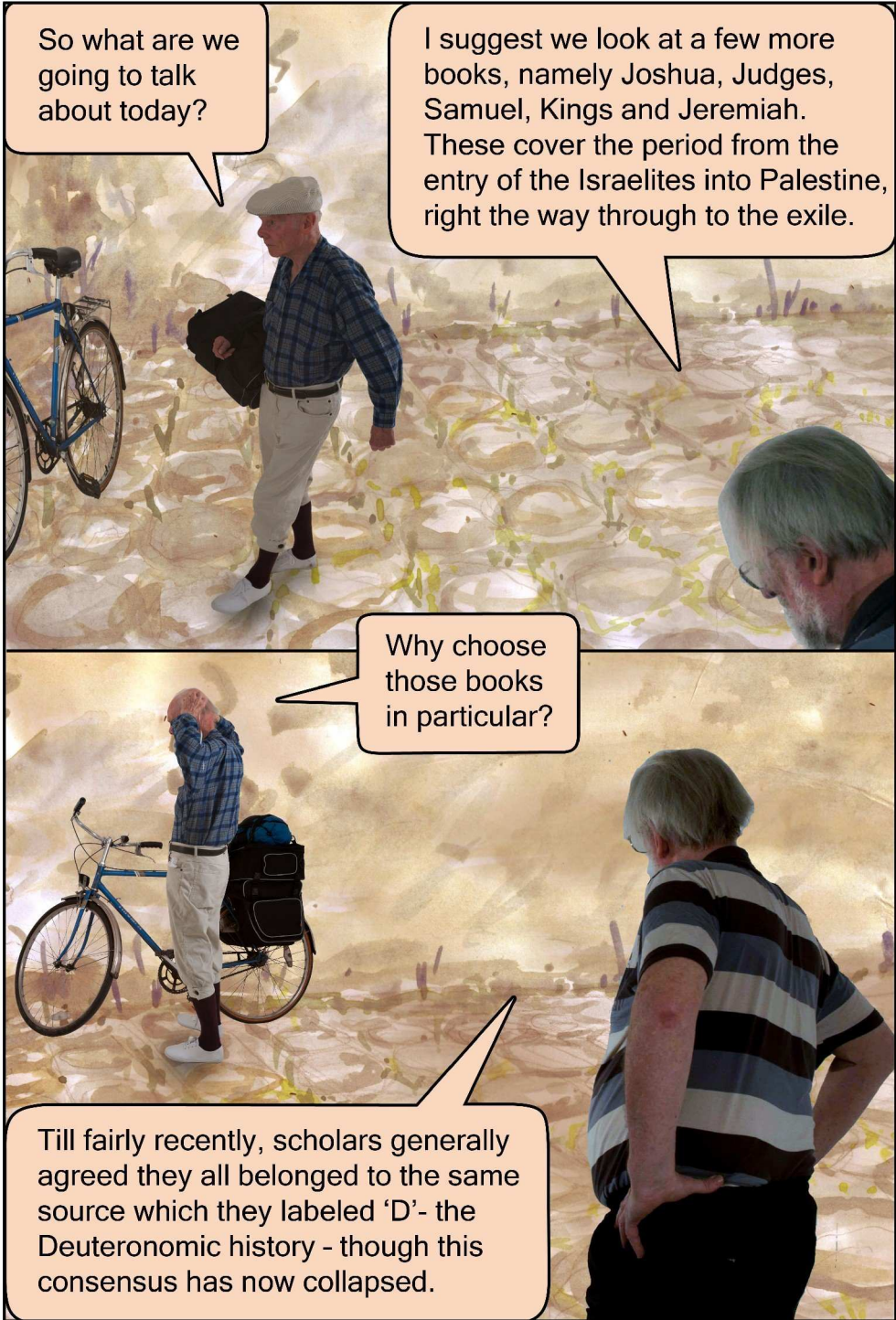
Once you know what you are
looking for you can find lots of
information about the Hebrews'
marginal ideology and its attendant
shaming-strategy within these texts.

Again, there is to my mind no adequate
way of accounting for this ideology and
its somewhat mind-blowing strategy
given a post-exilic context, since none
of the returning exiles would have
seen themselves as marginals.



2

JOSHUA



So what are we going to talk about today?

I suggest we look at a few more books, namely Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Jeremiah. These cover the period from the entry of the Israelites into Palestine, right the way through to the exile.

Why choose those books in particular?

Till fairly recently, scholars generally agreed they all belonged to the same source which they labeled 'D'- the Deuteronomic history - though this consensus has now collapsed.

Of course the whole source-history debate mainly concentrated on style, vocabulary and theology, the basic objective being to try and date the texts, whereas our focus is on political perspectives. So let's see if ideological criticism can throw some light on the situation.



OK. Take it away!



Well, actually I would prefer you to begin by briefly describing the book of Joshua.

Very well. It falls naturally into 4 sections.



The first deals with the preparations for and actual crossing of the river Jordan to enter the promised land. (Chapters 1-4)

What's up?

I've forgotten the baby!



The second deals with the successful fight to subdue the indigenous Canaanite population. (Chapters 5-12)



The third deals with the distribution of land and organization of the territory. (Chapters 13-22)



Finally we have a brief epilogue in which Joshua gives instructions before he dies (Chapters 23-24).

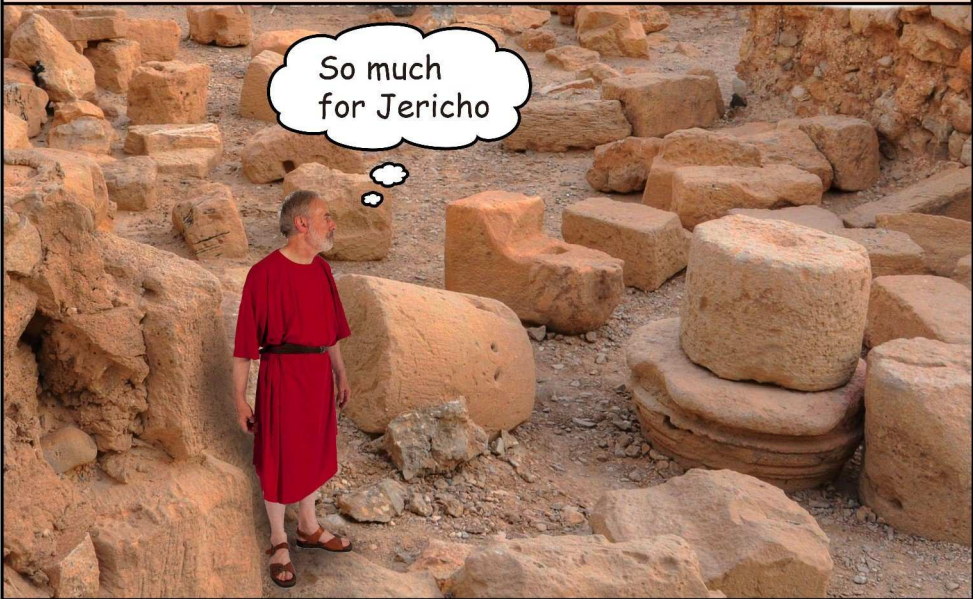


Well, as you yourself previously pointed out*, the problem with the Exodus story is that it ends in failure with Moses' loss of nerve.

* See *God of the Marginals*
Part 1 Page 84

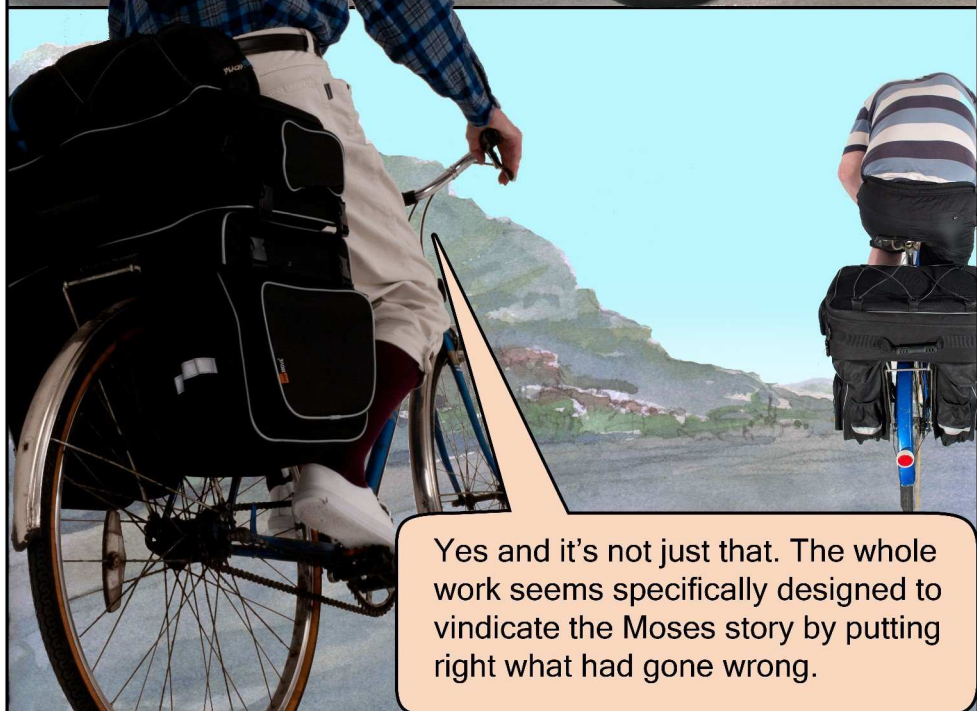


It seems to me that the Joshua story is designed to rectify this situation by turning the whole thing into a roaring success.





That's certainly true. There are over 50 references to Moses in the book and nearly all stress that Joshua was simply completing Moses' task.



Yes and it's not just that. The whole work seems specifically designed to vindicate the Moses story by putting right what had gone wrong.



Fair enough, but first remind me how to distinguish between a revolutionary standpoint and a conservative revisionist one.



It stands to reason revolutionary works can be identified by the fact that Yahweh is presented as god of the Hebrew marginals.

This was why we found the use of the term Hebrew* in the Exodus texts so indicative, though it was the symbol of the burning bush** that eventually sealed the issue.

* See *God of the Marginals* Part 1 p. 51

** See *God of the Marginals* Part 1 pp. 89-93



Well, the term Hebrew never appears in the book of Joshua, but tell me how I can isolate a revisionist text?



If you remember we came to the conclusion that since Genesis 1 clearly presents Yahweh as **an authoritarian** it must have been written by **a conservative revisionist**.

See:
*God of the
Marginals*
Part 1
page 19

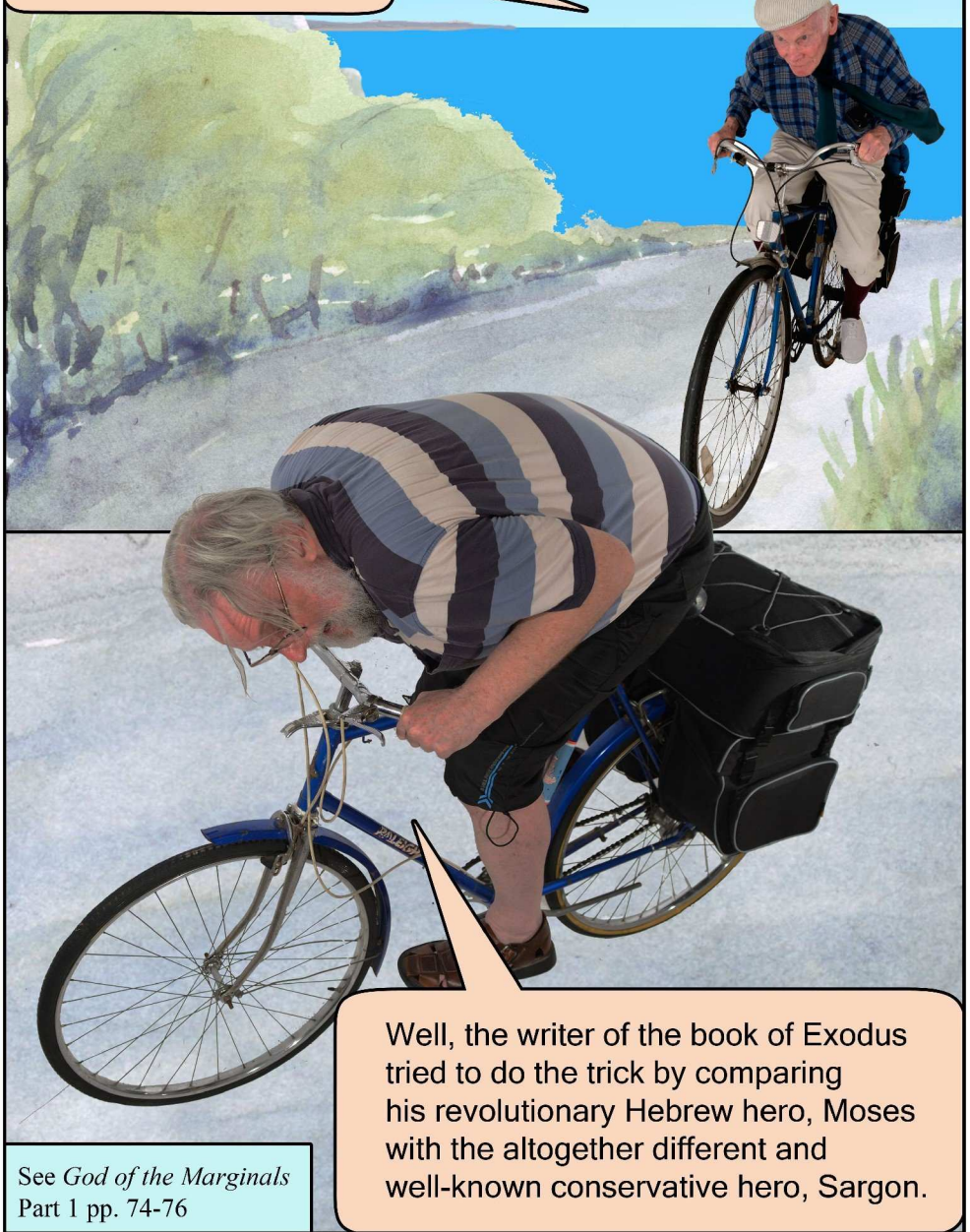


We also subsequently found the same author, or possibly one of his buddies, editing the other Genesis stories to make it appear they are all about **blind obedience**, which again is **authoritarian**.

See:
*God of the
Marginals*
Part 2
page 30
and also
page 109



OK I get your point
but have you anything
else that might help
me nail the difference?

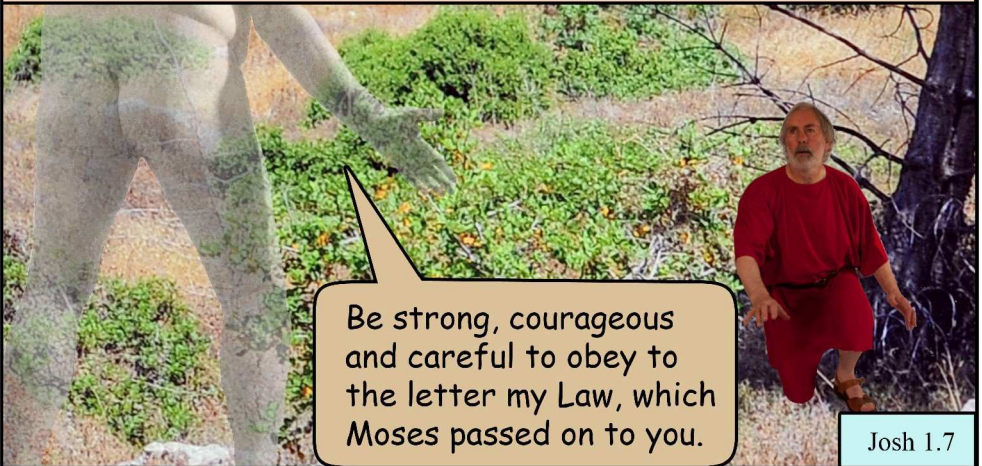


See *God of the Marginals*
Part 1 pp. 74-76

Well, the writer of the book of Exodus
tried to do the trick by comparing
his revolutionary Hebrew hero, Moses
with the altogether different and
well-known conservative hero, Sargon.



It begins with Yahweh telling Joshua to take up the mantle of Moses by crossing over the Jordan with the people and taking possession of the promised land.



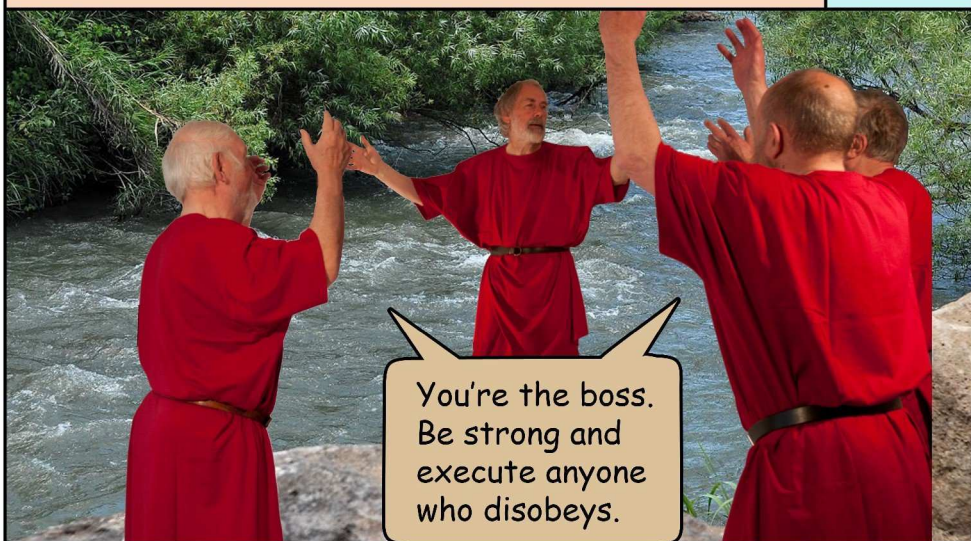
There's just one slight problem: some of the tribes are to live in the Trans-Jordan area, which means that, technically, they have already arrived. However, it is obviously necessary for everyone to be involved in this great symbolic act.

Josh 1.12-15



Joshua then gives a short speech in which he reminds everyone of their obligations and in return they all vow to obey him as they previously obeyed Moses.

Josh 1.16



After three days camped by the river making preparation, things kick off with the Levites carrying the ark, containing the Law and symbolizing Yahweh's presence, down into the river.



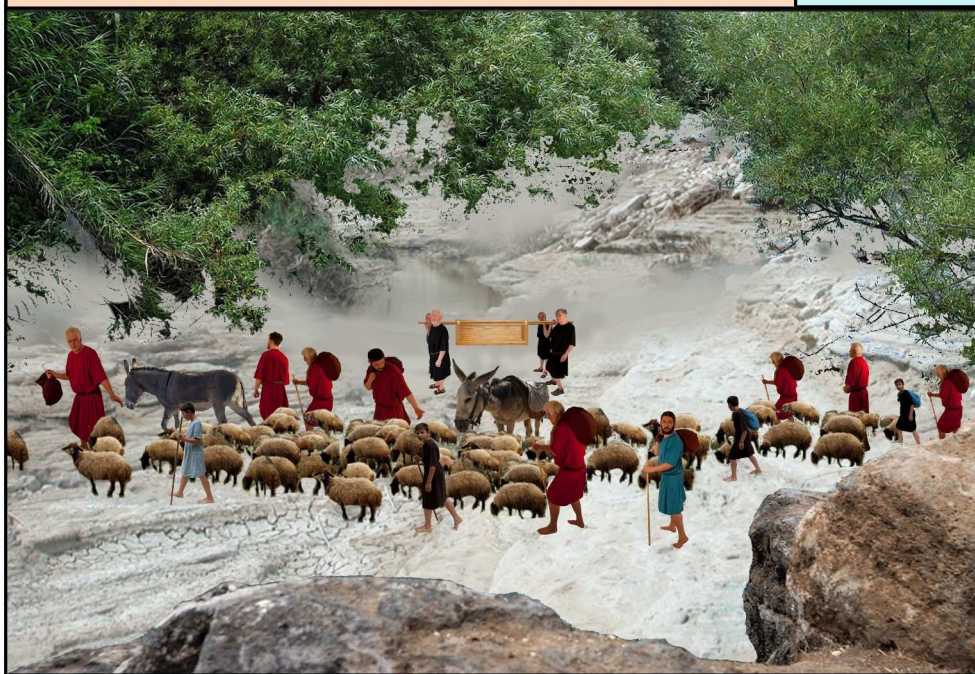
Josh 3.14

Just as soon as the they put their feet into the river the waters back up so that in fact no-one even gets wet.



When they reach the middle they stand to one side and all of Israel files safely past them to the other side.

Josh 3.16-17

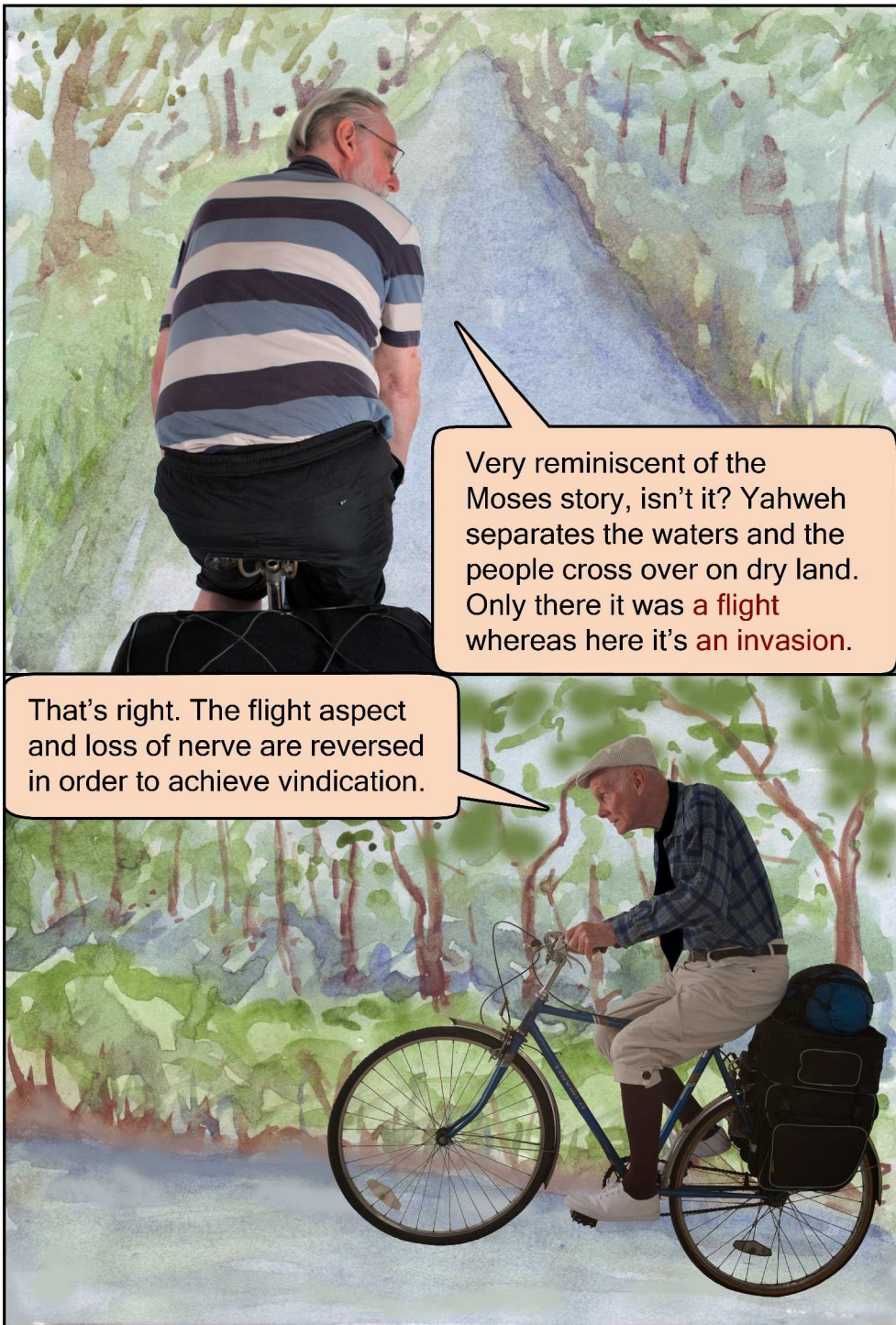


When everyone is across, Joshua tells them to build a memorial in case Israel forgets what has just happened.



When everything is done, the Levites themselves complete the crossing with the ark and the river returns to its normal course.





Very reminiscent of the Moses story, isn't it? Yahweh separates the waters and the people cross over on dry land. Only there it was a **flight** whereas here it's an **invasion**.

That's right. The flight aspect and loss of nerve are reversed in order to achieve vindication.

Any thoughts about the writer's political perspective?



Can't say I've noticed anything yet... though I don't like that line about 'death for disobedience'. Sounds too much like a demand for blind obedience to me!

True but we have to remember that in the revolutionary Hebrew tradition it was well understood that revisionists deserved death since they were guilty of undermining Yahweh's revolution: the only sin meriting capital punishment.

See
*God of the
Marginals*
Part 2
Page 319

Have no mercy. Don't stay your hand because a traitor turns out to be your brother, your friend or your neighbour.



Exod. 32:27

You'd better continue. Hopefully, the author's standpoint will become clear as we go along.



OK. The next thing he tells us is that all the civilization-leaders in the land*, when they heard what had happened, were thrown into a political turmoil.

Josh 5.1

Have you heard the latest?

Yes apparently the whole place is crawling with Hebrew scum.



*In Exodus the Hebrew's redoubtable civilisation-enemies in Palestine are called by various names however, the land itself is called Canaan. Here in Joshua these people are divided into Ammorites and Canaanites but we will stick with Canaanites.

However, Joshua himself doesn't panic but continues doggedly to follow the Mosaic line, first by having all males born during the wilderness period circumcised...



...then by performing the Passover ceremony.





We're back to
Moses and the
Exodus again.

So we are and we now
come to a couple of
very interesting verses.

*Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man
standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand.*


Josh 5. 13-15



Are you for us or
for our enemies?


Neither, I have come
as commander of
YAHWEH's army.

Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence...

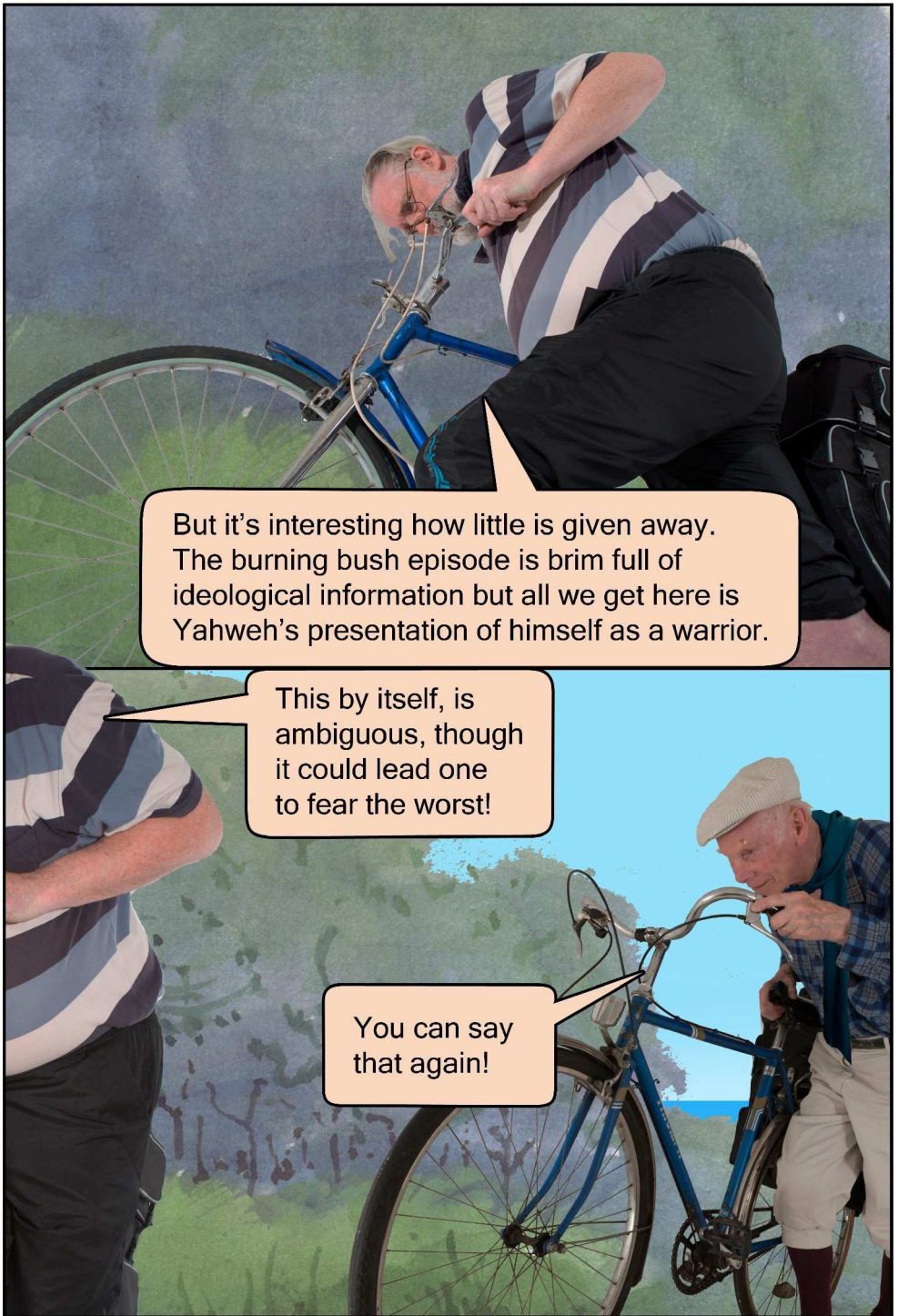


What message
does my Lord have
for his servant?

Take off your sandals,
for the place where you
are standing is holy.

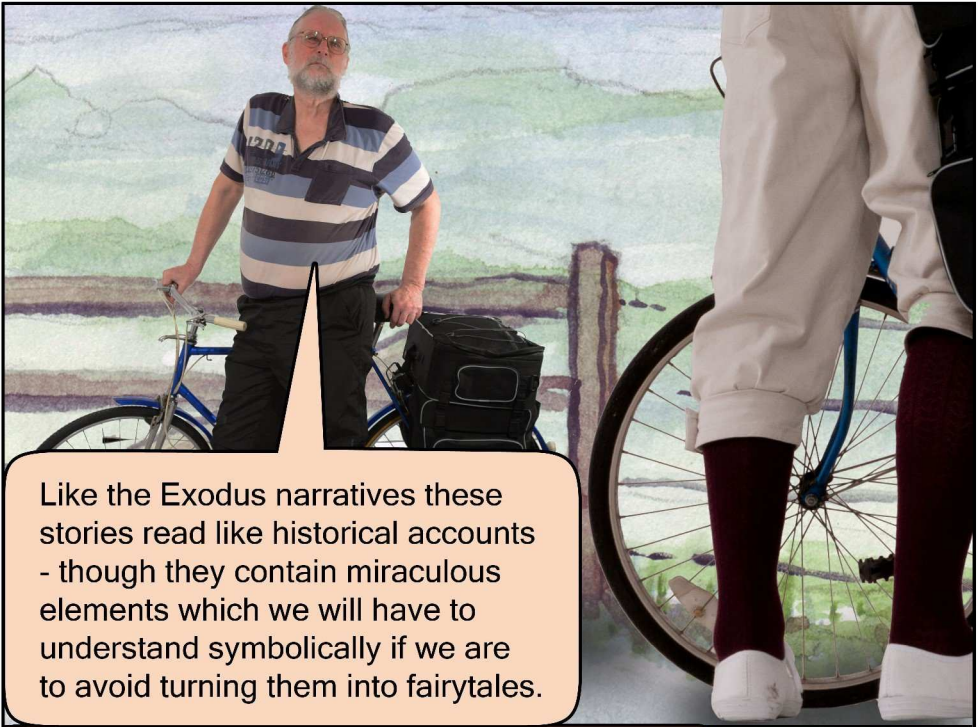


You're right. This, is of one
of those rare biblical texts
where Yahweh honours a
faithful servant by meeting
him face to face.









Like the Exodus narratives these stories read like historical accounts - though they contain miraculous elements which we will have to understand symbolically if we are to avoid turning them into fairytales.



However, the fact of the matter is we will only be able to deal seriously with your question when we know what the author is trying to say. So for the moment let's go on with the story.

Very well. It begins with the sending out of spies who enter the city and spend the night in the house of Rahab, a prostitute.

Josh 2.



... but clearly someone in the brothel spills the beans for the authorities get wind of their presence and come knocking at her door.



However, Rahab hides them under the flax drying on the roof and then helps them escape. In return, they promise that she and her extended family will be spared when the city falls.

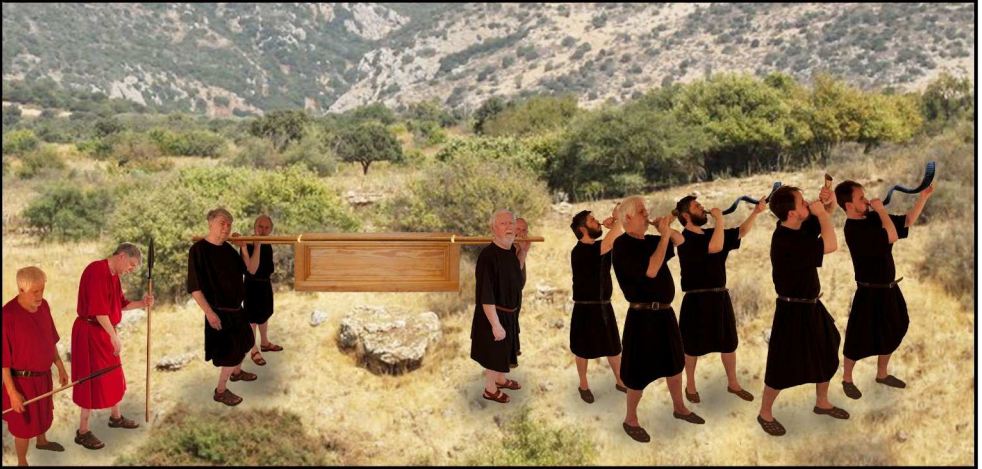


Some days later, Joshua and his army arrive to besiege the city, which is strongly fortified.

Josh 6.



Following Yahweh's strict instructions, they proceed to parade silently once round the city each day for six days, with the ark - led by seven priests blowing rams' horns - in their midst.



On the seventh day they follow the same procedure, only this time circling the city in dead silence seven times, till suddenly at the end the priests sound their horns and the whole army gives a great roar.



At this point all the walls fall down allowing the Hebrew army to enter the city and thoroughly destroy everything, only sparing the prostitute Rahab and her extended family.

Josh 6. 25



He seems to be saying
it's not the Hebrews but
Yahweh who wins the day.

True but that's not new.
It's just a repetition of the
general thrust found in all
the Exodus events.



Indeed, as we shall soon see,
this same thrust is found in all
of the Joshua stories. What
I'm looking for is **the specific
thrust of this particular story.**



If that's the case I suppose the specific thrust here must have to do with the prostitute Rahab.

Exactly! And what does Rahab as a prostitute represent?

Why should she represent anything? Wasn't it natural the spies should choose to hide in a brothel?

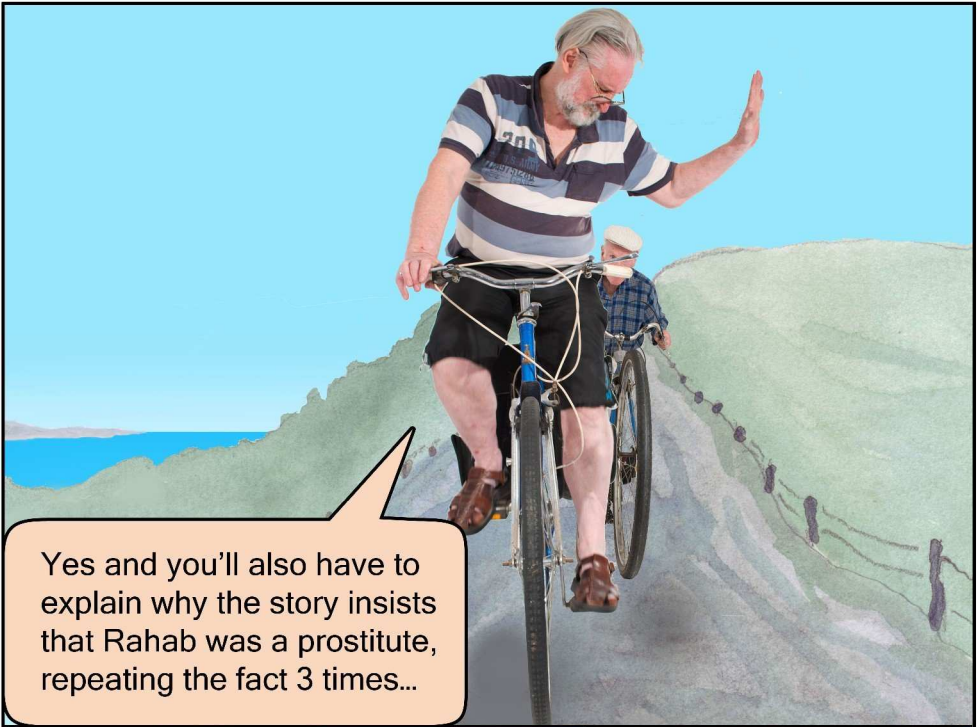


That's as may be but you'll have to explain why this whole incident is related, since what the spies and Rahab did had no effect on the actual outcome.



It's true. I hadn't noticed that. So the story has to be saying something important in itself.







So how often are we told of Canaanites being integrated into the Hebrew community?

Only **here**!
Yes that does seem to make it significant.



There are in fact three other verses where the revolutionary principle - which maintains the Hebrew community was to remain open to footloose foreigners - is hinted at:

All the Israelites... were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord,... Both the foreigners living amongst them and the native-born were there. Josh 8.33

There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including... the foreigners who lived among them. Josh 8.35

Any of the Israelites or any foreigner residing among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger. Josh 29.9

So, I ask you once again, why does the storyteller insist the Canaanite Rahab was a **prostitute**?

Is he telling us that in being a prostitute she was a marginal, which meant she alone was capable of seeing what Israel was trying to achieve?

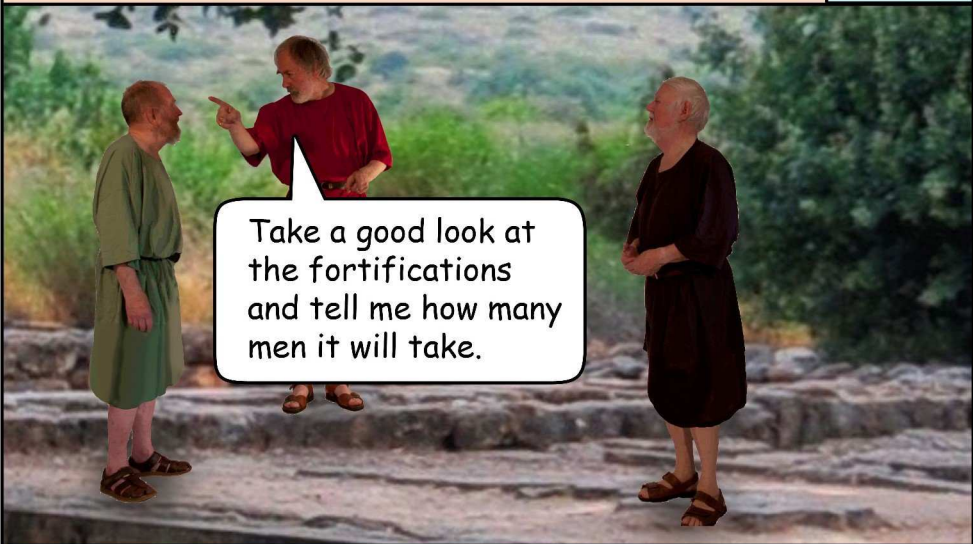
Precisely! So now we know for sure this is a **revolutionary text**.

Never in my whole life have I come across such an interpretation!

Perhaps we should go on with the story?

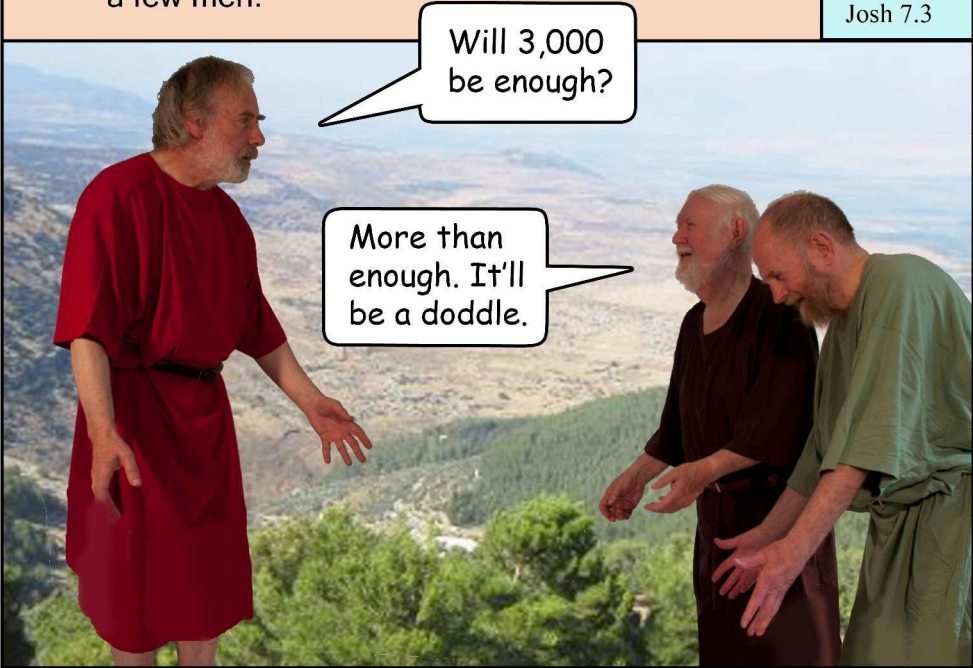
The next Canaanite city on the list for conquest is Ai and, as usual, Joshua begins by sending out spies.

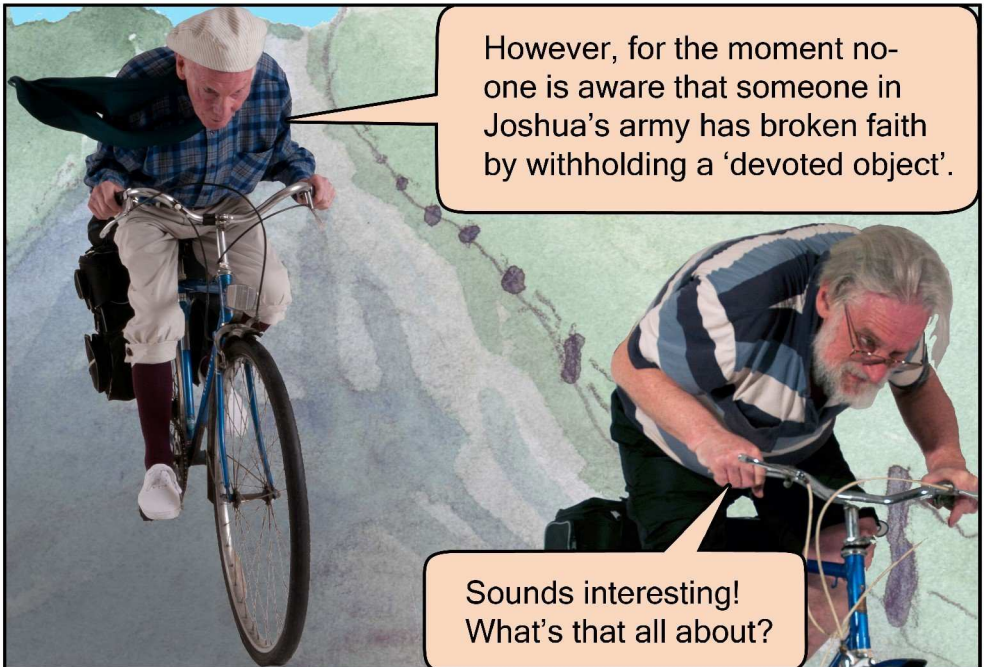
Josh 7.2



They return with the good news that he need only send a few men.

Josh 7.3





Well, a person or object is said to be devoted when they are so polluted with civilizational ideology that, however valuable they may appear to be, it is necessary to 'devote them to destruction' since otherwise the whole marginal community will be put at risk.



Because of this as yet undiscovered ideological sin, when Joshua sends 3,000 troops to take Ai they are routed.

Josh 7.4-5

It was a disaster!

How many dead?

About 36!

When Joshua complains to Yahweh he is given the reason for the defeat and told to straighten out the situation, which he immediately does...

Josh 7.22-26

We've found it.
He had it hidden
in his tent.

...and, of course, the next time the Israelites take to the field Ai is comprehensively put to the sword.

Josh 8.

Yes, the message is clear. If world transformation is to be achieved there must be no ideological messing about.

There's just one more story we have to deal with since the rest of the book is a dreary litany of conquest and bloodshed, as Joshua first establishes military control and then divides up the land between the tribes.

Fair enough.
Fire away!

It's about Gibeon, an old royal Canaanite city quite obviously in decline, since its leaders - scared stiff of the Hebrew riffraff - have only one concern: to preserve their lives.

Josh 9



The ploy succeeds and Joshua makes peace with them, only to discover they are in fact close neighbours living just around the corner.



Joshua is in a fix, for the Gibeonites, as a clear ideological danger, should by rights be destroyed but he has promised them peace. So he decides the only thing to do is to enslave them to neutralise their baneful ideological influence.

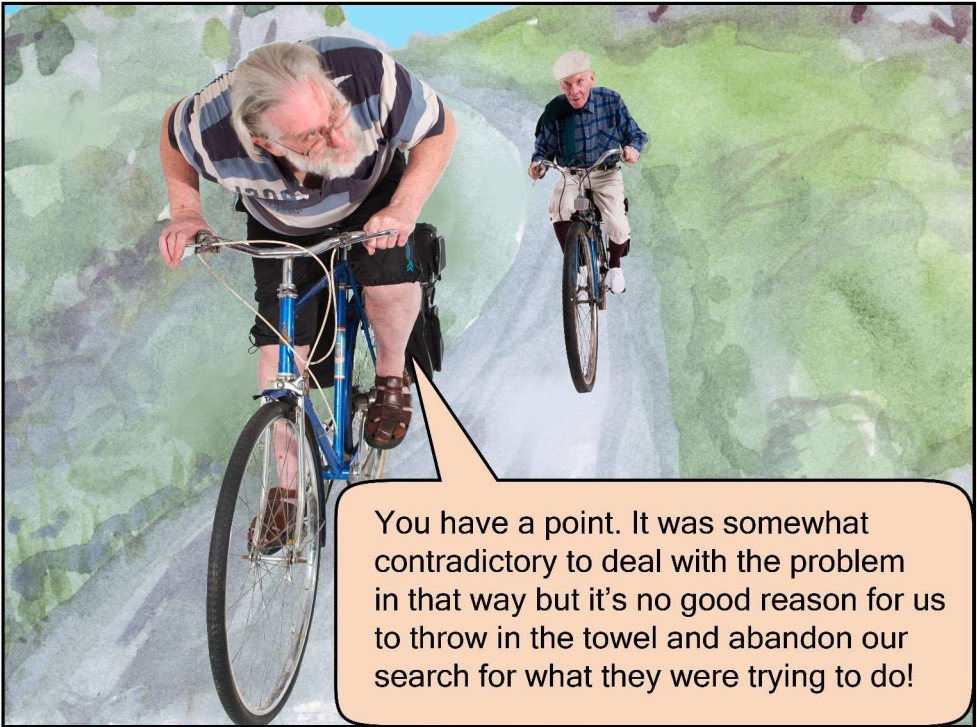


Because of what you have done you must now serve our people, cutting fire-wood and fetching water.

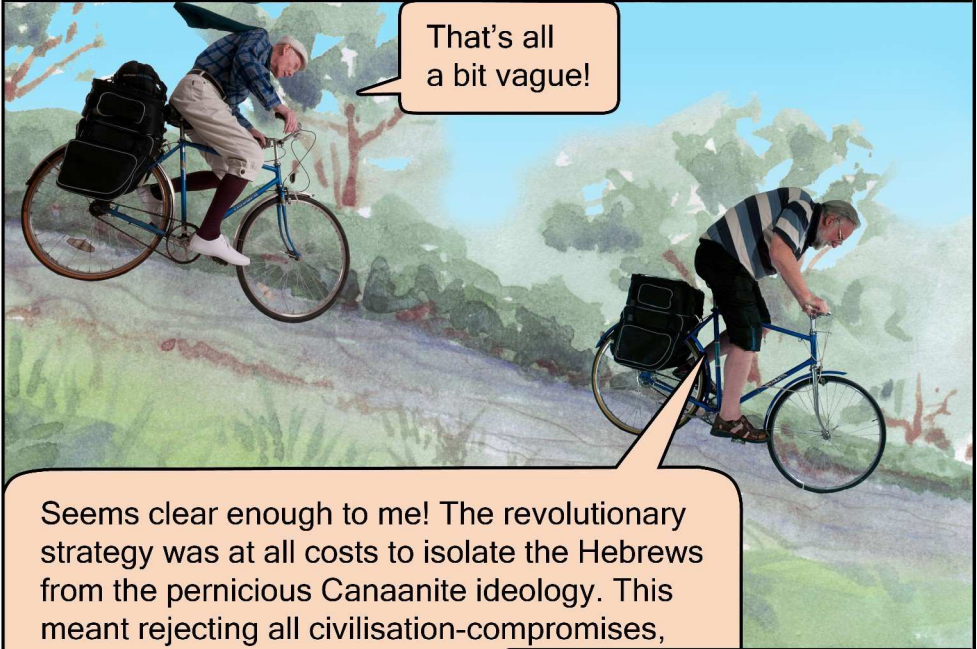


So what do you make of that?

Isn't it a bit self-defeating for Israel - as a marginal community - to go about marginalising other people?



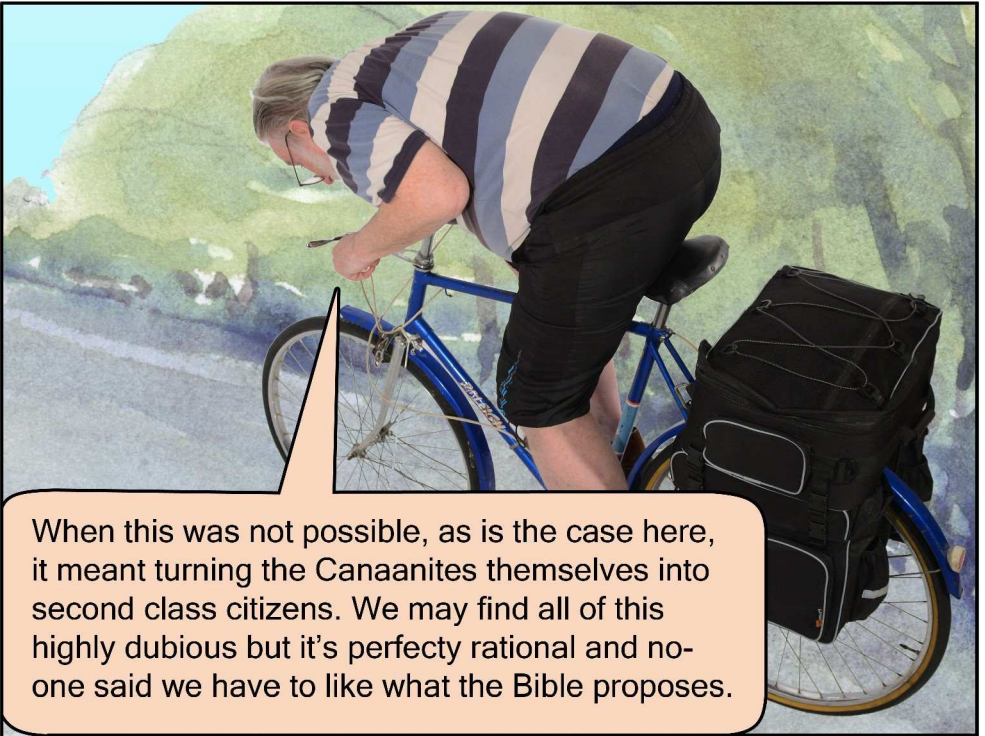
You have a point. It was somewhat contradictory to deal with the problem in that way but it's no good reason for us to throw in the towel and abandon our search for what they were trying to do!



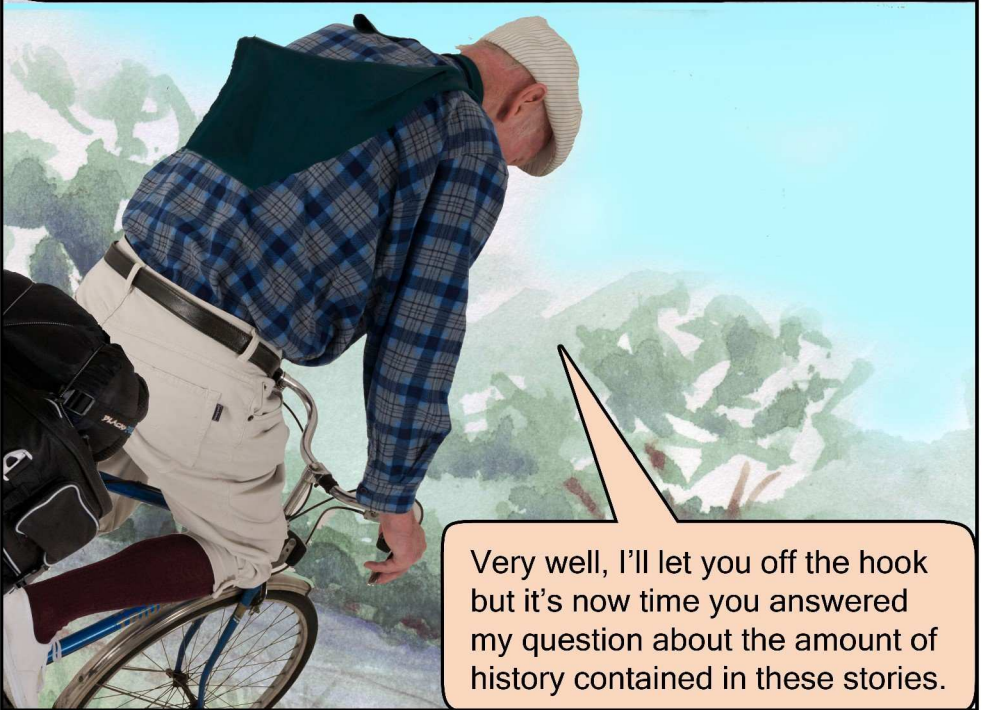
That's all a bit vague!

Seems clear enough to me! The revolutionary strategy was at all costs to isolate the Hebrews from the pernicious Canaanite ideology. This meant rejecting all civilisation-compromises, as we saw in the story of Dinah.

See *God of the Marginals* Part 2 p. 260



When this was not possible, as is the case here, it meant turning the Canaanites themselves into second class citizens. We may find all of this highly dubious but it's perfectly rational and no-one said we have to like what the Bible proposes.



Very well, I'll let you off the hook but it's now time you answered my question about the amount of history contained in these stories.

Well it's obvious there's no question of historicity when we are talking about the miraculous elements - as for example when Yahweh makes the sun to stand still just so the Israelites can have more time to slaughter the Canaanites.

So the sun stood still and the moon stopped till the nation avenged itself on its enemies.

Josh 10.13



Well I don't find it hard to believe that lying behind these stories is a traditional memory of ancestors arriving in the region as marginal immigrants who found themselves ideologically at loggerheads with the somewhat decrepit, conservative, Canaanite civilization still in place.

Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.



Josh 23.6-8

And I don't find it hard to believe these stories contain a traditional memory of an ongoing ideological struggle which only dogged ideological conviction, in conjunction with rigid exclusivity, made winable - or so the revolutionaries believed.

But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that Yahweh your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which Yahweh your God has given you.

Josh 23.11-13

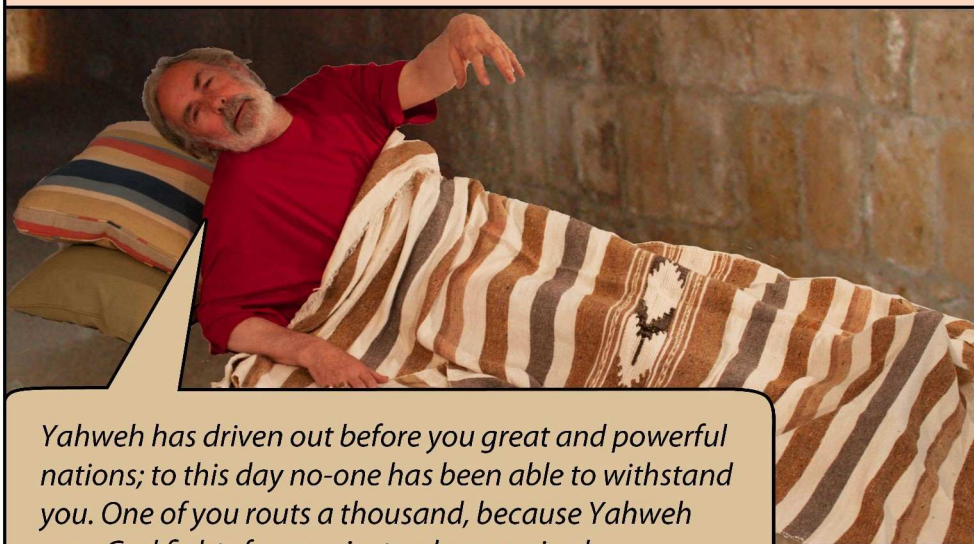


But I can't, for a moment take seriously this business of a military conquest, not because I don't like the idea but because it's altogether unlikely and, furthermore, there's no archaeological evidence supporting it.

So how do you account for it?

Well, writing much later, the revolutionary scribe must have been aware that in some inexplicable way the Israelites had triumphed, since in his day they were clearly in possession of the land.

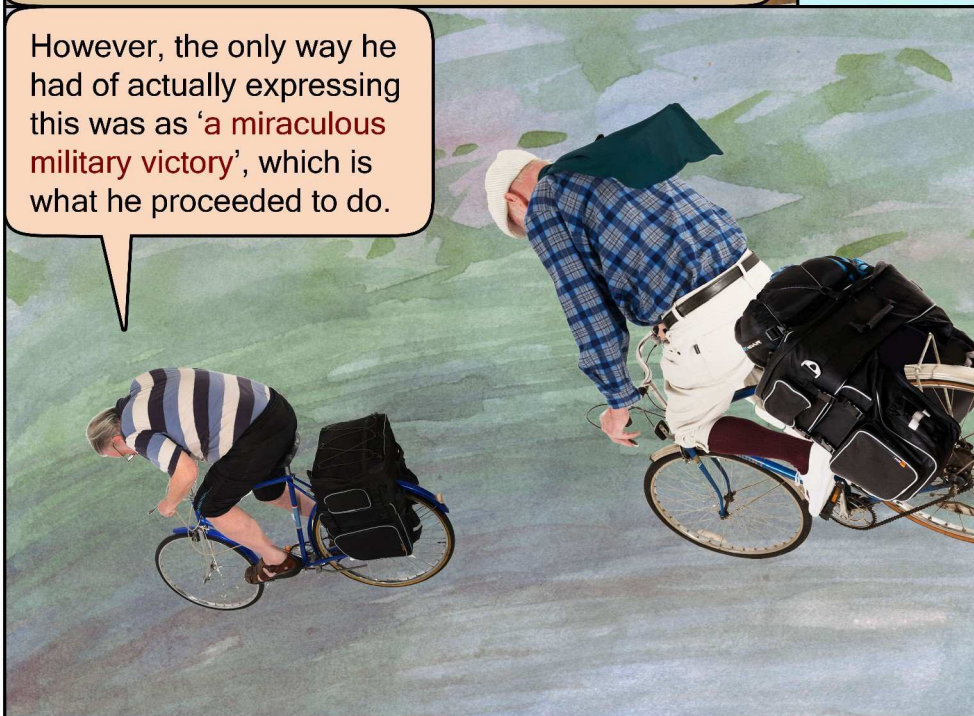
As he saw it, this had come about not because of the Isrealites' military strength but entirely thanks to their ideology: **Yahweh**.



Yahweh has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no-one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because Yahweh your God fights for you, just as he promised.

Josh 23.9-10

However, the only way he had of actually expressing this was as '**a miraculous military victory**', which is what he proceeded to do.



So would you say there's more or less history in Joshua than in Exodus?

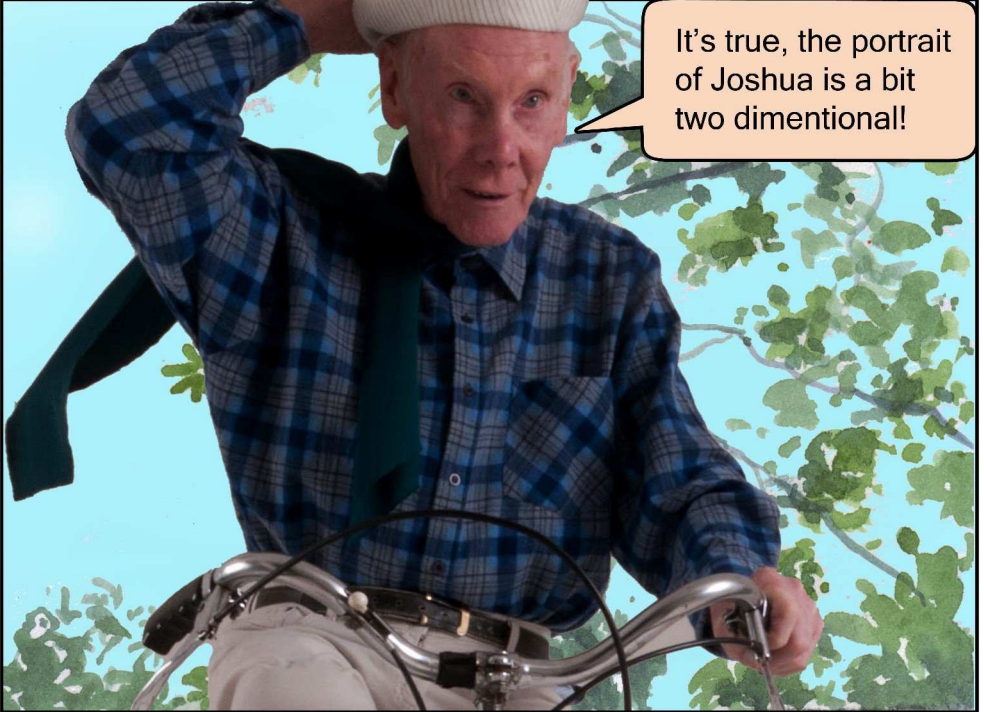
I can hardly claim Joshua is the more historical since we both agree it depends on Exodus.

Furthermore, there are characteristics in the Exodus portrait - Moses' **impetuosity** as a youth and **indecision** as an old man - which gives it unusual credence.

These are glaringly absent in Joshua where all human frailty has been removed in the desire to present a tableau in which now, at last, the Mosaic enterprise is perfectly fulfilled.



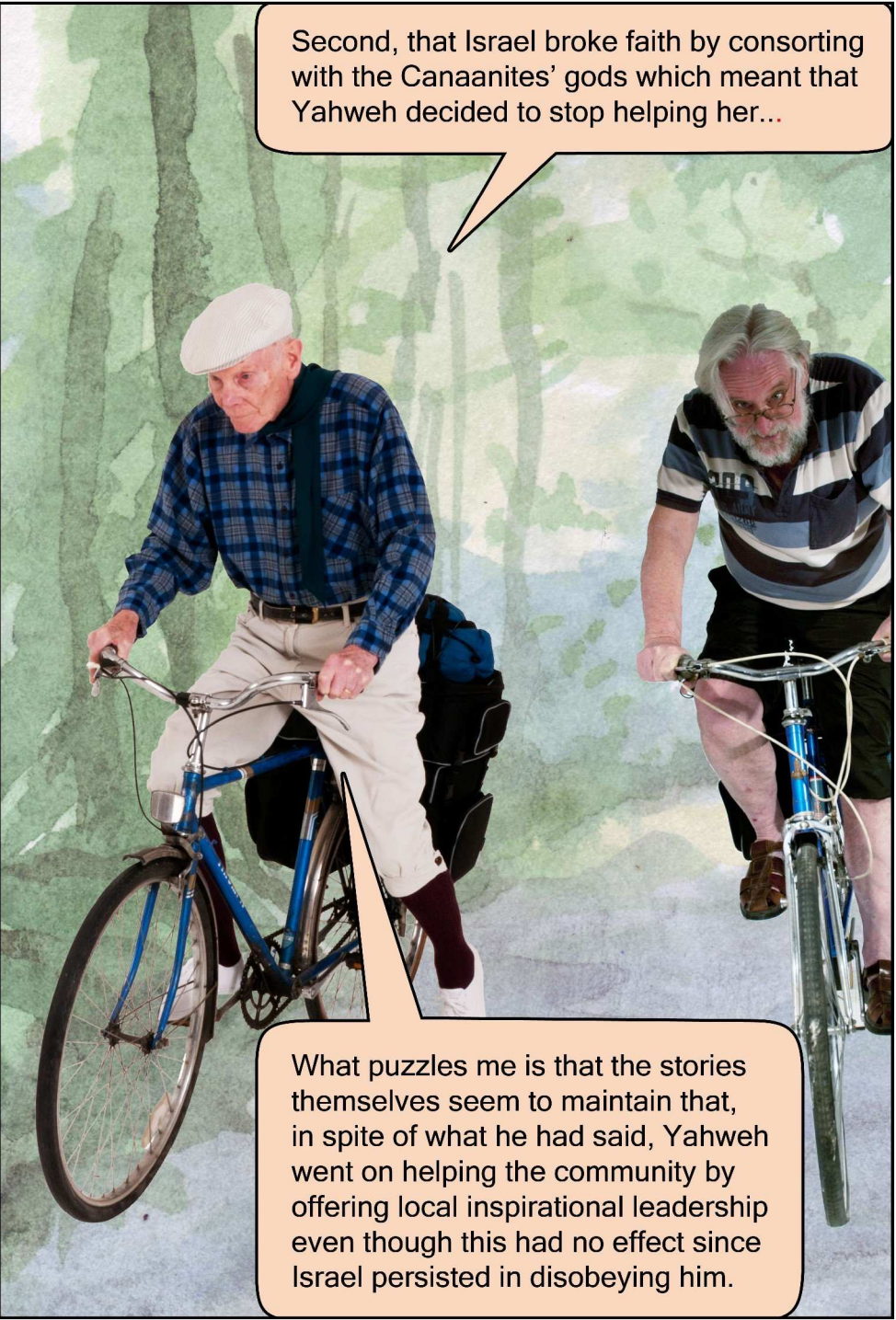
It's true, the portrait of Joshua is a bit two dimensional!



3

JUDGES



A comic-style illustration featuring two men riding bicycles. The man on the left is older, wearing a white flat cap, a blue and black plaid shirt, and light-colored trousers. He has a black bag slung over his shoulder. The man on the right is younger, with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt and dark shorts. They are both riding blue bicycles. The background is a soft, abstract watercolor wash of green and blue. Two speech bubbles are present: one at the top right and one at the bottom center.

Second, that Israel broke faith by consorting with the Canaanites' gods which meant that Yahweh decided to stop helping her...

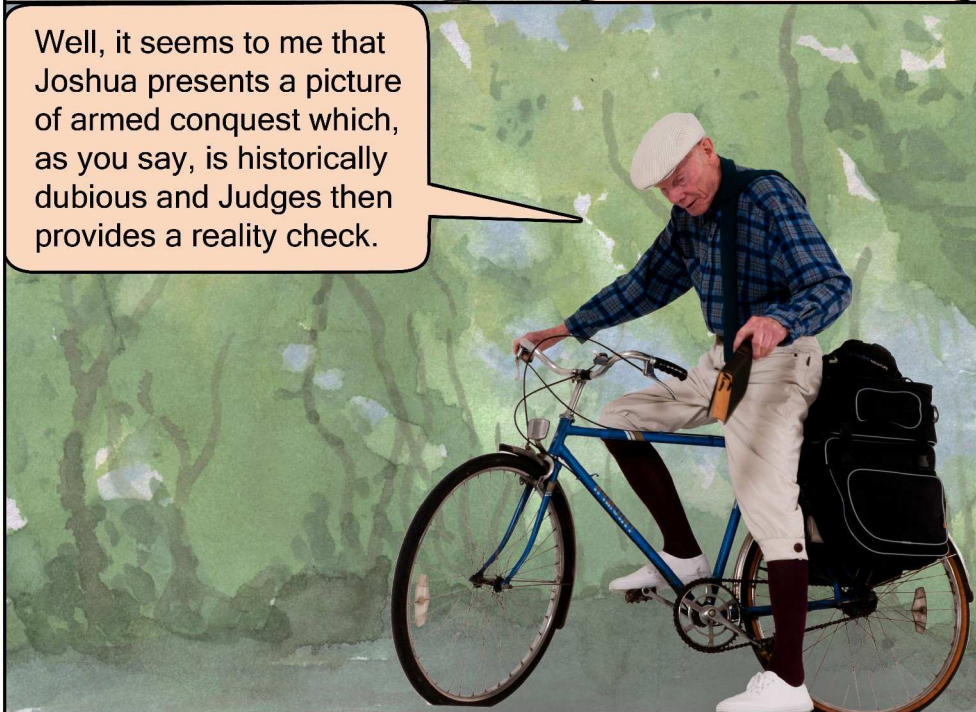
What puzzles me is that the stories themselves seem to maintain that, in spite of what he had said, Yahweh went on helping the community by offering local inspirational leadership even though this had no effect since Israel persisted in disobeying him.

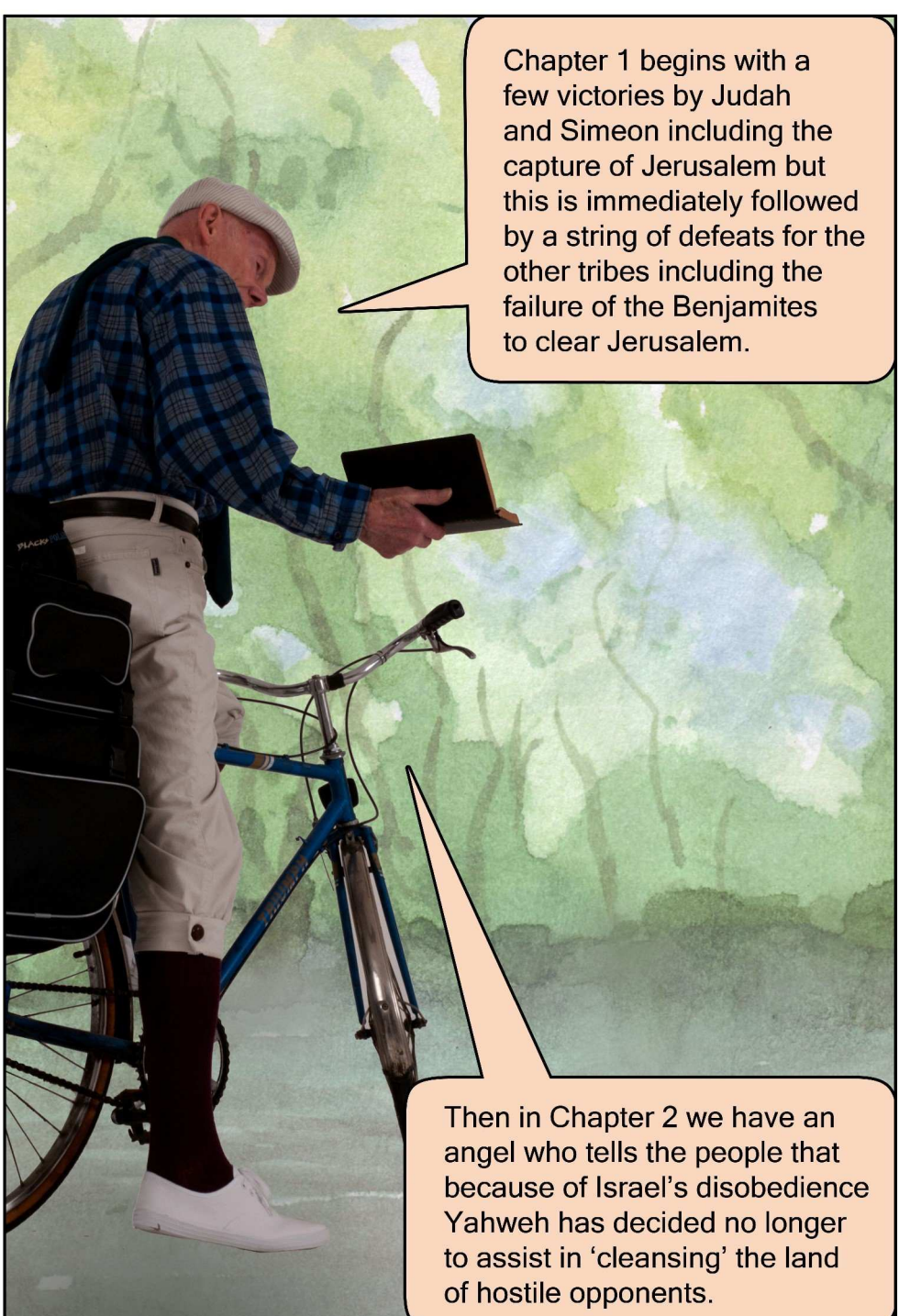
I have to say I find the whole thing very contradictory.



You're right it's going to take some sorting out. But how do you see the book relating to Joshua?

Well, it seems to me that Joshua presents a picture of armed conquest which, as you say, is historically dubious and Judges then provides a reality check.



A man wearing a blue and white plaid shirt, a grey cap, and light-colored trousers is riding a blue bicycle. He is holding a black book or tablet in his right hand. The background is a soft, abstract watercolor wash of green and blue. Two speech bubbles are present: one at the top right and one at the bottom right, both containing text about biblical chapters. The man's bicycle has a black bag attached to the rear.

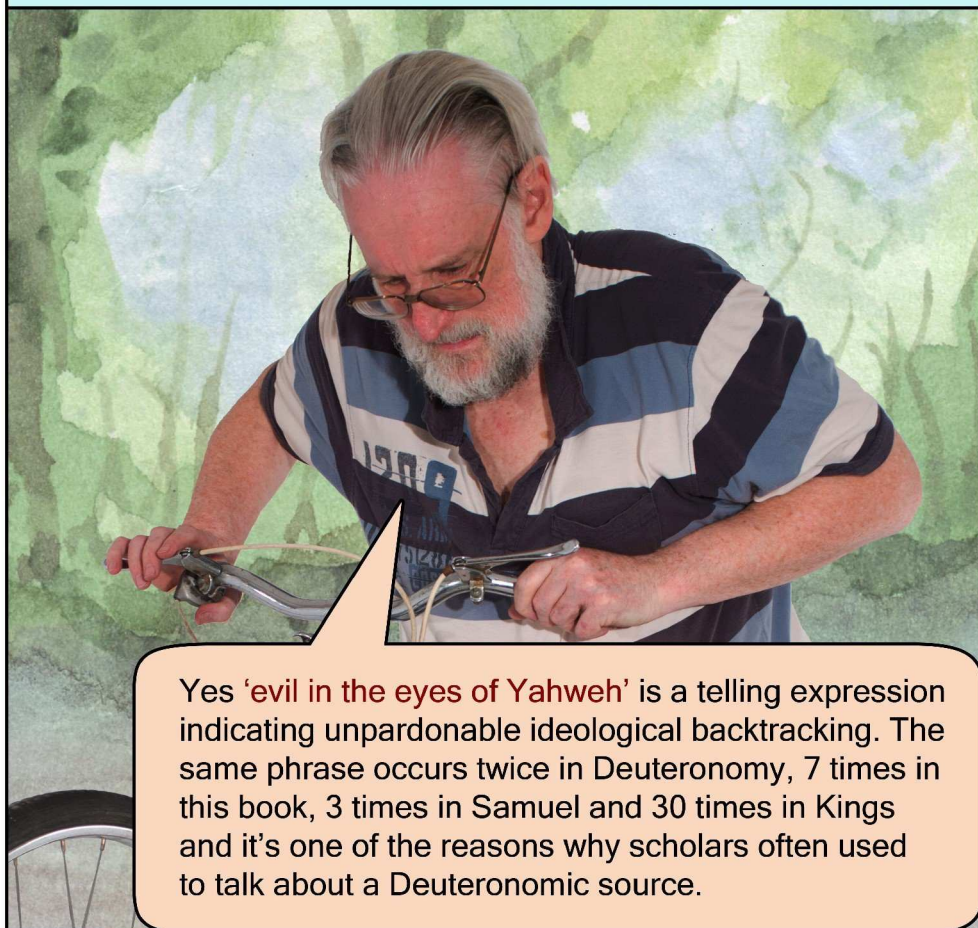
Chapter 1 begins with a few victories by Judah and Simeon including the capture of Jerusalem but this is immediately followed by a string of defeats for the other tribes including the failure of the Benjamites to clear Jerusalem.

Then in Chapter 2 we have an angel who tells the people that because of Israel's disobedience Yahweh has decided no longer to assist in 'cleansing' the land of hostile opponents.

Finally we have what strikes me as a note of doom:

Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and served the Baals. They forsook Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused Yahweh's anger.

Judges 2.11-12



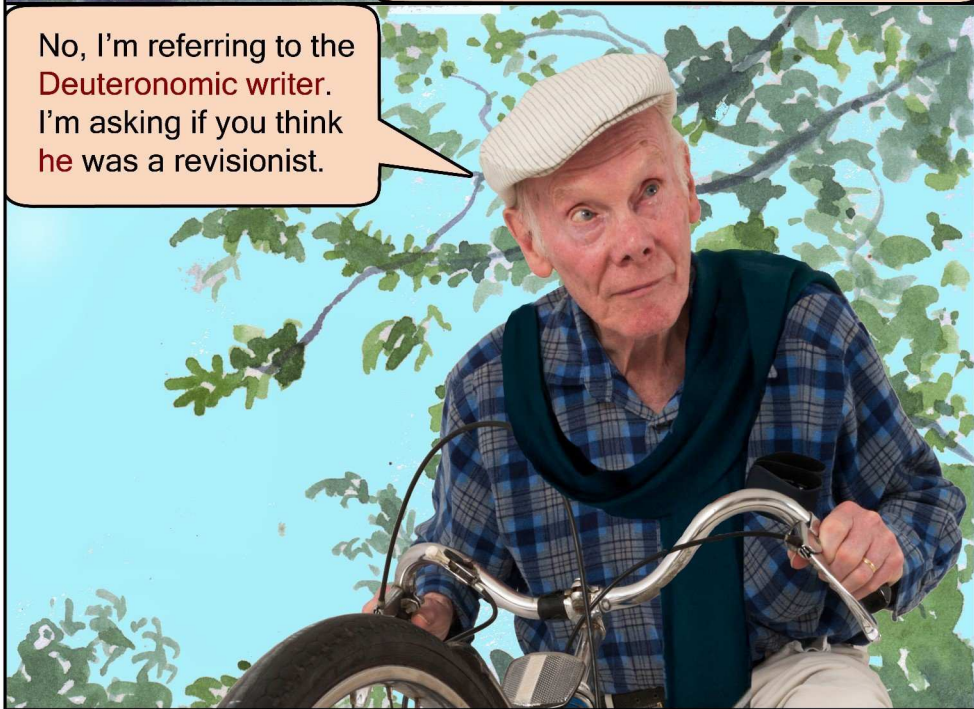
Yes 'evil in the eyes of Yahweh' is a telling expression indicating unpardonable ideological backtracking. The same phrase occurs twice in Deuteronomy, 7 times in this book, 3 times in Samuel and 30 times in Kings and it's one of the reasons why scholars often used to talk about a Deuteronomistic source.

Are you hinting we have revisionism beginning here?



If you're talking about **Israel's back-tracking** as revisionism this was hardly new for the book of Exodus finds it taking place **from the very beginning!**

No, I'm referring to the **Deuteronomic writer**. I'm asking if you think **he** was a revisionist.

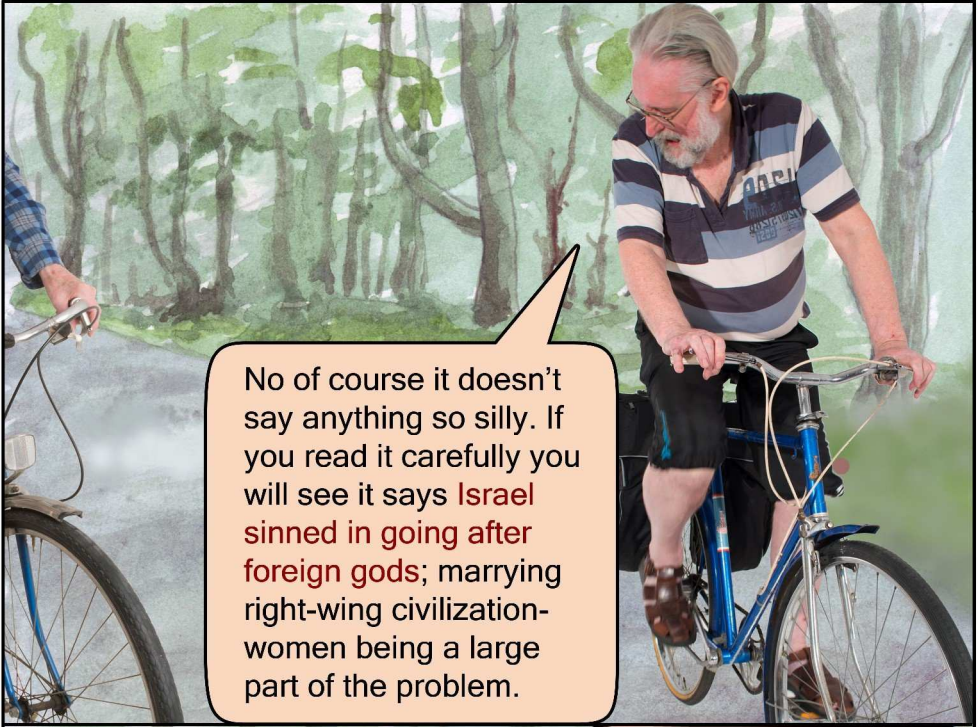




Well, it's clear the post-exilic biblical editors wanted people to conclude **Old Israel had been doomed to fail** leaving room for people like themselves to take over. So your suggestion is perfectly reasonable since these editors were certainly revisionists.

However, the fact is Judges never suggests for a single minute Israel was doomed.

Is that true? Doesn't it say Old Israel committed unpardonable sin in marrying foreign women?

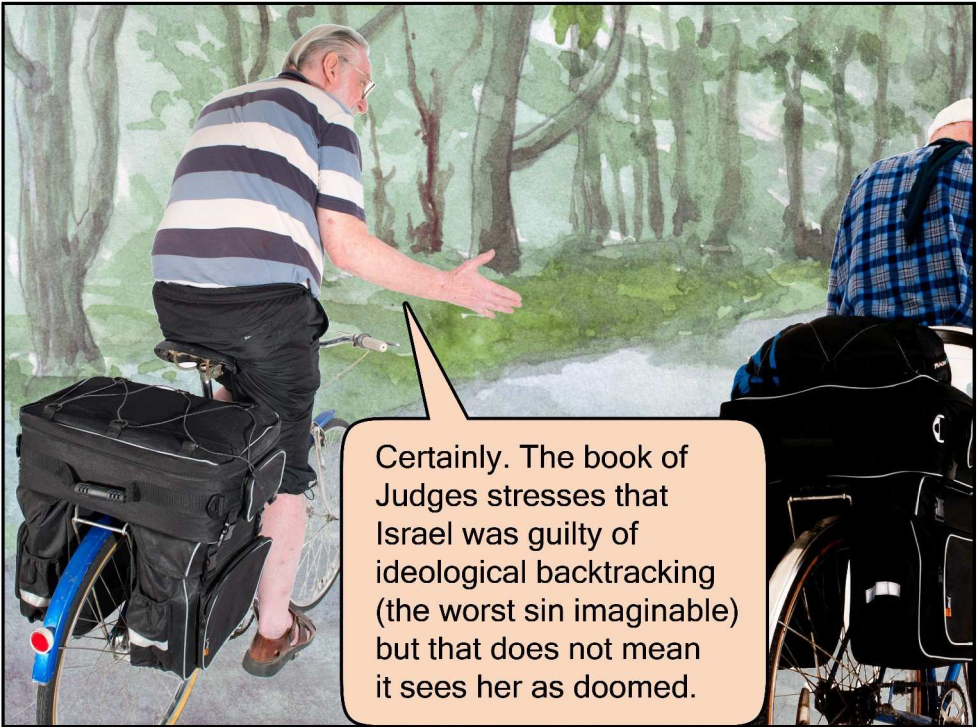


It was conservative revisionists, with their narrow-minded nationalist mentality, who later came to hate foreigners.

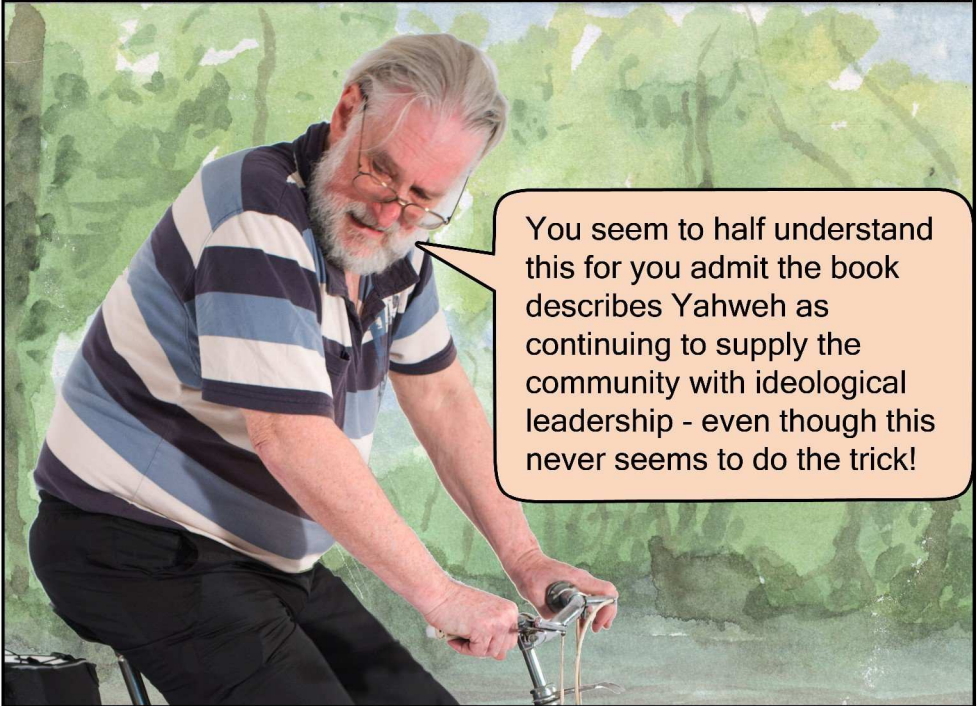


I'm getting confused. You've explained that the revisionist editors wanted us to **misread** this text by mistakenly seeing in it signs that Old Israel was **doomed**. Can you now explain how we can read it properly using a marginal approach.





Certainly. The book of Judges stresses that Israel was guilty of ideological backtracking (the worst sin imaginable) but that does not mean it sees her as doomed.



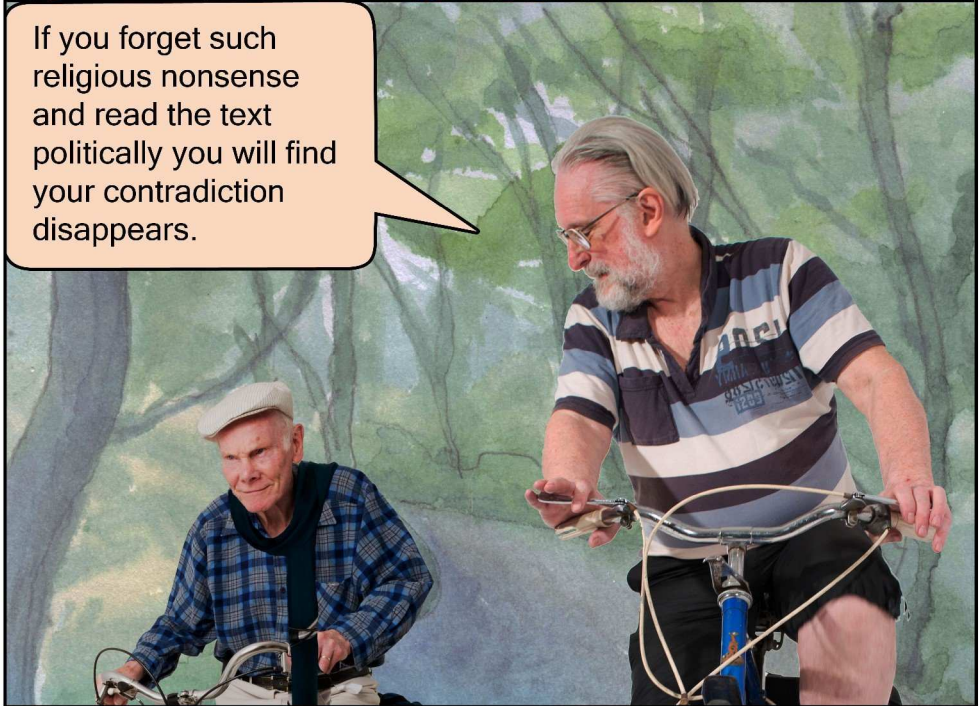
You seem to half understand this for you admit the book describes Yahweh as continuing to supply the community with ideological leadership - even though this never seems to do the trick!

You find it contradictory Yahweh should **help** by providing leaders at the same time as **refusing to help** by driving out the Canaanites.

In a nut shell!

But this is only because you adopt a **religious** approach to the text mistakenly seeing Yahweh as a spiritual being.

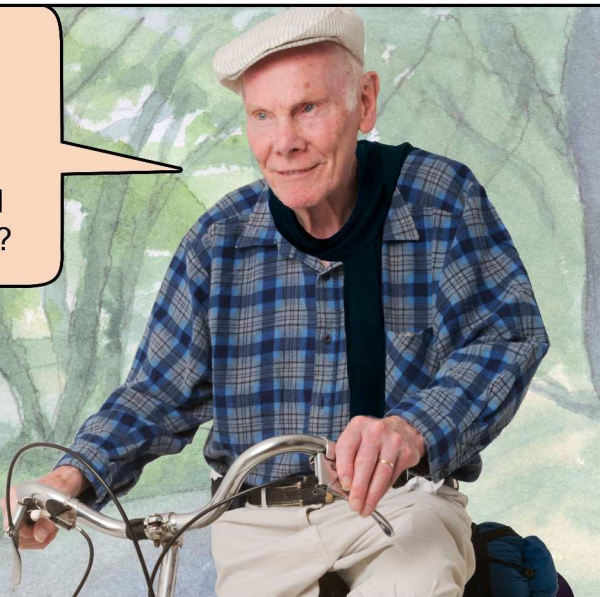




Like most of the gods in the ancient Near East Yahweh represented a community's ideology. However, in his case we're not talking about some run-of-the-mill, tinpot, conservative set-up but, on the contrary, the revolutionary Hebrew marginals.

This means that what we have in this text is not an aspiration for local dominance but rather a plan to transform the world.

So what is the writer trying to put across when he says Yahweh refused to get rid of the Canaanites when Israel went after foreign gods?



He's saying that in exchanging the marginal ideology for the civilisational practices of the Canaanites, Israel inadvertently cut herself off from her own power-source thereby rendering herself vulnerable to the very forces she sought to overthrow.

Just bought myself a house in the city!



Who are those people?

They're Israelites. They think they're so civilised!

When he then says Yahweh continued to send inspirational leaders he's just pointing out that the roots of revolutionary marginalism remained present and blossomed from time to time, without fundamentally altering the overall situation.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh ...

So he sold them into the hands of ...

*But when they cried out he raised up for them
a deliverer ...*

But the Israelites again did evil in they eyes of Yahweh ...

I find nothing in the least
bit contradictory about
these political statements
which taken together
make perfect sense.



It's only when you
read them as religion
that everything turns
into nonsense.

Perhaps we should now look at some of the stories.



We can do that but I'm not certain how helpful it will be since they are traditional tales which have been selected not because of their value as history but rather in order to cover the full spread of the problems Israel faced.

Othniel and the Mesopotamian menace.
(Judges 3.7)

Gideon and the Midianite/
Ishmaelite menace.
(Judges 6.1)

Ehud and the Moabite menace. (Judges 3.12)

Jephthah and the Ammonite menace.
(Judges 10.6)

Deborah and the Canaanite menace.
(Judges 4.1)

Samson and the Philistine menace.
(Judges 13.1)

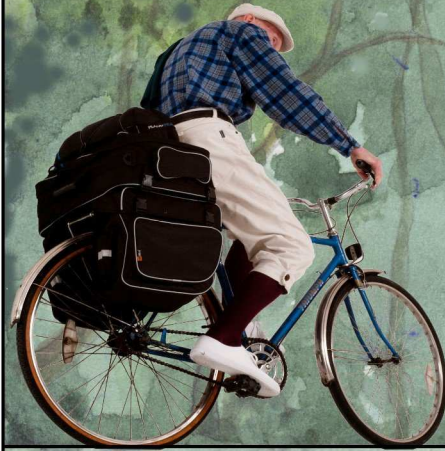
As such the stories are not without interest and variety but our business is not to pan them in search of historical tit-bits but rather to work out what the writer was trying to say in using them.

There's no problem in understanding what he was basically saying: Israel's revolution had ground to a halt because of her ideological infidelity and because of practical problems to do with her organization.

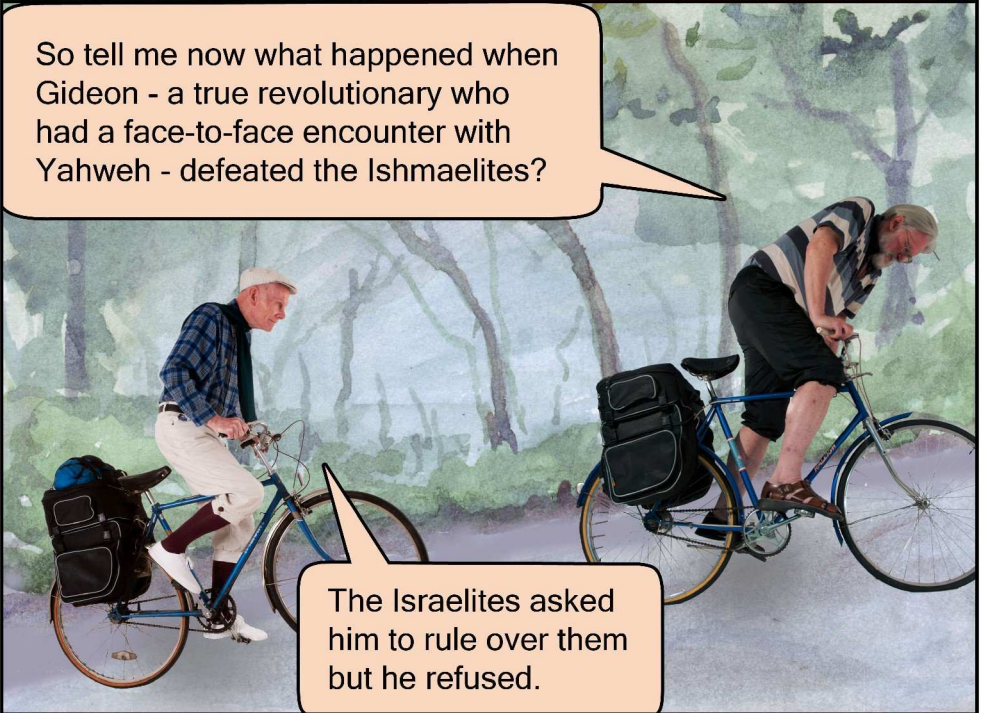
However, this clarity can easily become muddled when it comes to dealing with the details of an individual story as you will soon see.

Are you saying these are not true stories but rather representations as in Genesis.

No, they are not like the Genesis narratives for they are, on the whole, quite believable and the characters within them are not communities in disguise!



However, though they look to us like history it's not history as we know it. So **BEWARE!**



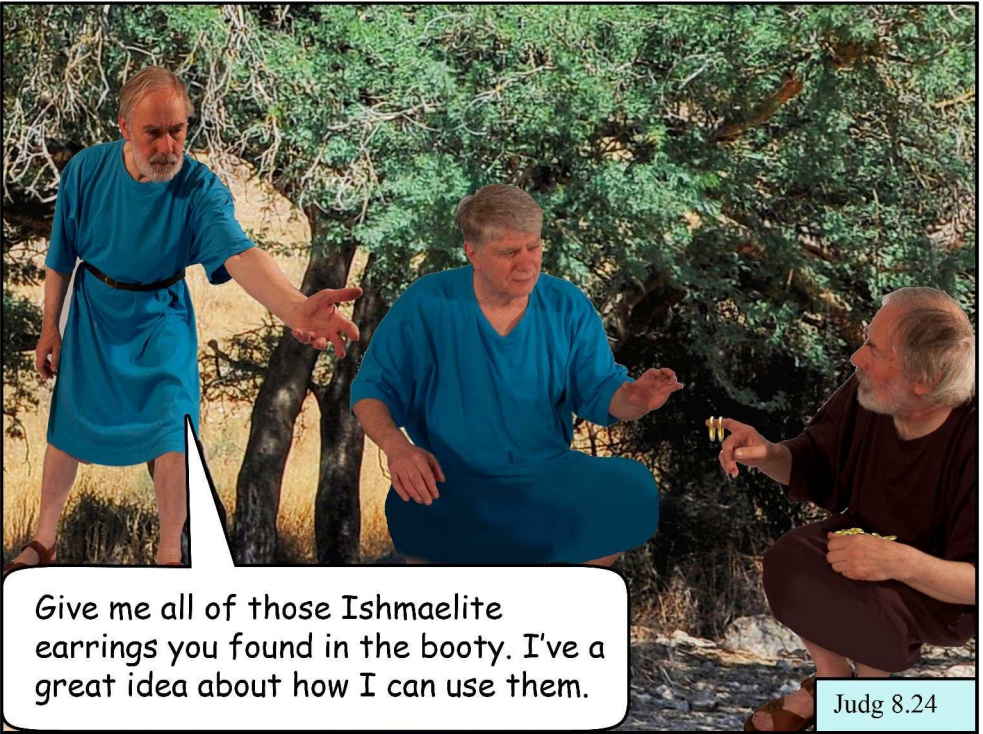
Rule over us — you, your son and your grandson —
because you have saved us from the hand of Midian.

I will not rule over
you, nor will my son
rule over you. Yahweh
will rule over you.

Judg 8.22-23

Sounds to me like a ringing
ideological rejection of
kingship wouldn't you say?

True, but the point is lost when Gideon
tells everyone to join him in wickedly
withholding devoted objects!



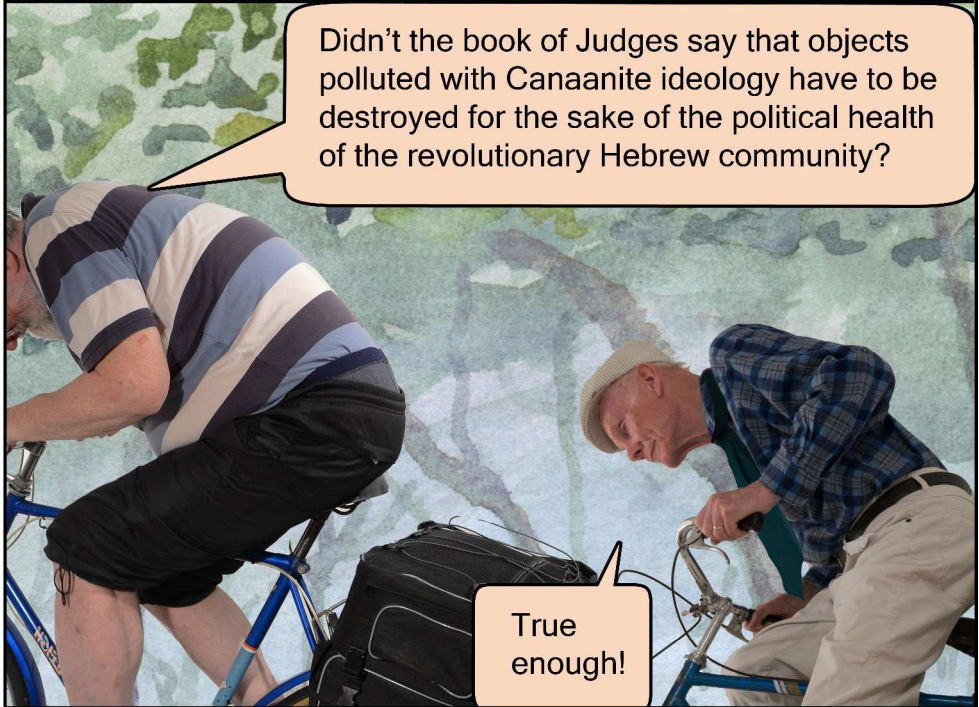
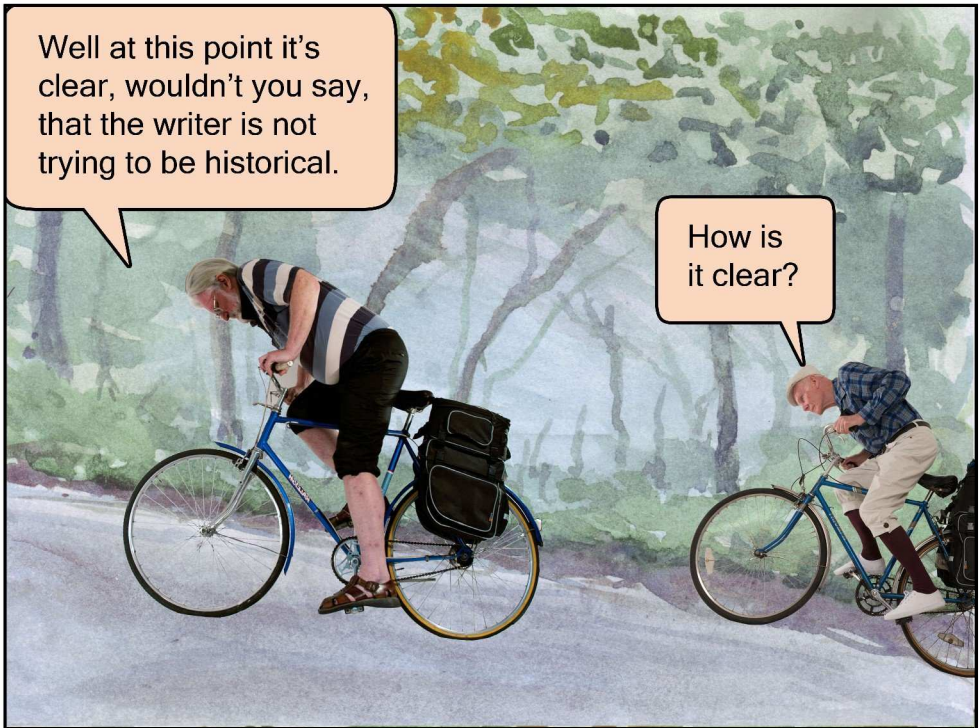
Give me all of those Ishmaelite earrings you found in the booty. I've a great idea about how I can use them.

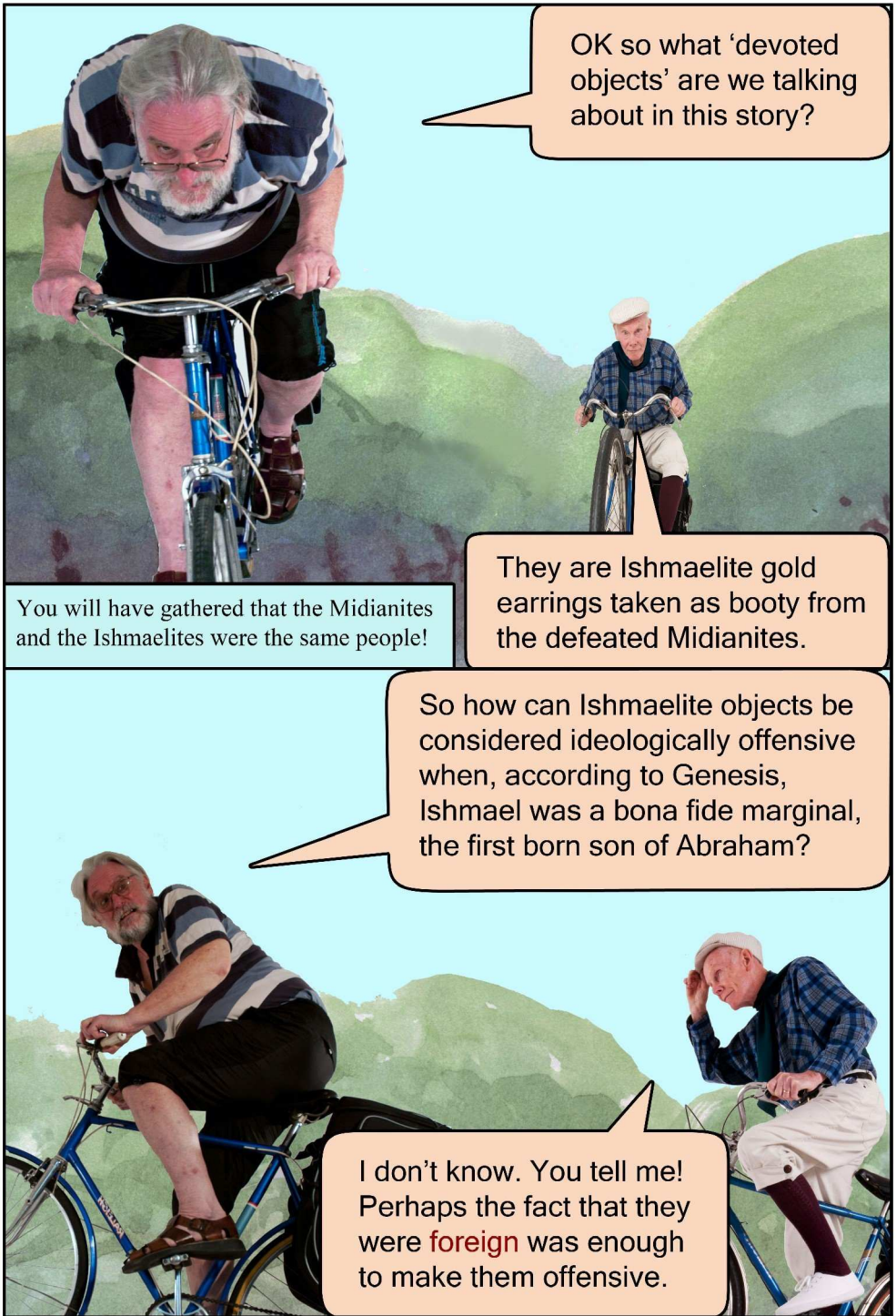
Judg 8.24



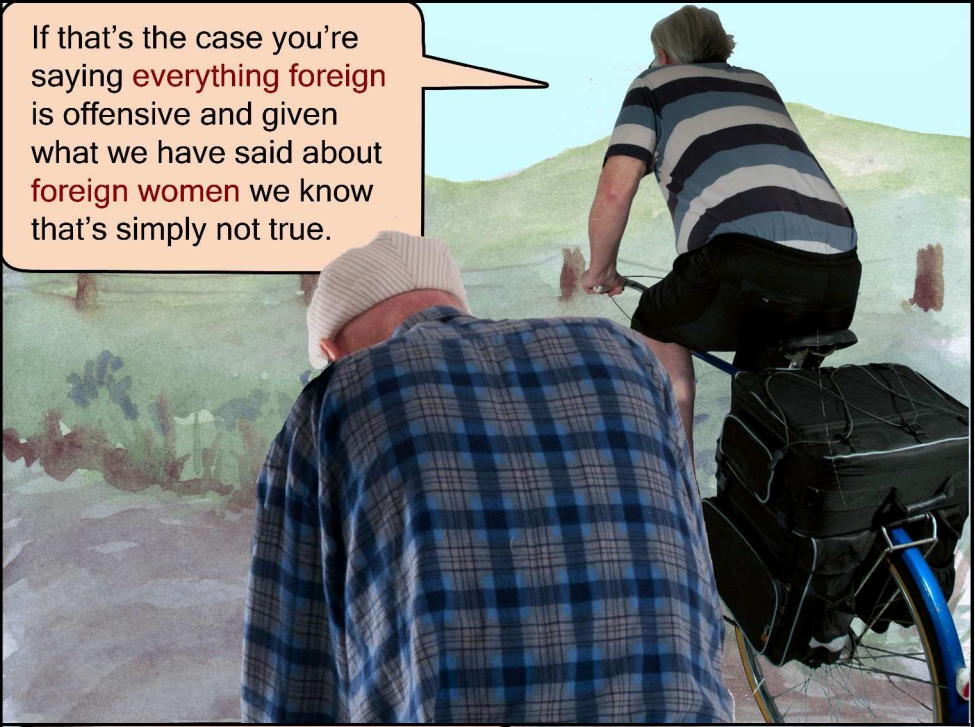
What are you on about now?

Yes, I warned you to be careful about reading the story as history!

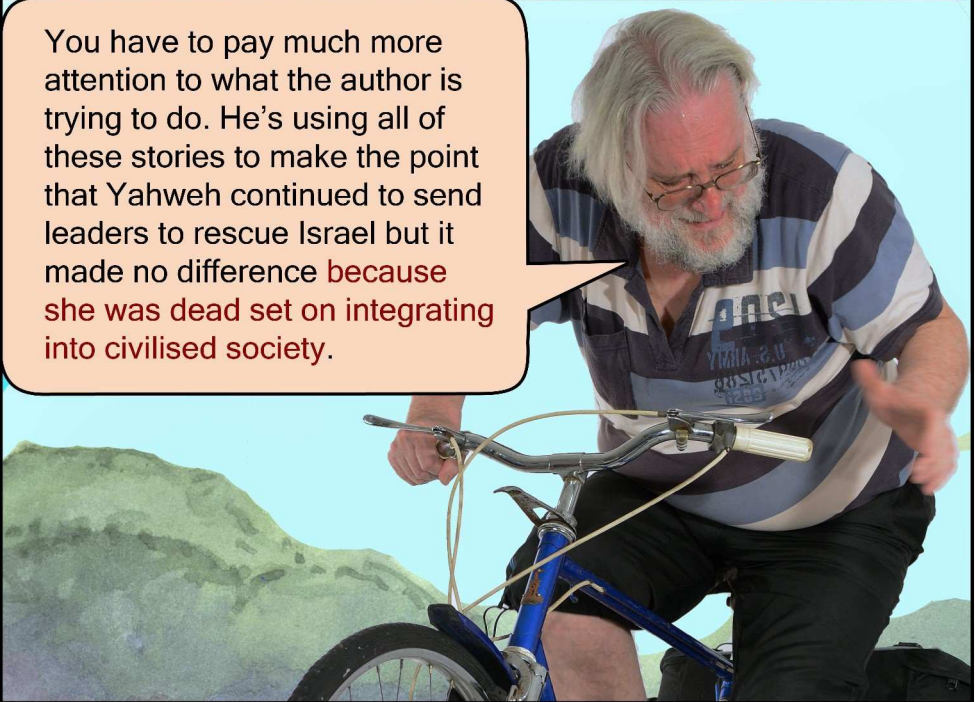




If that's the case you're saying **everything foreign** is offensive and given what we have said about **foreign women** we know that's simply not true.



You have to pay much more attention to what the author is trying to do. He's using all of these stories to make the point that Yahweh continued to send leaders to rescue Israel but it made no difference **because she was dead set on integrating into civilised society.**



However, our storyteller had a problem for, unlike all of Israel's other adversaries, the Midianites were nomads and, as such, represented **no ideological threat!**



He was certainly aware of this for, though he often talks about Israel serving Canaanite gods, he never ever accuses them of worshipping Midianite deities.

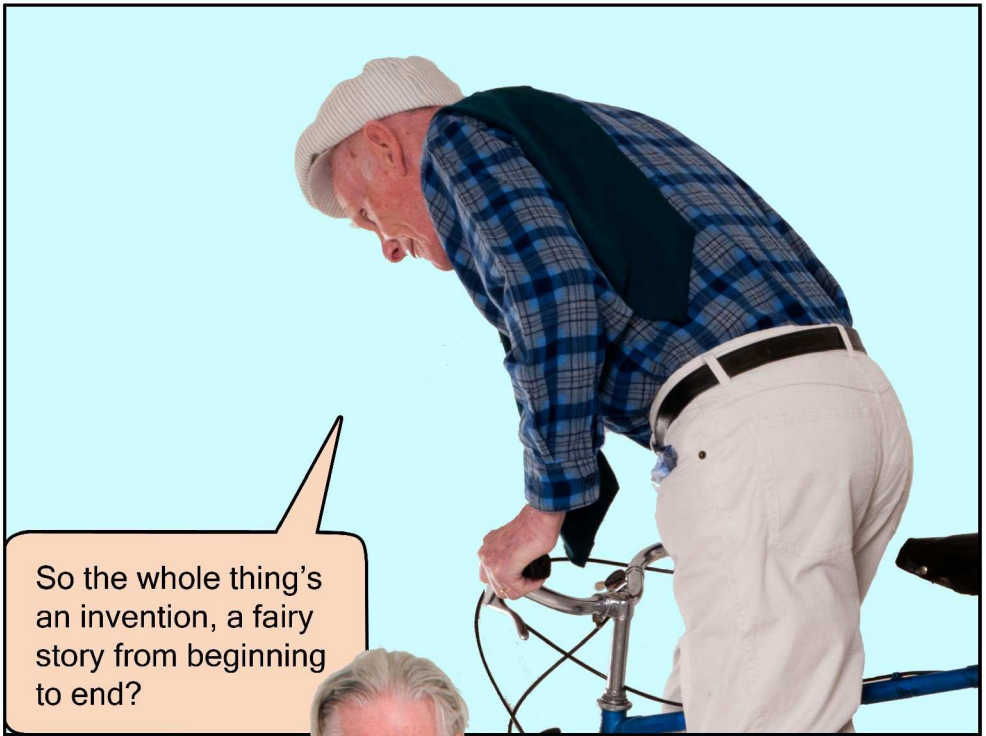
So why did he say that the Ishmaelite earrings were devoted objects if it made no sense in his story?

Well it did make sense... excellent sense... not here in **this story** but in **the one that follows!** *

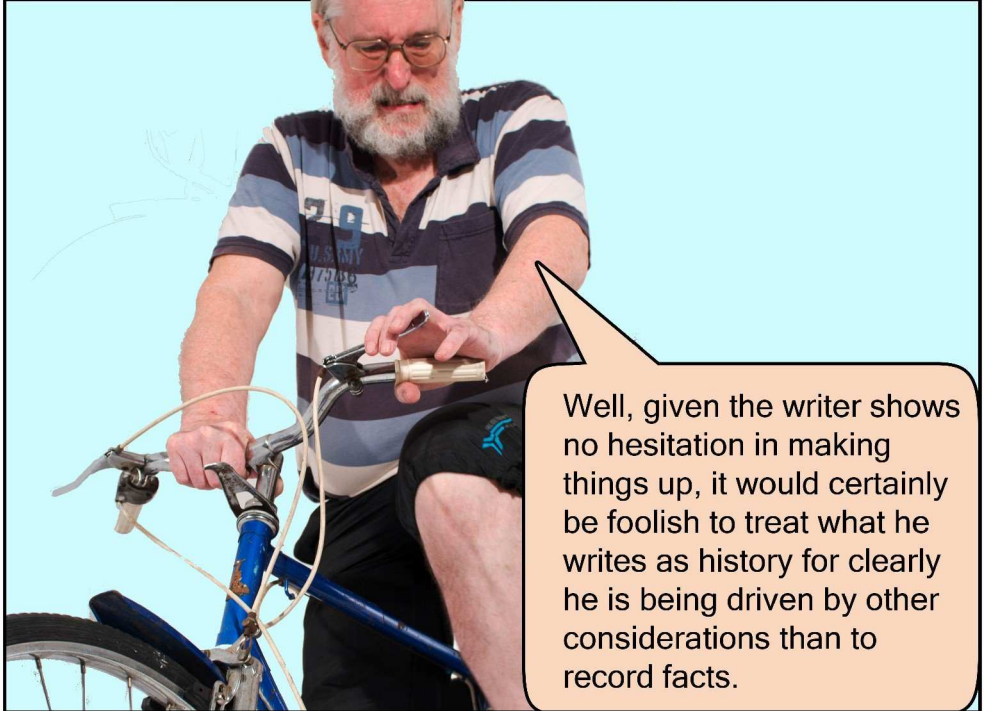


* See Chapter 9. 1-5

There he relates that when Gideon - a very successful man with many sons - died, the family tore itself apart. Our storyteller seems to feel this tragedy, which he sees as reflecting Israel's ongoing failure, needs explaining: hence Gideon's sin in keeping the devoted objects.



So the whole thing's an invention, a fairy story from beginning to end?



Well, given the writer shows no hesitation in making things up, it would certainly be foolish to treat what he writes as history for clearly he is being driven by other considerations than to record facts.

But it would be a great mistake to write-off everything he says. For though neither you nor I would want to give credence to his contention that disasters which befall families are the result of parental sins...



...it would be hard to deny he sees himself as part of a revolutionary tradition that had at least some basis in history.

I'm begining to see what you're driving at. You're saying there is history behind these stories but they themselves are not meant to be read simply as histories!

Precisely!

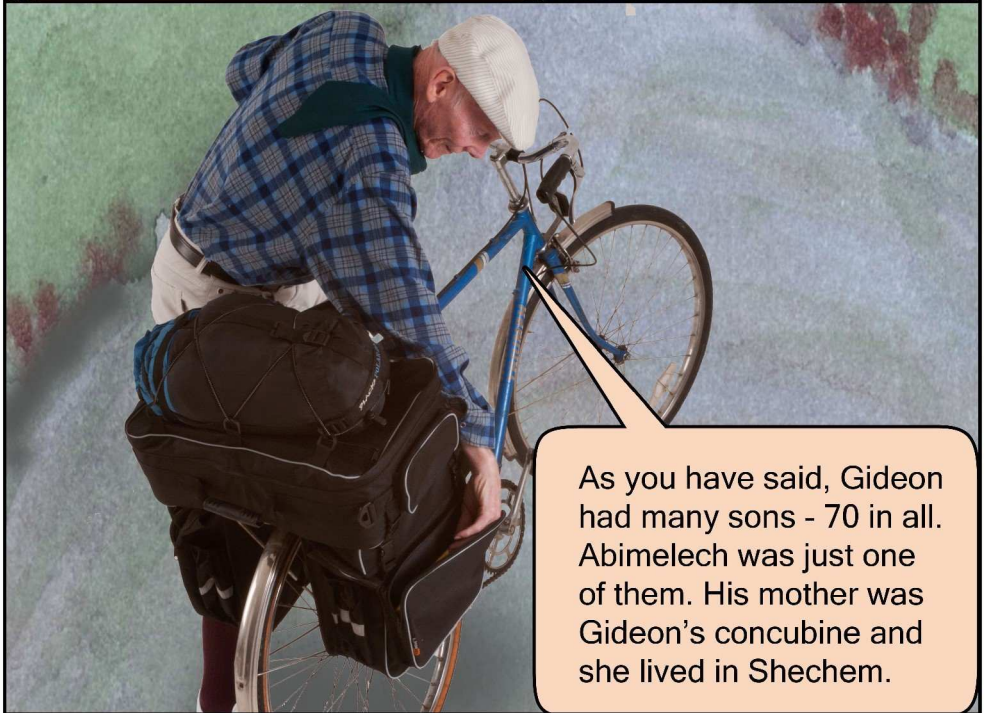
Now remind me once again what you think this story - when true to history - is saying.

This story is just the writer's way of telling us that Israel found herself in a fix since the only way of dealing with her organisational problems seemed to be by making further ideological compromises.



She had already found it impossible to resist the cultural attractions of civilisation and now, as a result, she was faced with the prospect of having to join in the general struggle for dominance.





When Gideon died Abimelech went to Schechem looking for support against his brothers and the citizens gave him money to hire men to get rid of the competition.

Judg 9.1-6



In the subsequent slaughter, all of Abimelech's brothers were dispatched except for Jotham who was the youngest.



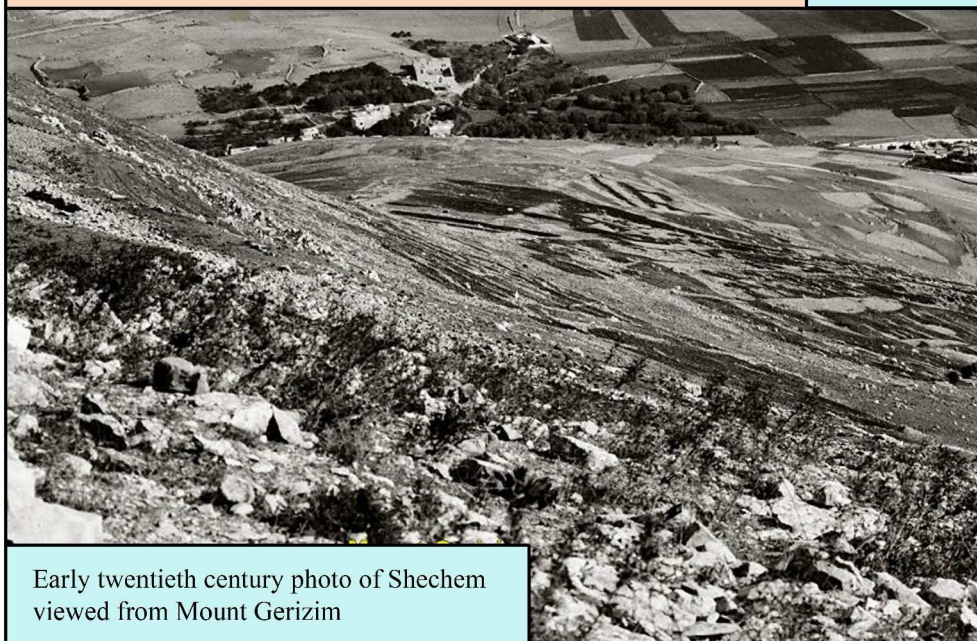
When the citizens of Shechem heard of the success of the coup they made Abimalech their king... the first Israelite monarch we come across in the Bible.

Judg 9.6

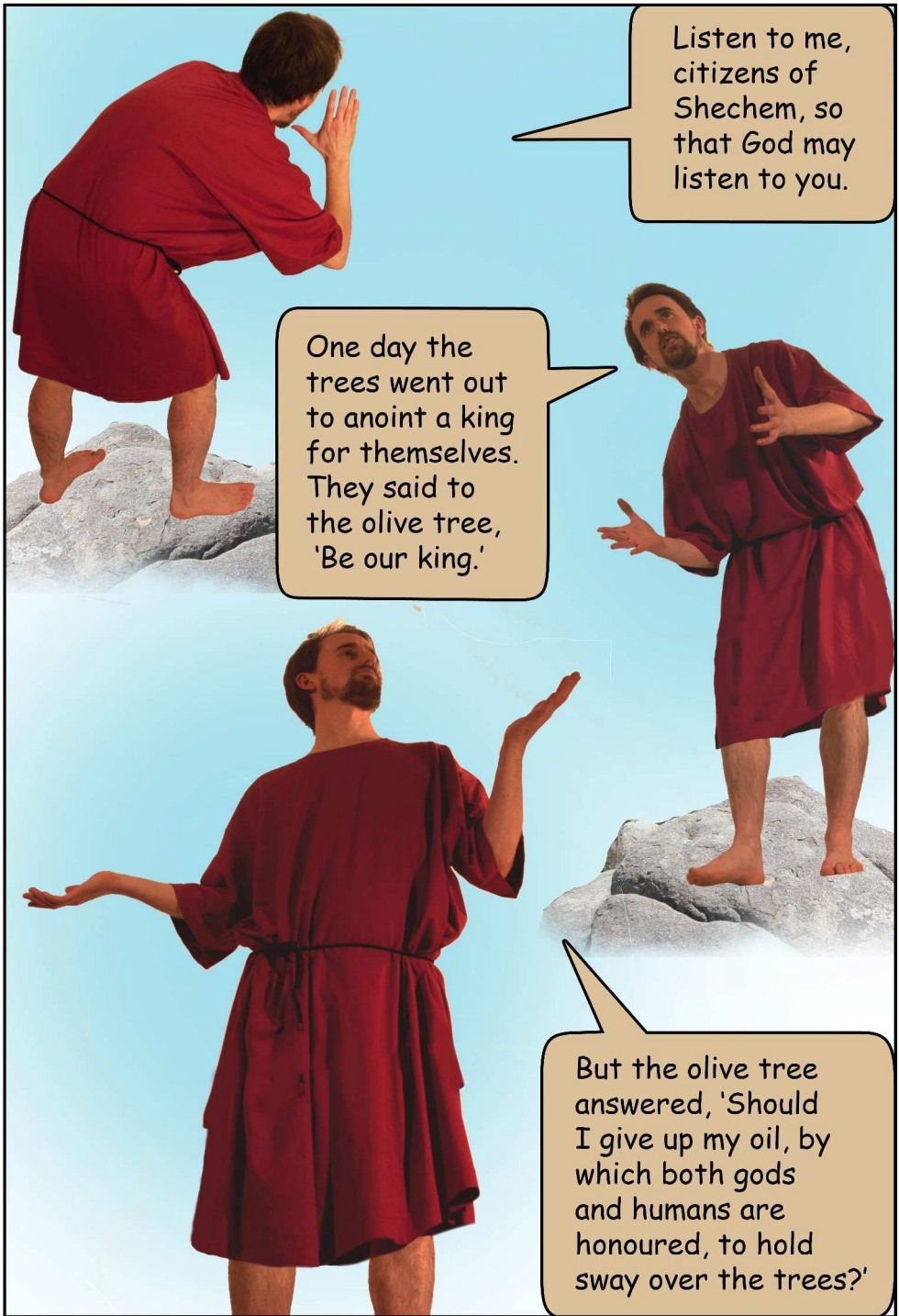


However when Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, learned the news he went to the top of Mount Gerizim and cried out to the people of Shechem telling them a parable...

Judg 9.7-15



Early twentieth century photo of Shechem viewed from Mount Gerizim




Listen to me, citizens of Shechem, so that God may listen to you.


One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, 'Be our king.'

But the olive tree answered, 'Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honoured, to hold sway over the trees?'






But the vine answered,
'Should I give up my wine,
which cheers both gods
and humans, to hold sway
over the trees?'



Finally all
the trees
said to the
thornbush,
'Come and
be our king.'



The thornbush said to the trees,
'If you really want to anoint me
king over you, come and take refuge
in my shade; but if not, then let fire
come out of the thornbush to burn
up the cedars of Lebanon!'



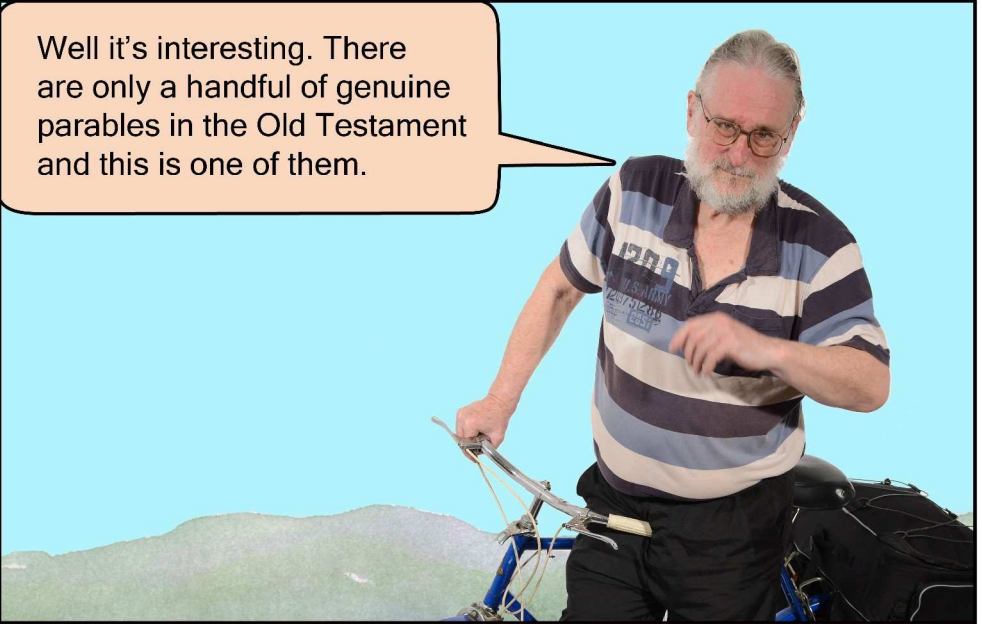
Forget the curse and concentrate instead on the principle topic which is the **kingship** issue. Tell me what Jotham is saying about it.

He seems to be likening Abimelech to a thornbush.

He's doing a lot more than that but it's a start. Can you tell me a bit more!

I'll need your help since parables are tricky but I know you're an expert!

Well it's interesting. There are only a handful of genuine parables in the Old Testament and this is one of them.



Like similes, parables are illustrations only they are rather more complex.

A **simile** illustrates a **characteristic**.

*It was **as tough as old boots**.*


A **complex simile** illustrates a **phenomenon**.

***As wax melts before fire**, let the wicked perish before God.*

A **parable** illustrates an **if.... then... logic**.

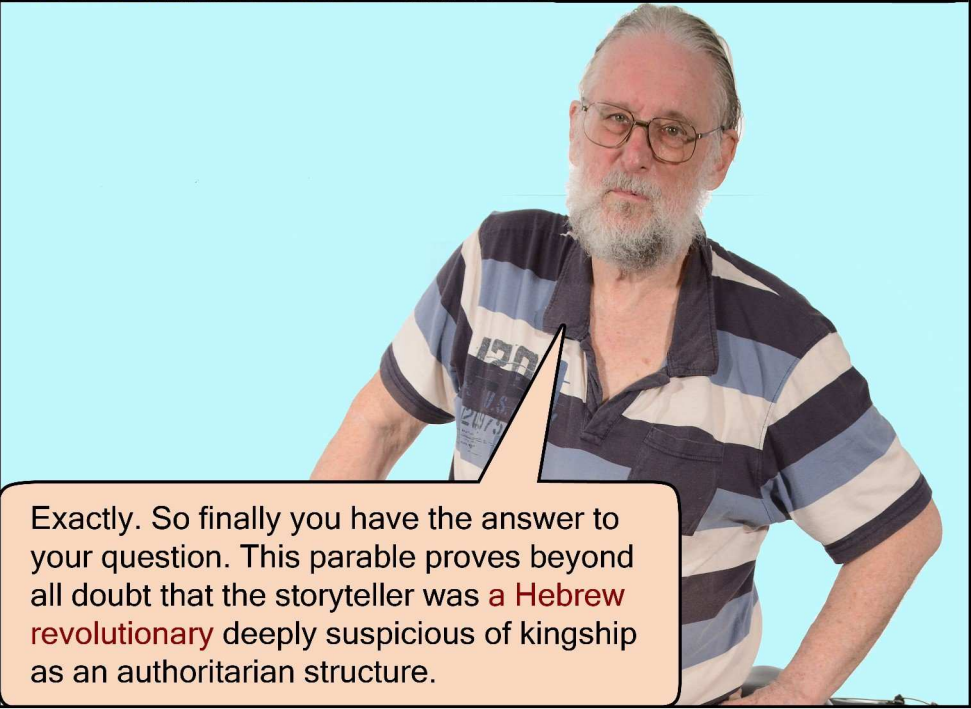
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

So let's see if we can identify the logic in this story:

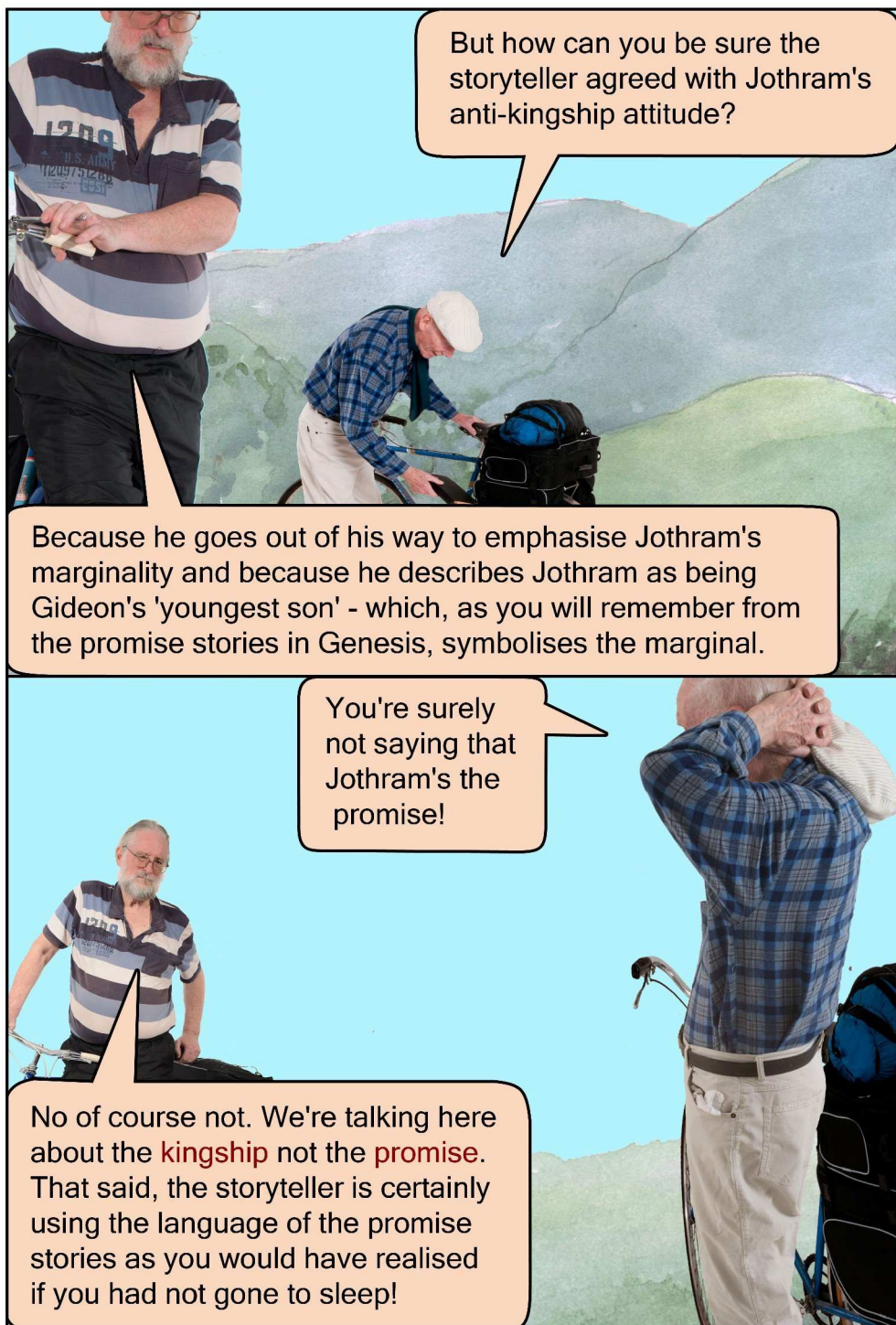
A man in a blue and white striped polo shirt and black shorts is standing on a blue bicycle, gesturing with his right hand towards a large, abstract, green and blue background. He is facing away from the camera. Another man, wearing a blue plaid shirt, a white cap, and light-colored pants, is standing next to him, looking at the first man. A black bag is hanging from the bicycle's handlebars.

If you choose to be ruled by a king then...?

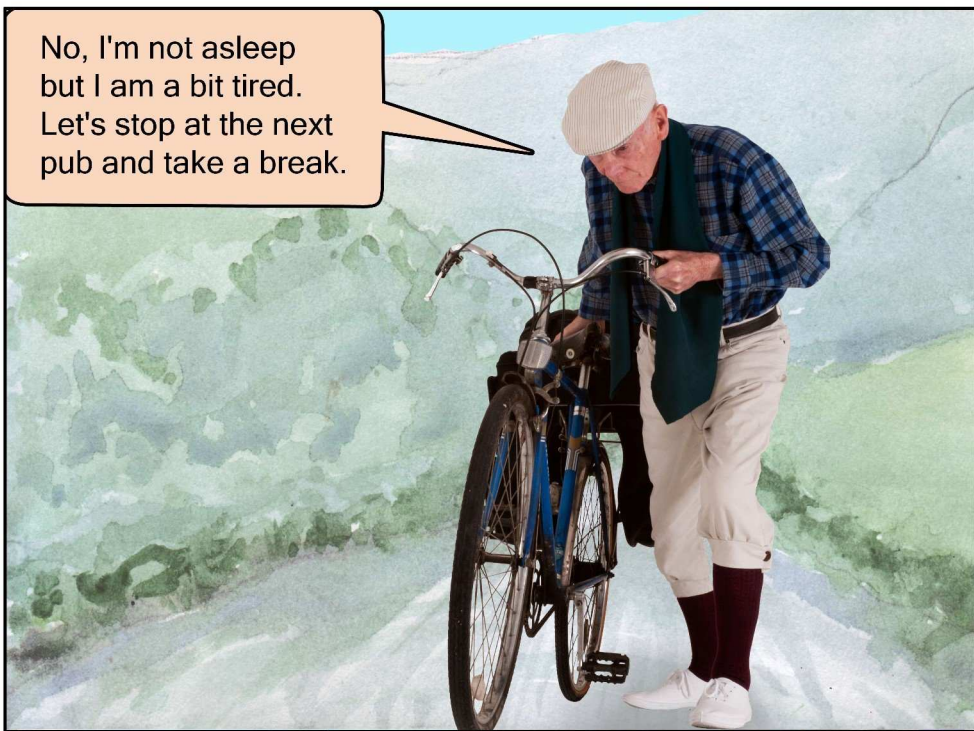
...don't be surprised when you end up being oppressed by a scoundrel!

A close-up shot of the man in the striped shirt, now facing the camera. He has a grey beard and is wearing glasses. He is leaning forward with his hands on his hips, looking directly at the viewer.

Exactly. So finally you have the answer to your question. This parable proves beyond all doubt that the storyteller was a **Hebrew revolutionary** deeply suspicious of kingship as an authoritarian structure.



No, I'm not asleep
but I am a bit tired.
Let's stop at the next
pub and take a break.



So do you think the
storyteller made up
this parable like all
the rest?



Well, he certainly made up **the story as a whole**, as you can tell by this early photo taken from near Schechem. For it shows that if Jothram was at the top of Mount Gerizim he would not have been seen in the valley, let alone heard!



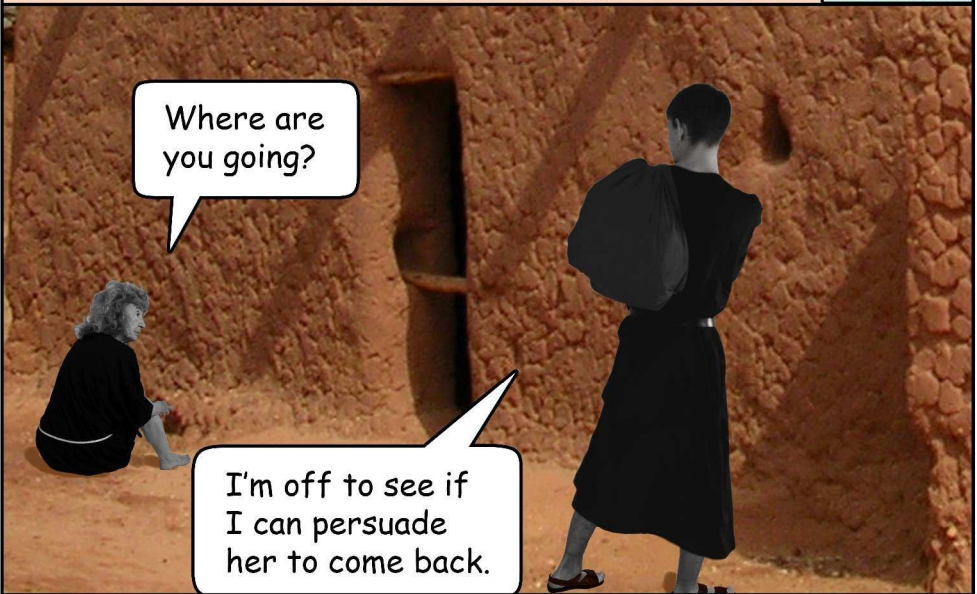
People suggest he might have been calling from a nearby cliff... but let's forget such foolishness and concentrate instead on the last story in the book of Judges which, perhaps, you could now tell us about.



What's interesting about the final story in Judges is that, whereas all the others are concerned about external threats to the community, here the threat is from within.

The story itself is about a Levite from the north of Ephraim and his concubine. She had become fed up with him and had returned to live with her Dad in Bethlehem.

Judg 19



Where are you going?

I'm off to see if I can persuade her to come back.

When he arrived looking for her in Bethlehem his father-in-law was overjoyed to see him.



After three days he decided it was time to return home but his father-in-law urged him to tarry.



So the two men sat and ate and drank... and then, of course, it was too late to leave and the Levite found himself back where he had started.



The next day it was just the same only in the evening the Levite decided enough was enough.



Look, it's almost evening. Spend the night here. Early tomorrow morning you can ...

No! No! We really must go!

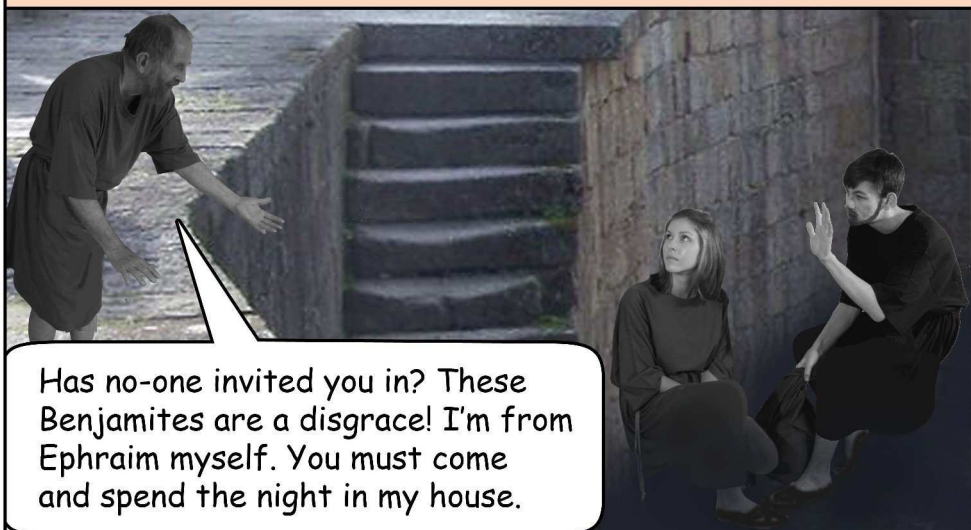
The trouble was there was now insufficient time to make it back home in one day. However, they struggled on to Gibeah - a town in Benjamite country - because they did not want to spend the night amongst foreigners.



I hope someone will take us in...

Of course they will. They're Israelites!

But they were out of luck for no-one offered them hospitality and they were beginning to resign themselves to spending the night in the open when an old man hailed them.



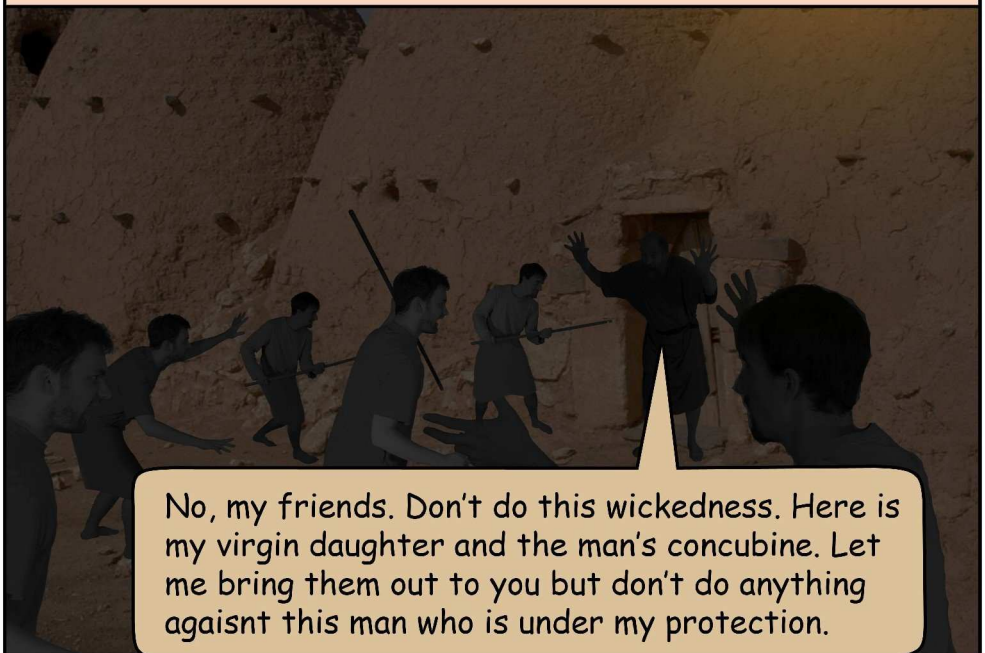
So they went with him to his home and he made them very comfortable.




While they were enjoying a meal, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door...



The old man went outside to remonstrate with them...




But the men would not listen to him.




Get out
of our way!

You foreigners are
all the same thinking
you are better
than us!




If you don't,
we'll treat you
worse than him!

So the Levite took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go.



I'm famished. Have
you anything to eat
in the house?

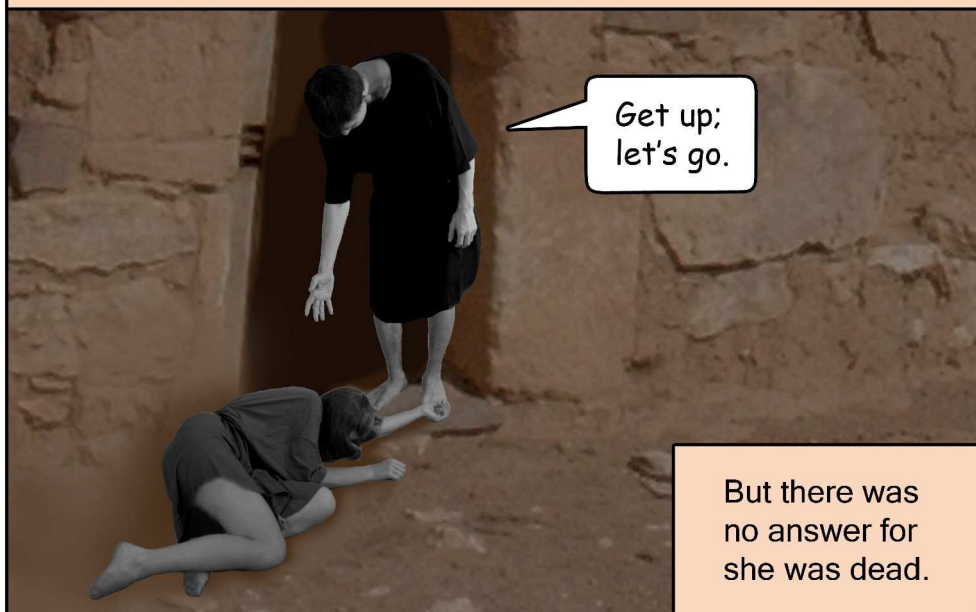


All you think about
is your stomach.
I need my bed.

The woman dragged herself to the house where her master was staying and, falling down, lay there scratching at the door until it became fully light.



So, when her master got up and stepped outside to continue on his way, he found her lying there in the doorway...



But there was no answer for she was dead.





The man put the lifeless body on his donkey and set out for home.

Judg 19.28



When he arrived there, he took a knife and cut the corpse, limb by limb, into twelve parts and sent them into all the areas of Israel.





Understandably everyone in Israel was appalled.

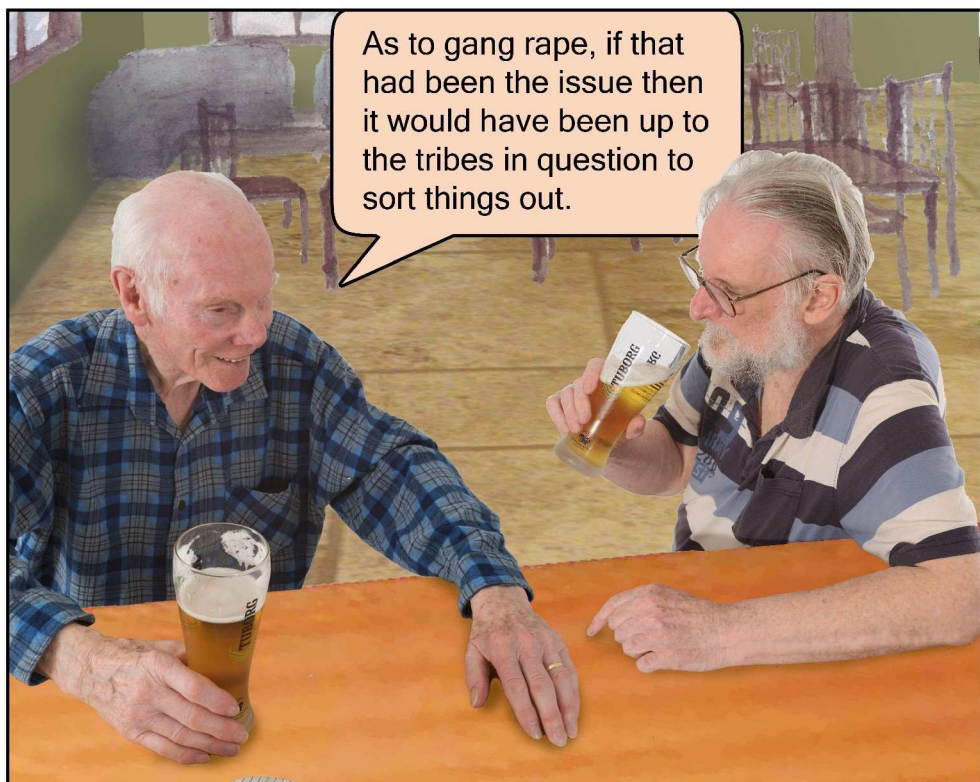
Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt. Just imagine! We must do something! So speak up!



Were they appalled by the packages or were they saying Israel had never before experienced gang-rapes?



Well of course they would have been shocked by the parcels but clearly it was the implications which most disturbed people.



Then all Israel... came together as one and assembled before the Lord in Mizpah. The leaders of all the people of the tribes of Israel took their places in the assembly of God's people, 400,000 men armed with swords.



Tell us how this awful thing happened.

Well, we were on our way home...

Judg 20. 1-3



So will you now agree the writer's talking **politics** not **morality**?

Couldn't he be talking **religion**?

Is that your last desperate throw? If we empty your religious sack of all politics and morality there will be nothing left in it to regulate human behaviour but taboo and you are surely not going to say this story's about a taboo!



No, you're right, the story has to be about morality or politics and, since we can't make good sense of it using morality, I suppose it has to be about politics.

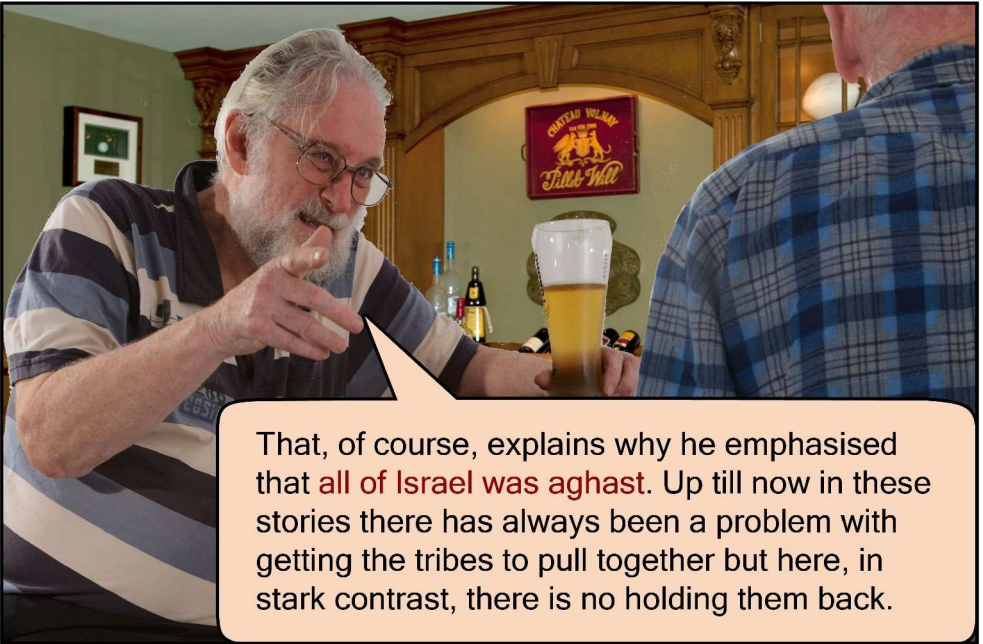




You shouldn't be despondant for we are now in a position to properly understand this fantastic narrative, which the storyteller dreamed up to make his political point.



He wanted to raise the issue of outright ideological betrayal occuring within the revolutionary community and he represented this abstract idea as **the refusal of hospitality and the sexual abuse of the stranger** just as the Genesis story of Lot had done.



That, of course, explains why he emphasised that **all of Israel was agast**. Up till now in these stories there has always been a problem with getting the tribes to pull together but here, in stark contrast, there is no holding them back.

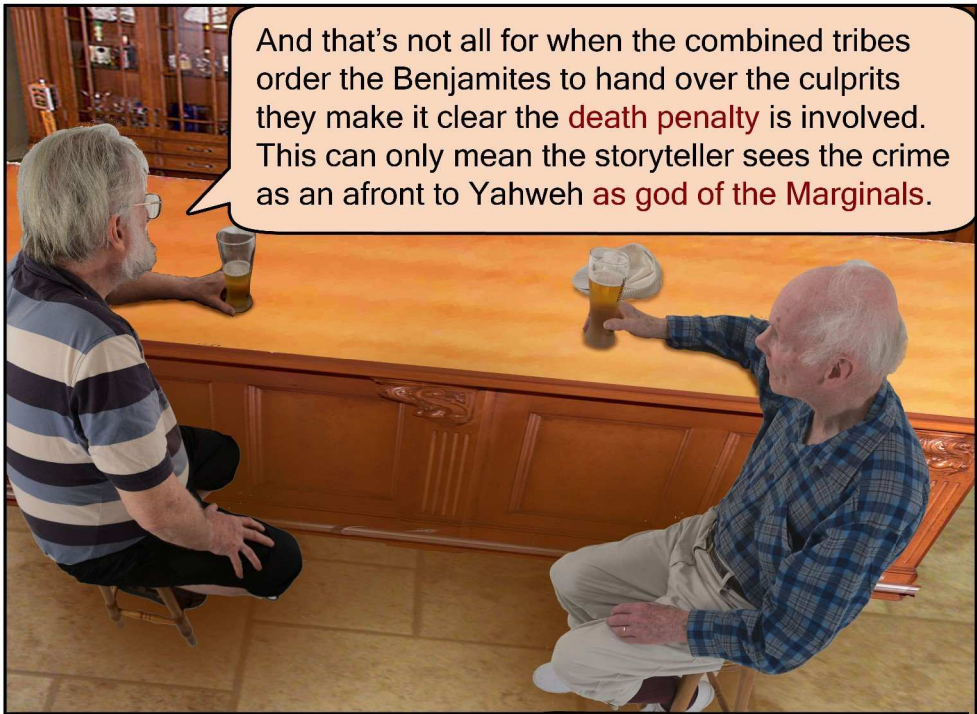
All the men rose up together as one, saying, "None of us will go home. No, not one of us will return to his house.

Judg 20. 8-10

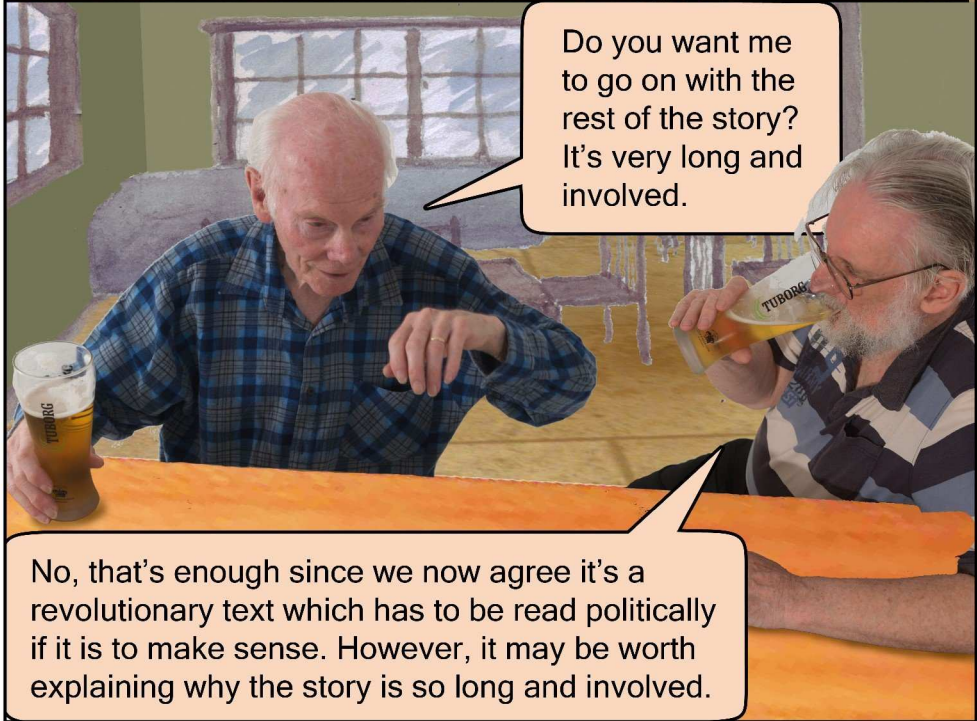


We must organise provision for the army and then when it arrives at Gibeah in Benjamin, it can give them what they deserve for this outrageous act done in Israel.

So all the Israelites got together and united as one against the city.



And that's not all for when the combined tribes order the Benjamites to hand over the culprits they make it clear the **death penalty** is involved. This can only mean the storyteller sees the crime as an affront to Yahweh **as god of the Marginals**.



Do you want me to go on with the rest of the story? It's very long and involved.

No, that's enough since we now agree it's a revolutionary text which has to be read politically if it is to make sense. However, it may be worth explaining why the story is so long and involved.



The point the storyteller is anxious to make is that while it may be hard for a revolutionary community to deal with external aggression it is not half as hard as it is to deal with internal betrayal.

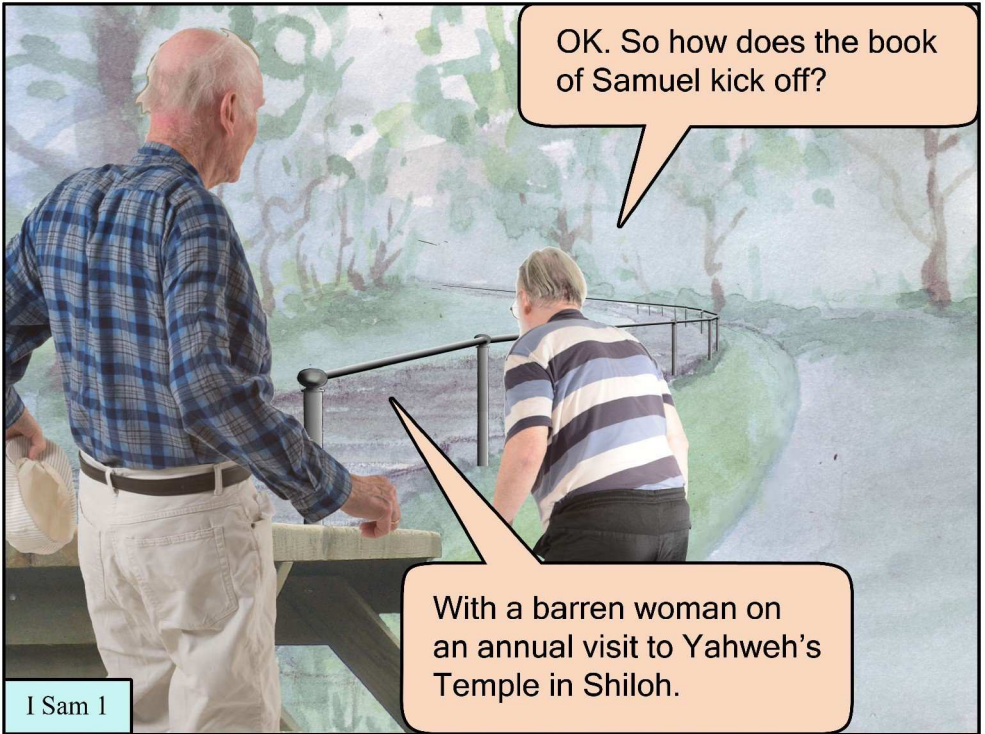
It's not just that the struggle tends to be more bloody and protracted. It's also that there's nowhere for the defeated party to go... making it incredibly difficult to deal with the resulting misery and mess.

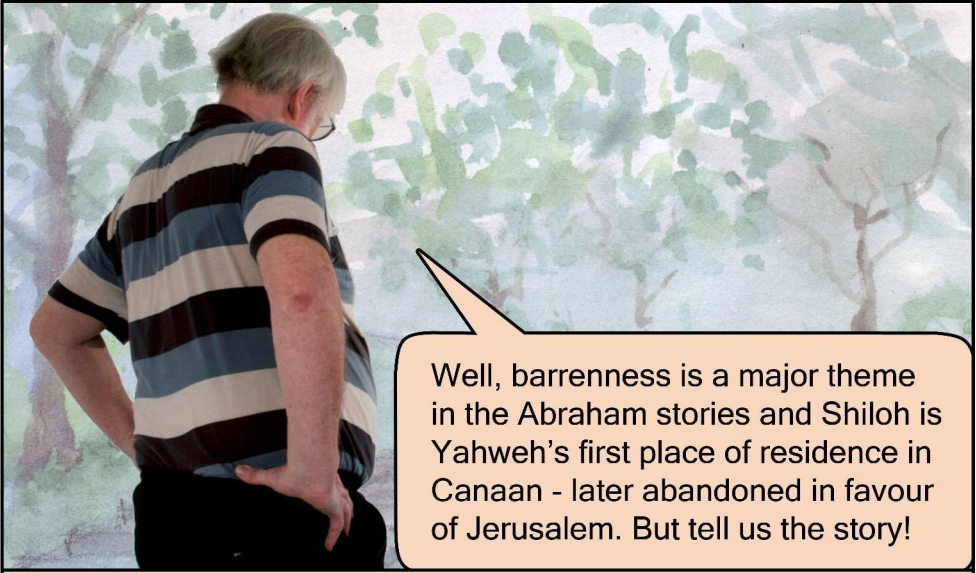
OK. So **Joshua** rectifies Moses' failure thereby setting the revolutionary movement on course and **Judges** deals with the continuing difficulties of external aggression and internal backsliding which ends up dividing the community and threatening the whole enterprise. So where do we go to next?

To **Samuel** and his problem with kings!

4

SAMUEL





Well, barrenness is a major theme in the Abraham stories and Shiloh is Yahweh's first place of residence in Canaan - later abandoned in favour of Jerusalem. But tell us the story!

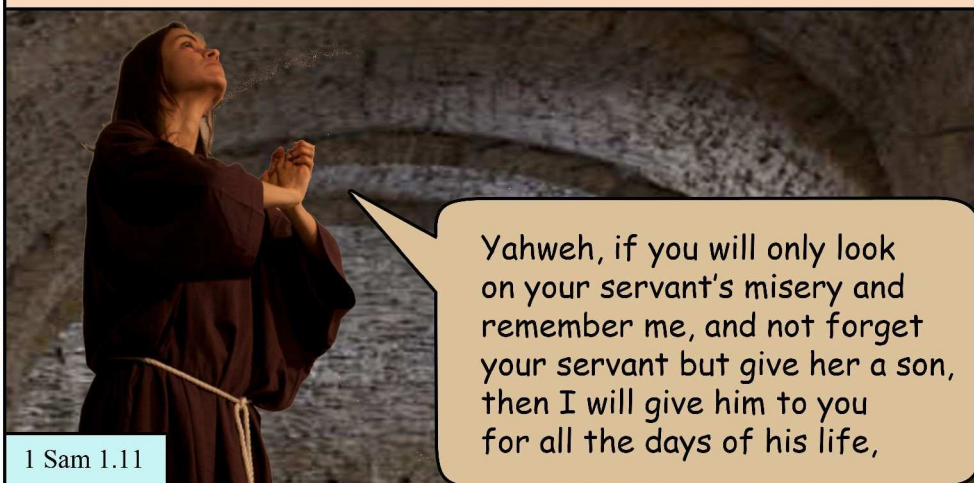
The barren woman's name was Hannah. She found the annual trips to Shiloh a terrible ordeal because, having no children, she was naturally given little money by her husband to spend.



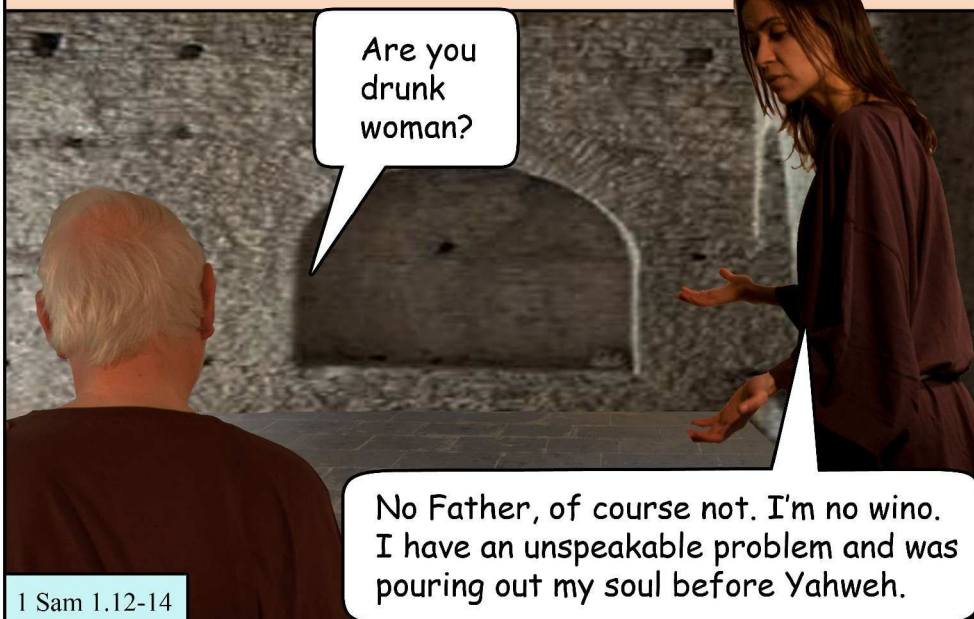
How much has he given you? Hmm! You'll not go far on that! Hi! Hi!

I Sam 1.5

Understandably, therefore, she used her visit to the temple to beseech Yahweh to look on her affliction and remember her by sending her a child.



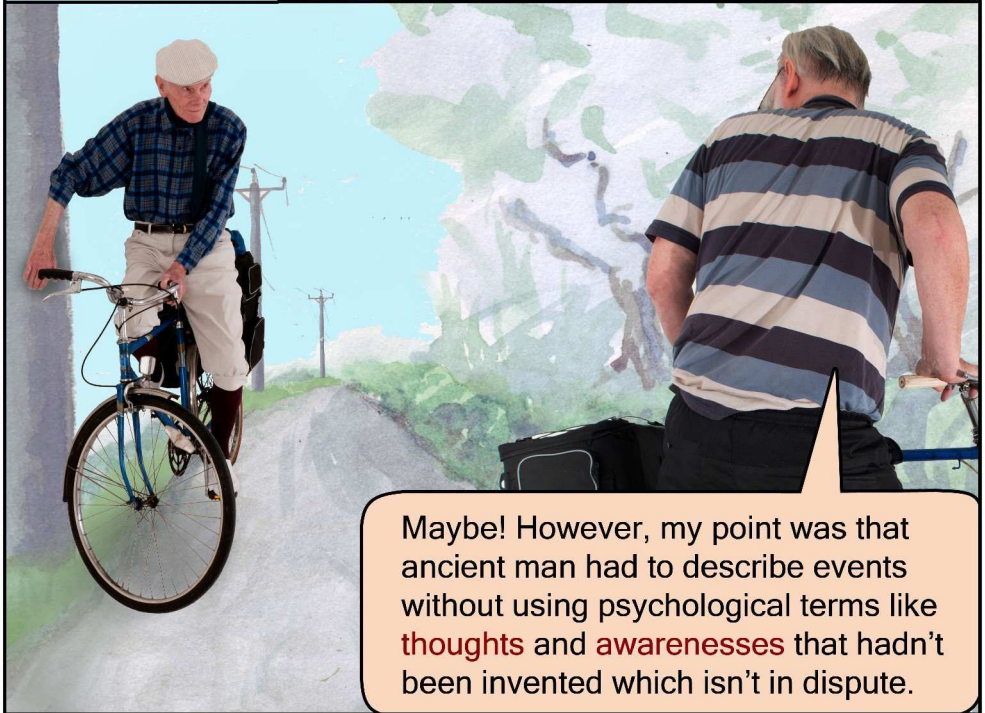
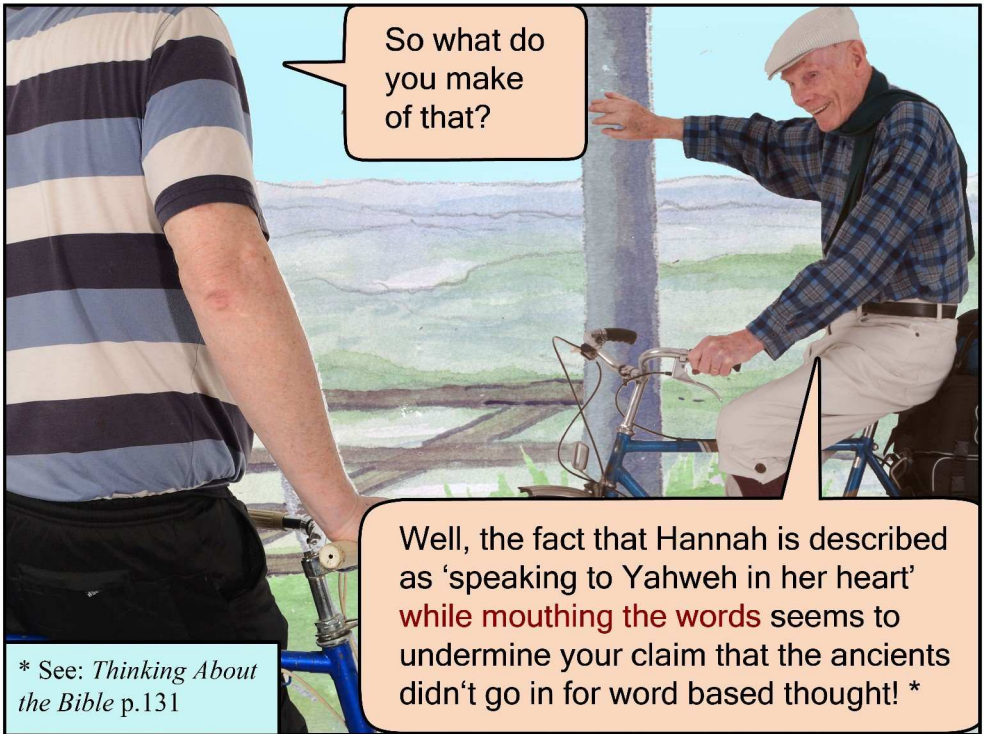
Eli the priest, sitting near the entrance, saw her standing there with her lips moving but hearing no words he mistakenly concluded she must be inebriated...

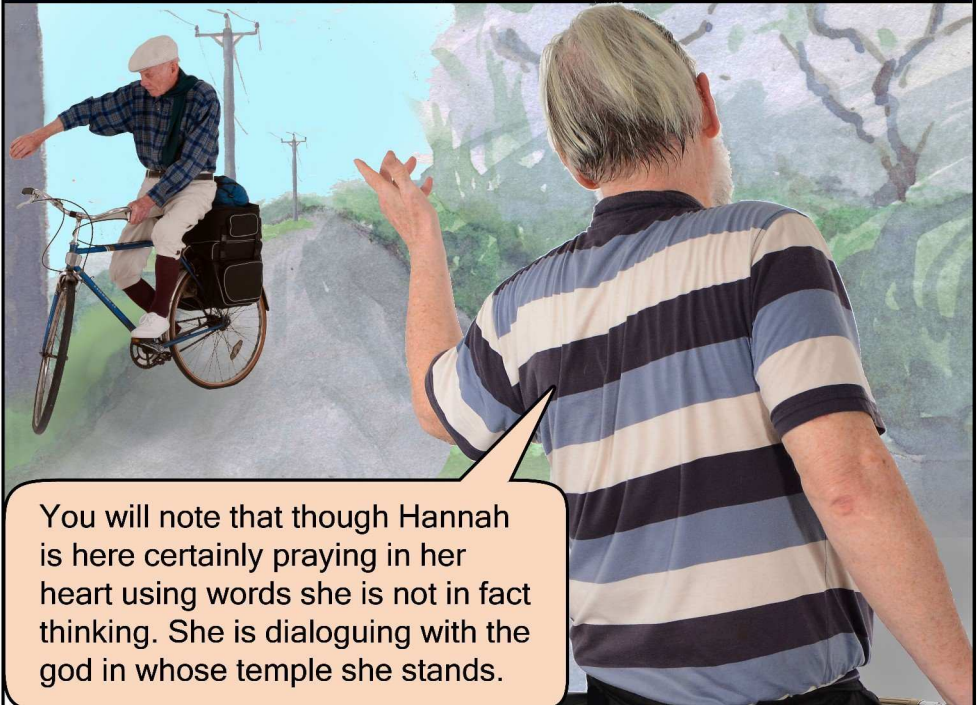
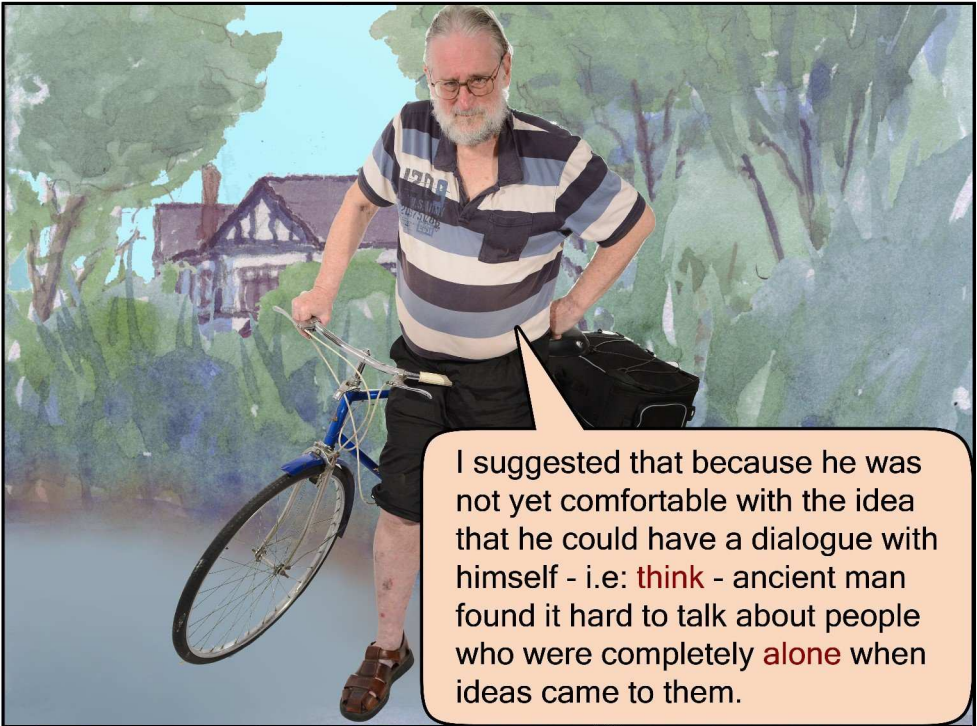




Shortly afterwards her prayer was answered when her longed for child was born, which is how the prophet appeared on the scene.







So it remains true that ancient writers were removed from our privileged circumstances which make it possible for us to discuss the thoughts and awarenesses that pass through peoples' minds with consummate ease.

I don't for a moment believe ancient man lacked such thoughts. However, I am aware he had to talk about them in a different way from us and this explains his use of mythological language.



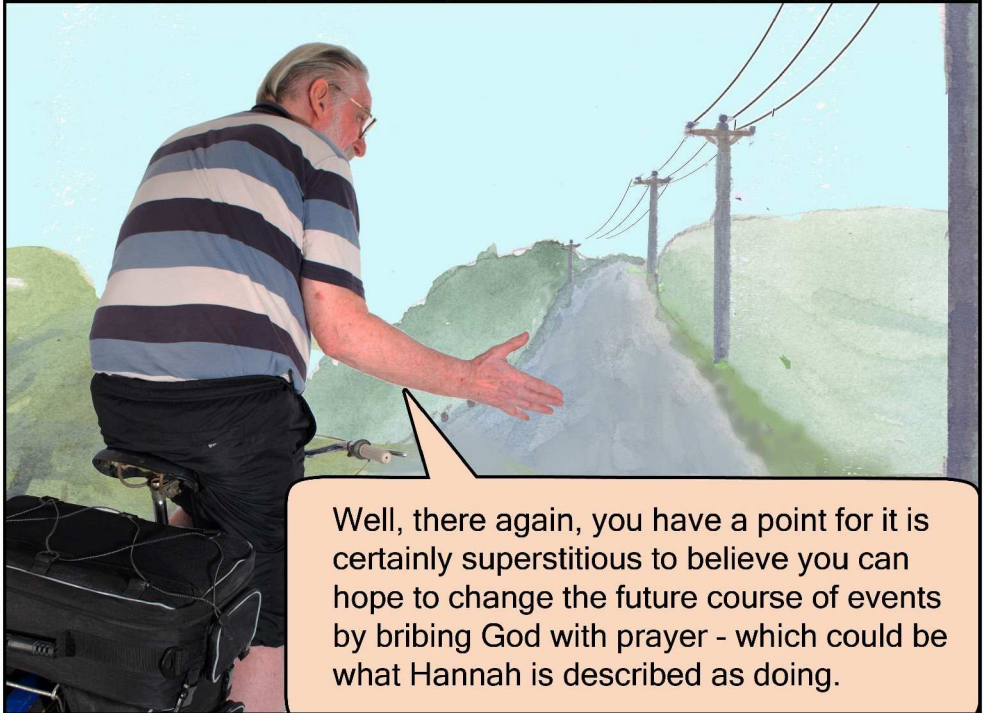
Since we have a full range of psychological expressions at our command we have become blind to the ancients' difficulties in expressing themselves.



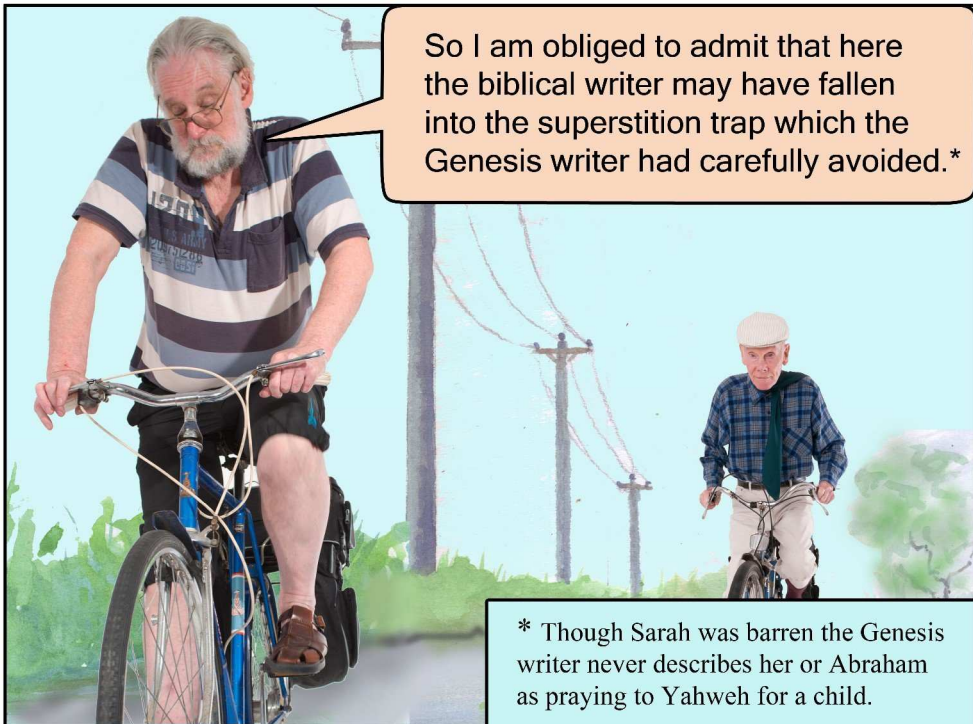
So we read their texts in a crass religious manner totally missing the important ideological points they were trying to make.



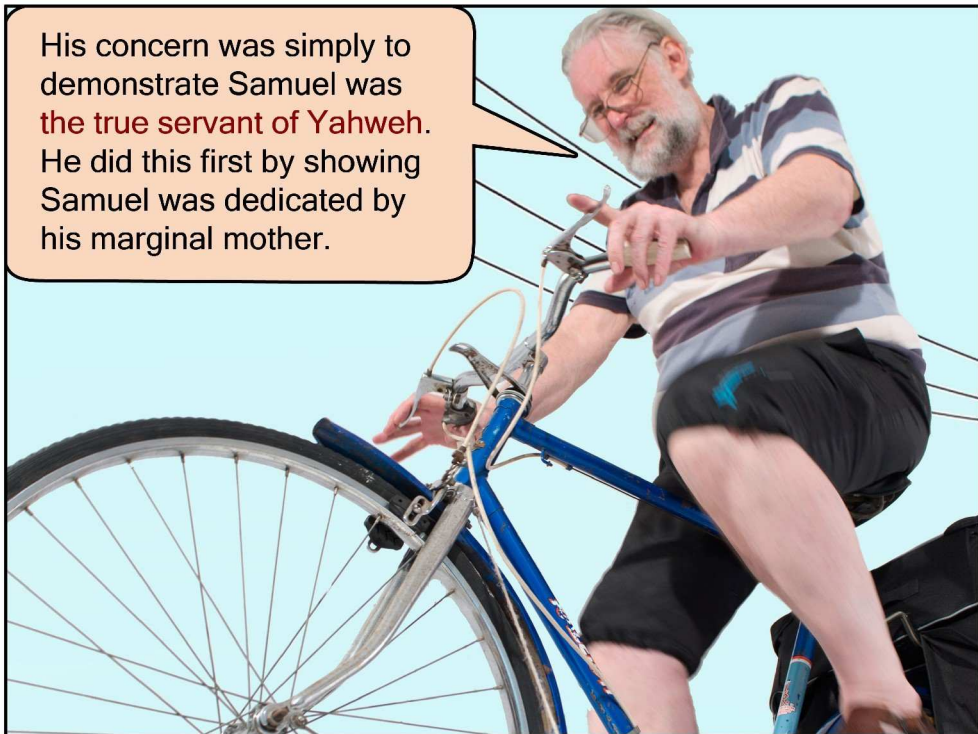
Are you saying that asking God for a child and having your prayer answered are **not** religious matters?



Well, there again, you have a point for it is certainly superstitious to believe you can hope to change the future course of events by bribing God with prayer - which could be what Hannah is described as doing.



His concern was simply to demonstrate Samuel was **the true servant of Yahweh**. He did this first by showing Samuel was dedicated by his marginal mother.



Then by showing Samuel was gifted by the god of the marginals himself... a demonstration achieved as **an answered prayer**.



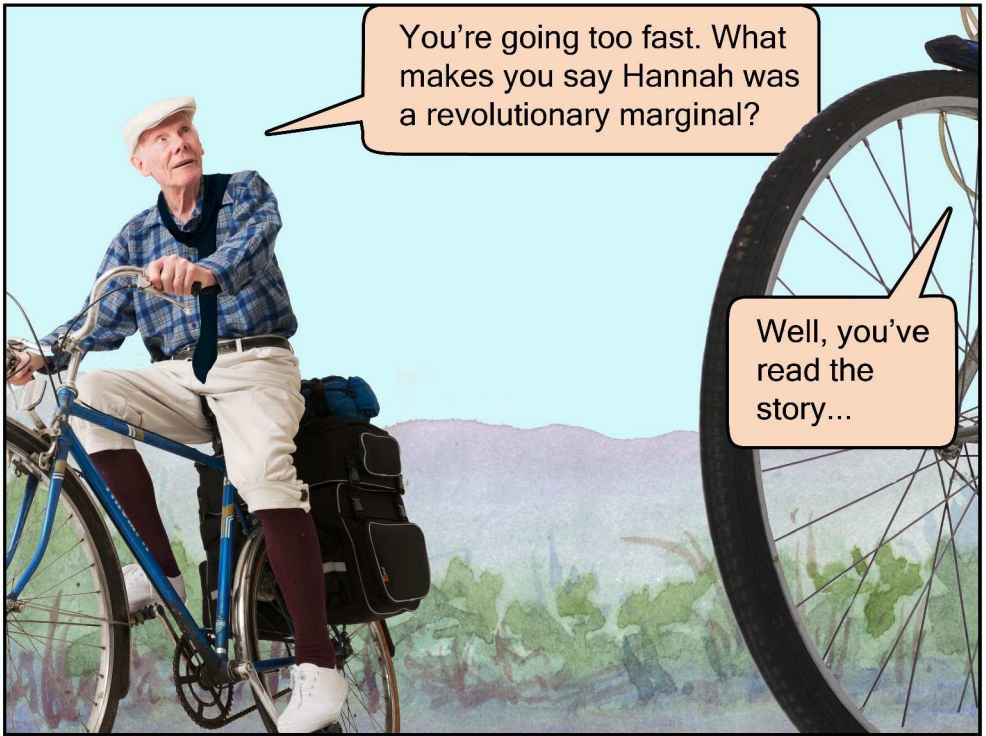


So 'prayer' itself has no particular significance in this story. It's just a construct enabling an important political point to be made.

Moreover, it's worth noting that when Luke later reuses Hannah's prayer in The Magnificat there's no question he sees Mary as falling into the superstition trap.



* In Luke 1.26 ff Mary doesn't pray for a child. like Abraham in Gen 18.9ff. She is simply told she is to have one.



You're going too fast. What makes you say Hannah was a revolutionary marginal?

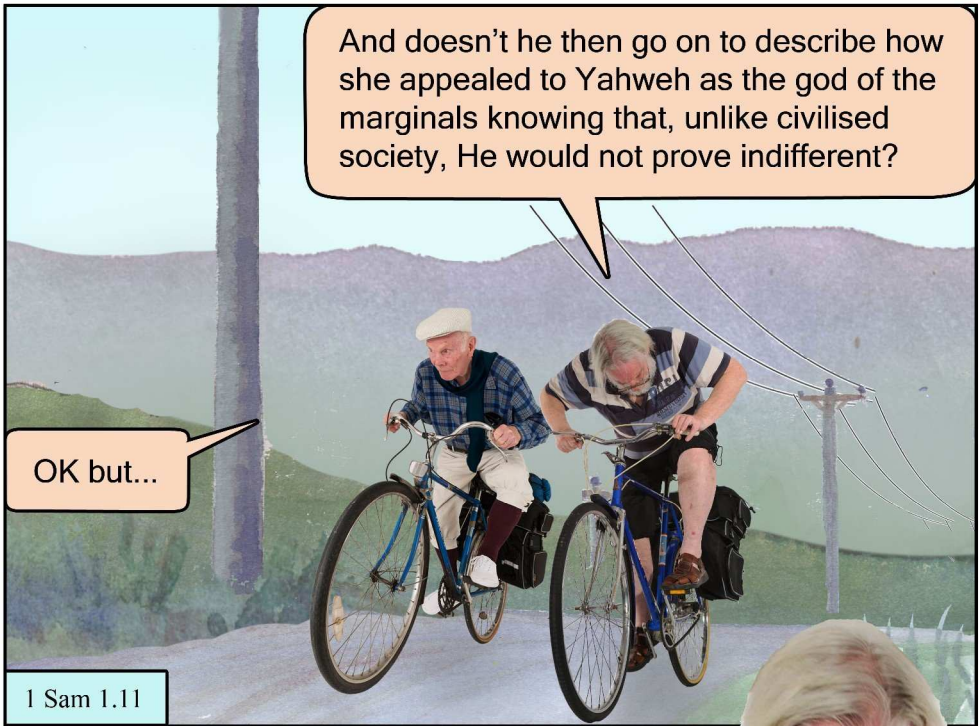
Well, you've read the story...



Doesn't the writer clearly describe her as being made to feel a dreadful social failure because of her barrenness?

1 Sam 1.7

Yes I suppose so but...





*1Sam 2.1-10

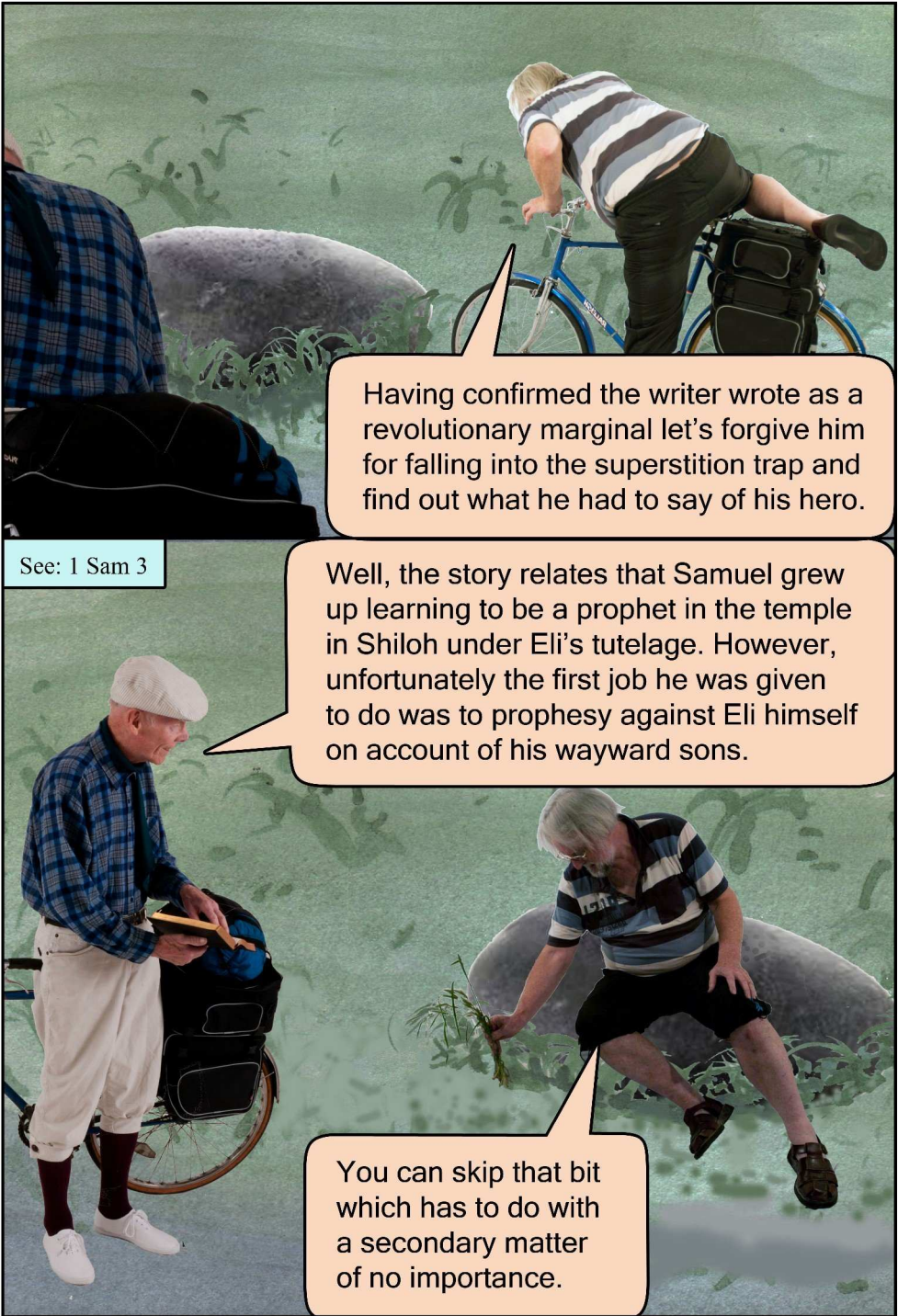
If you have any remaining doubts
you have only now to read the
extraordinary prayer Hannah offered
in thanksgiving*... which you never
even bothered to mention...

...for undoubtedly it constitutes the best
encapsulation of the revolutionary marginal
spirit found in the Jewish Bible which explains
why Luke chose to put it into Mary's mouth.



Luke 2. 46-55

OK! OK!
You win!

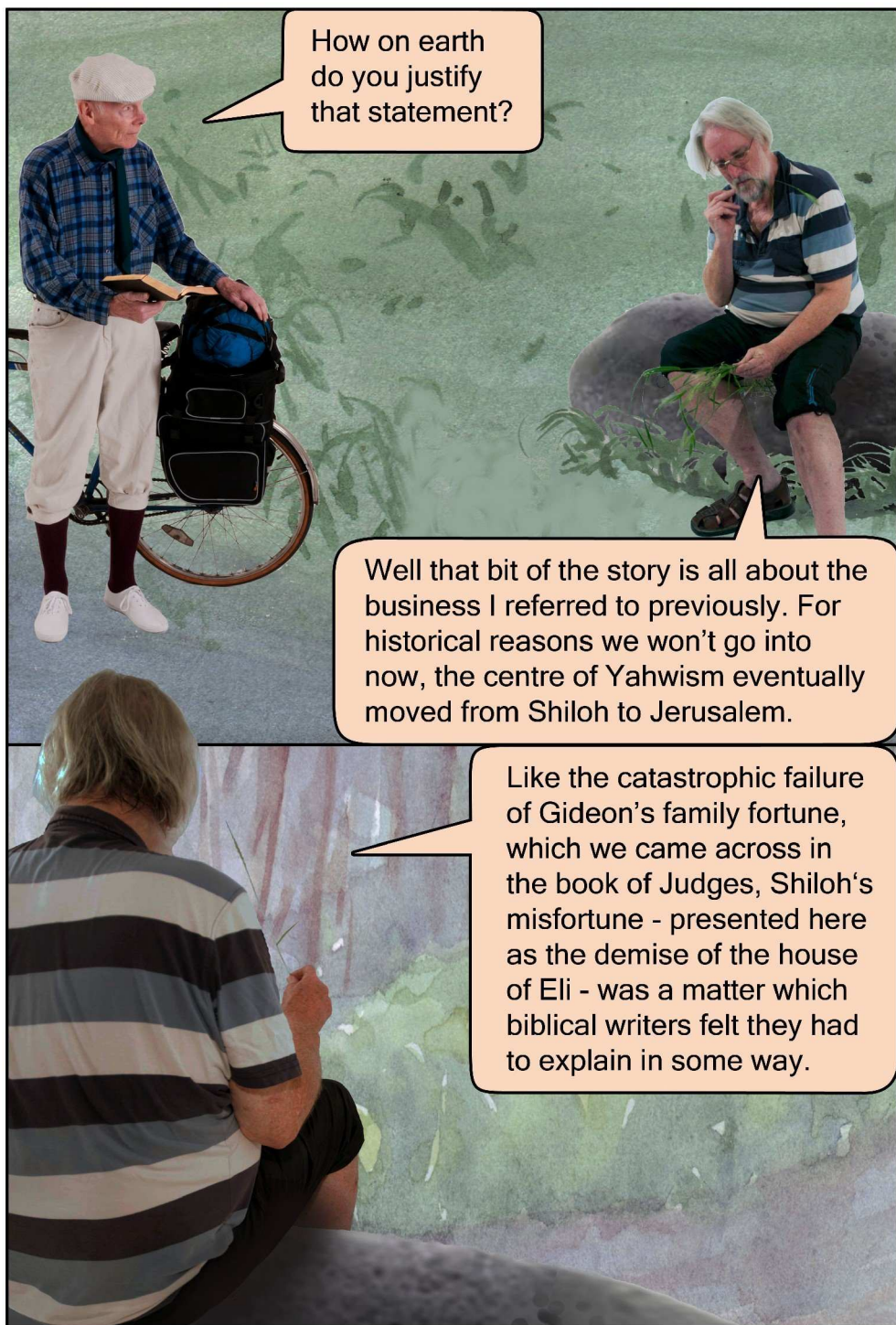


Having confirmed the writer wrote as a revolutionary marginal let's forgive him for falling into the superstition trap and find out what he had to say of his hero.

See: 1 Sam 3

Well, the story relates that Samuel grew up learning to be a prophet in the temple in Shiloh under Eli's tutelage. However, unfortunately the first job he was given to do was to prophesy against Eli himself on account of his wayward sons.

You can skip that bit which has to do with a secondary matter of no importance.

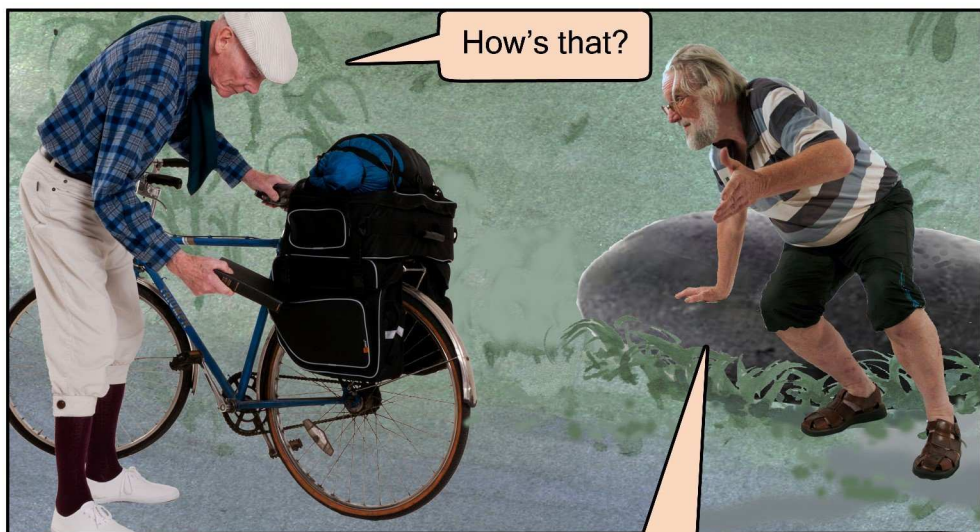


However, **we** don't feel the same need which means that, for us, their explanations now appear somewhat ludicrous.

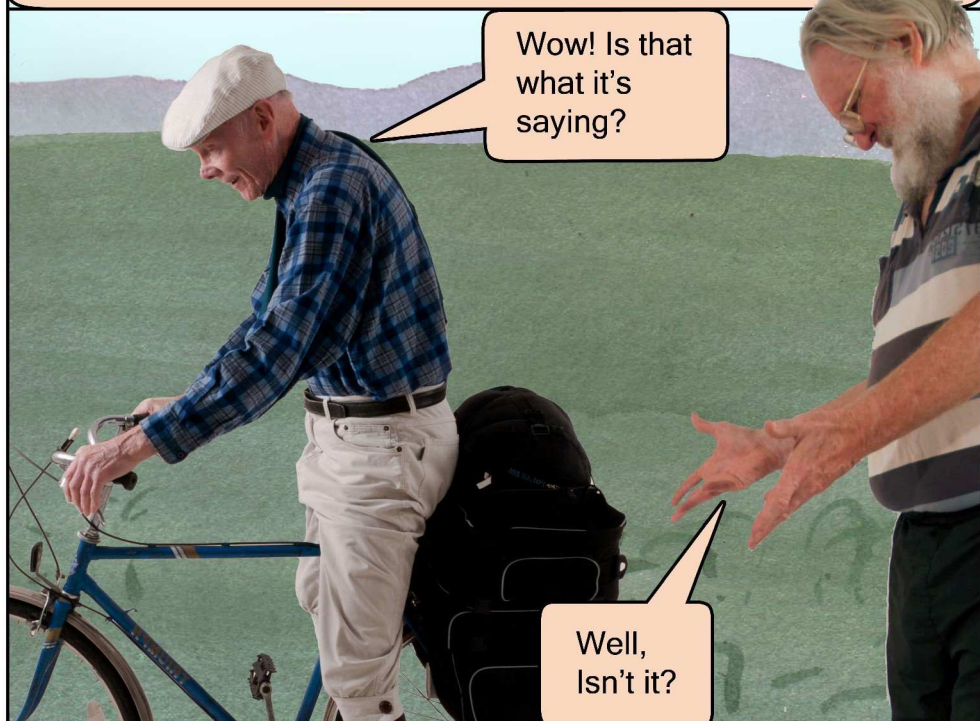
So do you want to deal with the adventures of the Arc of the Covenant? It was captured by the Philistines but made their life so unbearable that they begged the Israelites to tell them how to get shot of it. It's entertaining but highly fanciful!

See: 1 Sam 4 - 7.5

Yes, but the story makes a serious point don't you think?



Isn't it saying that though marginals rightly fear civilisation's power their marginal ideology itself has nothing to fear since the truth they can see, because they are marginals, will always prove superior to the vision of civilisation-hypocrites like us?



Having dealt with these preliminaries, the storyteller now turns to his central concern: the introduction of kings in order to counter the Philistine menace.



Perhaps you could remind me who these Philistines were.

See 1 Sam 7. 3ff

The Philistines were sea people, ethnically related to the Greeks, who arrived on the coast of southern Canaan from the Aegean at the beginning of the Iron Age (circa 1200 BCE).



Philistine warriors from the palace of Minos in Crete.



Carving of an Ancient Philistine warrior from the ruins at Thebes, circa 1200 BCE

They were relatively few in number but made up for this by a high degree of organisation and by employing local mercenaries to fight for them. They operated alongside the Egyptians - the controlling centrarchical power in the region - as junior partners and, since they could not threaten Egypt itself, they naturally sought to extend their influence by taking over control of the central Palestinian highlands,



Introducing this, the body of the work, is an immensely important story which, unfortunately, all too easily gets overlooked.

1 Sam 7.5-17

It functions as a **paradigm** setting out how matters should have unfolded had the community remained faithful... which, of course, turned out not to be the case!

Tell me more.
I'm intrigued!

Well, like all new starts in the Bible it begins with a great ceremony of repentance on this occasion held at Mizpah.



...they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord."

Naturally, such a gathering did not go unnoticed and when the Philistines learned of it they saw it as a good opportunity to manifest their dominance in the region.

1 Sam 7.6-7

When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them.



Hearing that the Philistines were coming the people surrounded Samuel and begged him to do something.



So he set about performing a great sacrificial ceremony calling on Yahweh to fulfil his covenant promise by rescuing his newly faithful people.

1 Sam 7.7-9



Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf...

Yahweh proceeded to do just that by throwing the attacking Philistines into confusion with a spectacular thunderstorm thus allowing the Israelites to defeat them so badly that there was peace in the country for the best part of Samuel's lifetime.

While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

1 Sam 7.10-11

What do you think of that?

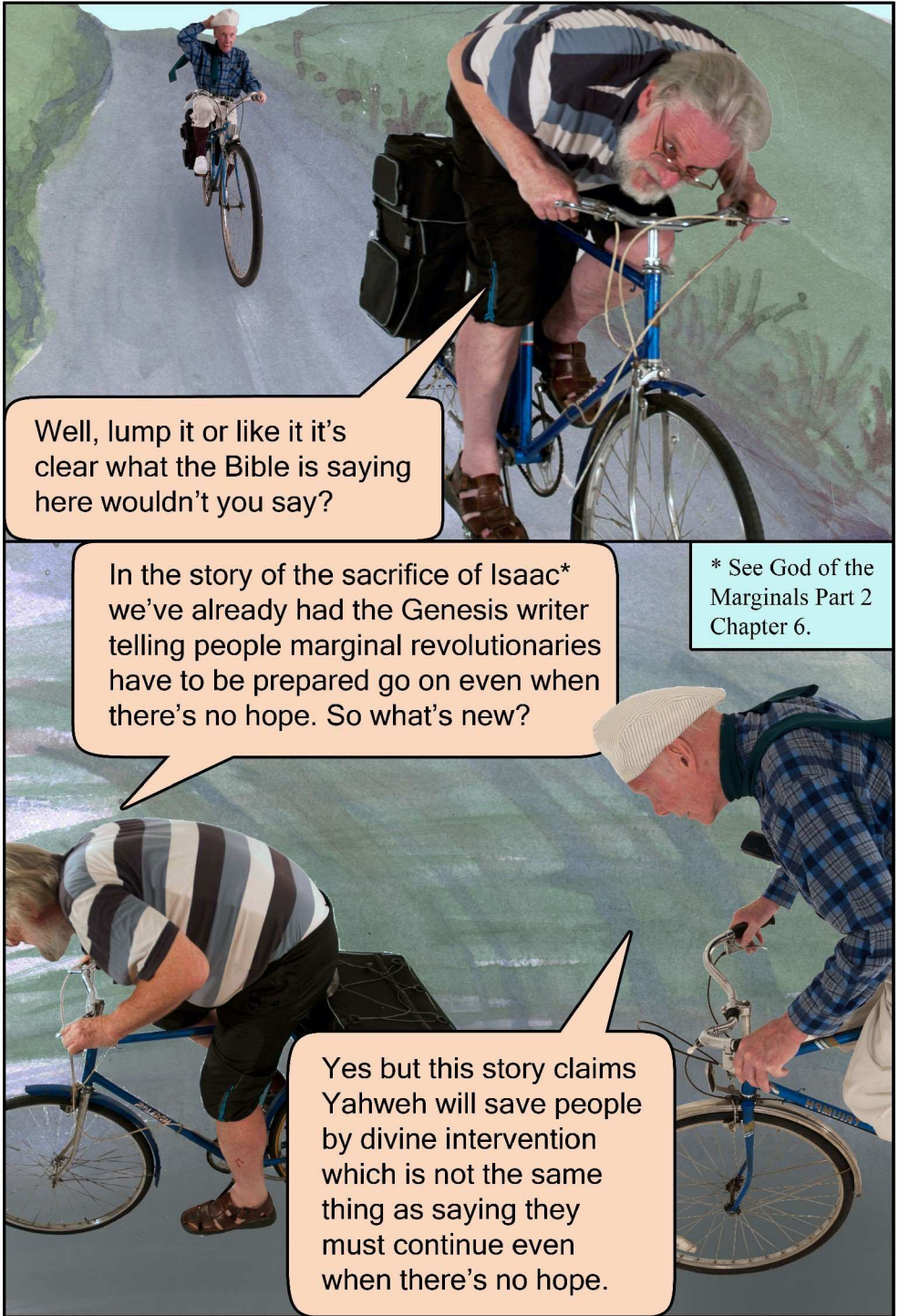
It's not surprising your story has been overlooked. The idea that political aggression can be checked by praying for a miracle is embarrassing to say the least!

So you have no confidence in Yahweh's covenantal promise that, if people live differently - loving the neighbour as the self - he will see to it that the Gentiles are shamed?

No I suppose I don't!

So what's your alternative? Changing the world by force?

I'm not here to offer an alternative. I'm here to discover what the Bible is saying!



Well, lump it or like it it's clear what the Bible is saying here wouldn't you say?

In the story of the sacrifice of Isaac* we've already had the Genesis writer telling people marginal revolutionaries have to be prepared go on even when there's no hope. So what's new?

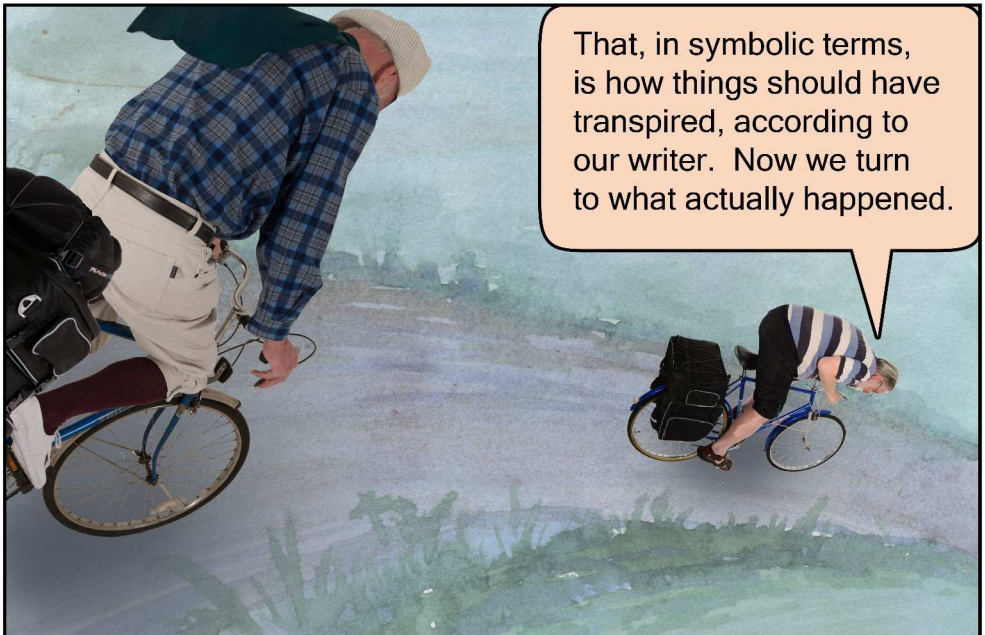
* See God of the Marginals Part 2 Chapter 6.

Yes but this story claims Yahweh will save people by divine intervention which is not the same thing as saying they must continue even when there's no hope.

Seems to me they're reverse sides of the same coin. If one day Gentile hearts are softened, and if we civilisation-people are one day shamed, **it will be a miracle** don't you think?

Certainly!

So marginal revolutionaries just have to go on with a crazy hope **believing in miracles - though not in magic** - which is what this story is saying, in a slightly naive way it is true, but only because the writer lacked our highly-developed means of communication.



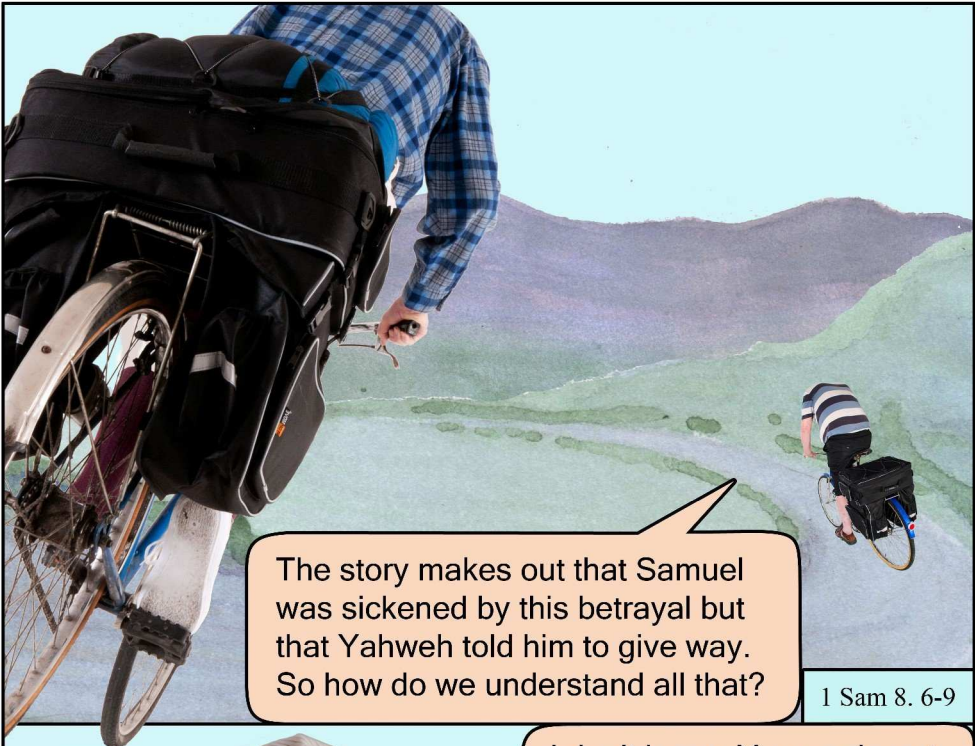
That, in symbolic terms, is how things should have transpired, according to our writer. Now we turn to what actually happened.

It's a classic situation the writer describes. Everything was fine so long as Samuel remained fit and strong but when he became old responsibility fell on his sons who turned out to be no-users.



You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.

1Sam 8.5



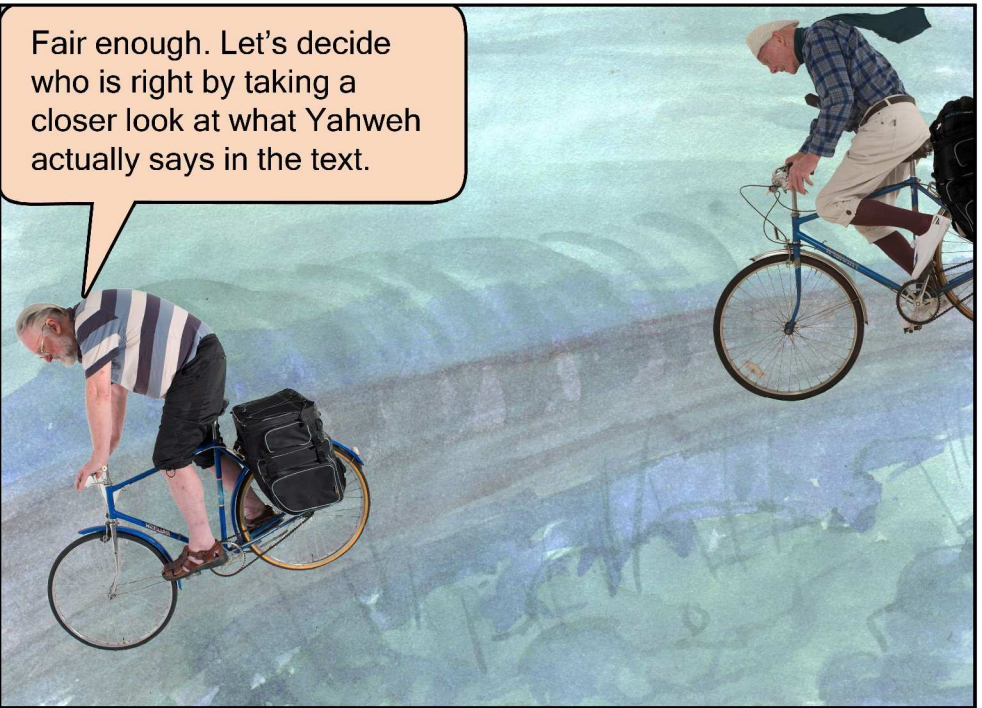
The story makes out that Samuel was sickened by this betrayal but that Yahweh told him to give way. So how do we understand all that?

1 Sam 8. 6-9



I don't know. You made out that the revolutionary writer of Judges was ideologically opposed to the kingship but I'm not convinced. I think it was all a question about having the right sort of king!

Fair enough. Let's decide who is right by taking a closer look at what Yahweh actually says in the text.

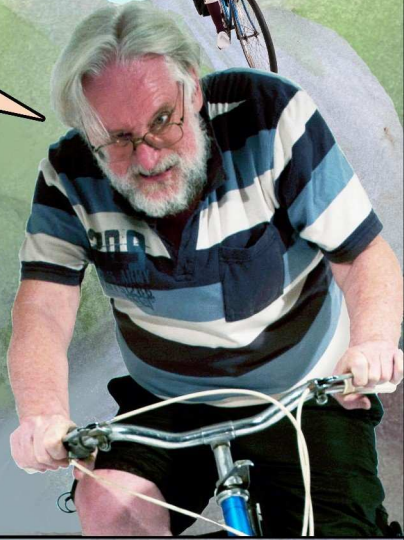


Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.

1 Sam 8. 7-10

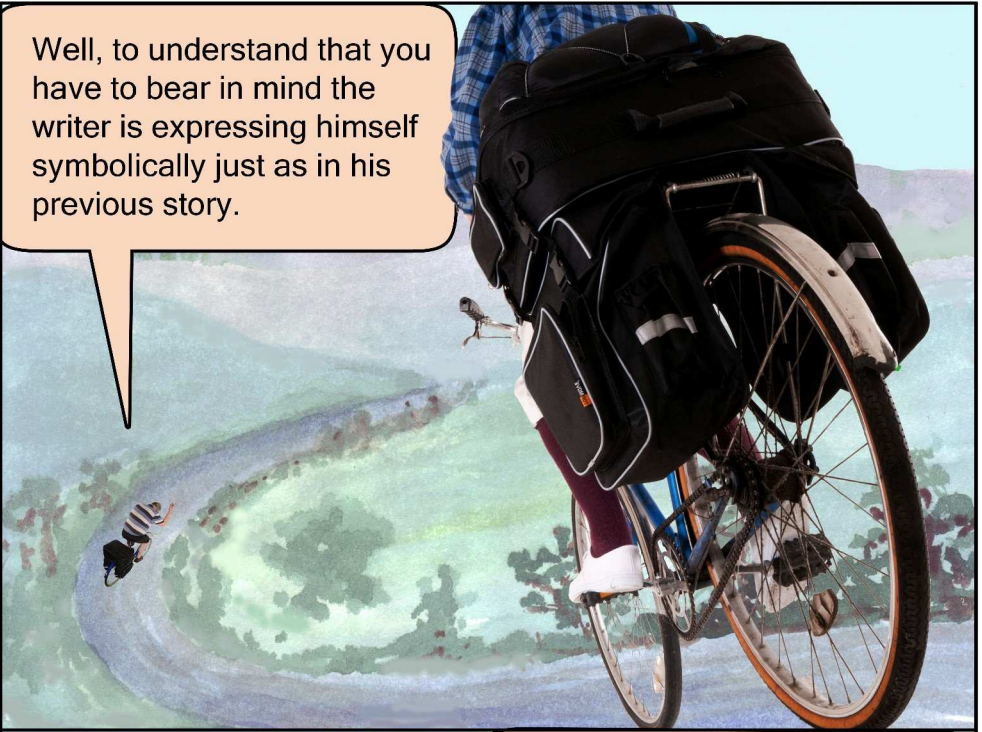
Isn't Yahweh saying here that in asking for a king the people are effectively rejecting the marginal ideology and doesn't that make the introduction of kings a political mistake?

This seems to me to accord well with what the writer of Judges previously said. So I conclude that far from thinking that kingship was ideologically neutral, both writers were clear in their minds its introduction constituted **revisionism**.

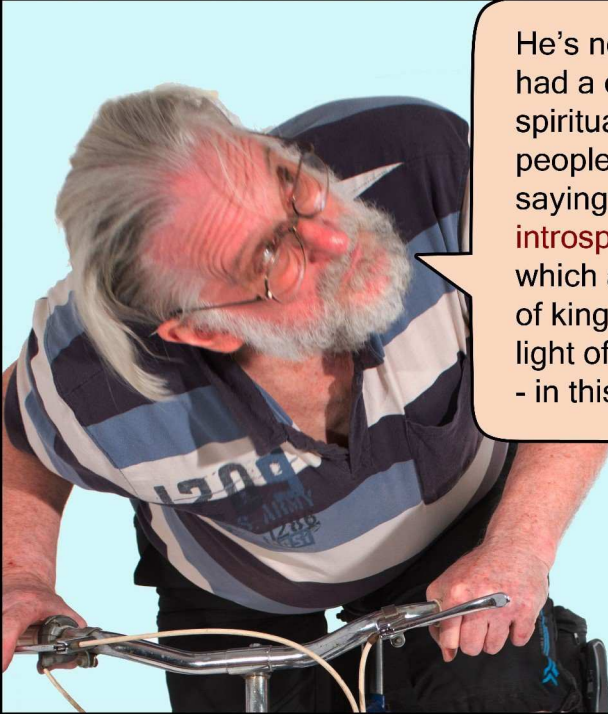


That is all very well but how do you explain why Yahweh tells Samuel to give way?

Well, to understand that you have to bear in mind the writer is expressing himself symbolically just as in his previous story.



He's not pretending Samuel had a conversation with a spiritual being. He's expecting people to understand what he's saying sensibly **as ideological introspection**: an exercise in which an act (the introduction of kings) is assessed in the light of a given perspective - in this case marginalism.



As a Hebrew revolutionary Samuel is very aware the peoples' demand constitutes **ideological betrayal**. But he is also aware that if he refuses their request they will not just reject the Hebrew ideology but also his ideological leadership **as well**.

Note 1 Sam 8.7

Sam 1 8.19-22

He decides, therefore, to remain in solidarity with the people - being prepared to grant their request - **but only after underlining what the consequences will be.**





You could justifiably argue **the people** saw kingship as a necessary evil for the very next thing we're told is that they rejected Samuel's advice out of hand:

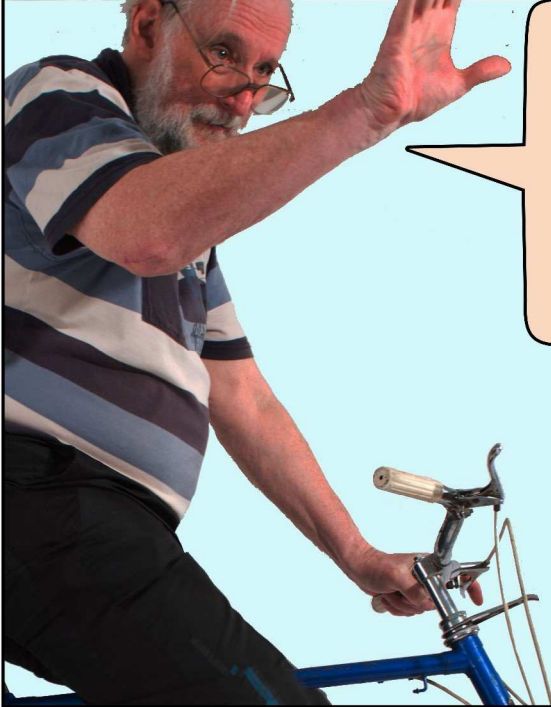


But **Samuel** himself is in a different category and scholars are simply **lying** when they pretend to find here justification for their 'poles in tension' model; for the text is very clear. In asking for a king, Israel was **abandoning Yahweh** to follow other gods.





But in giving way to the people and anointing a king wasn't Samuel **countenancing** kingship to some extent?

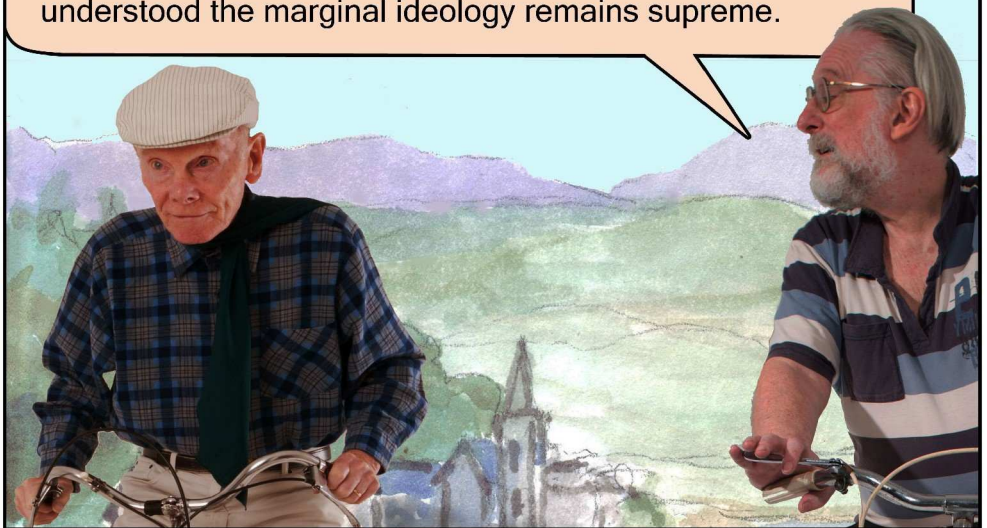


Certainly, but he's careful to make it clear that the rules of the game hadn't changed and that the behaviour of the people **and their king** would continue to be subject to the self-same scrutiny.



Seems to me that **countenancing kingship** and **seeing it as a necessary evil** are the same thing which means we're back to poles being held in tension.

How's that? Samuel never says kingship is **necessary** or **intrinsically evil** for that matter. He claims the people clamour for it only because they lack confidence in Yahweh but he says he is prepared to run with it so long as it's understood the marginal ideology remains supreme.

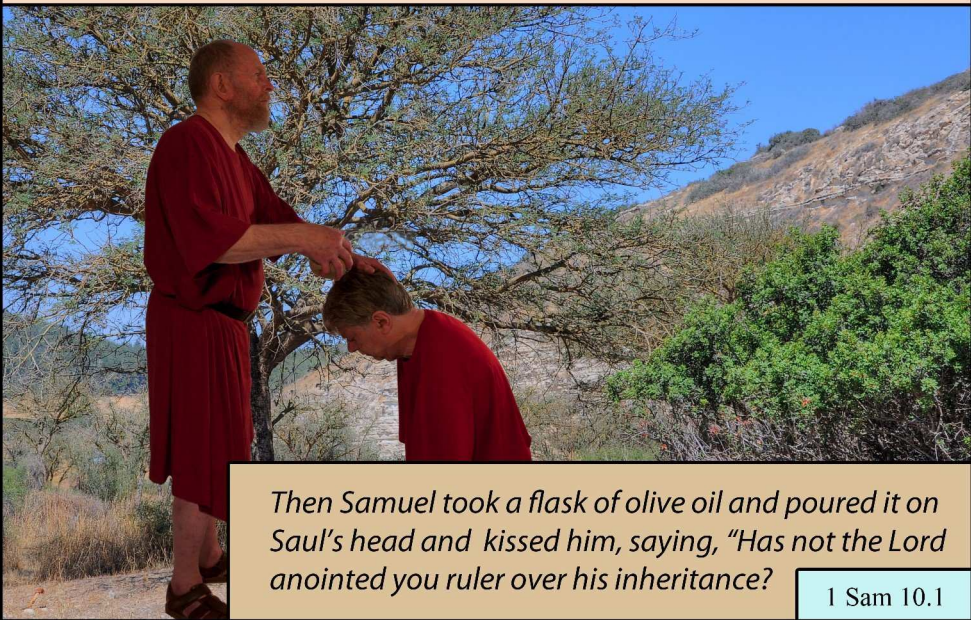


What about the big story:
the crowning of Saul as
Israel's first king?

Well, he wasn't crowned, of
course, and this highlights
an interesting problem. For
there are **three different**
accounts of what happened.



In the first, which takes place in **Ramah**, where Samuel lived,
the prophet anoints Saul as Israel's king **strictly in private**...



*Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on
Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord
anointed you ruler over his inheritance?"*

1 Sam 10.1

In the second - which brings us back to **Mizpah** - Saul is chosen by Yahweh in a public lottery involving all the tribes.

1 Sam 10.20-25

Do you see the man
Yahweh has chosen?
There is no-one like him
among all the people.


Long live the king!

Whereas in the third, the people make Saul their king at **Gilgal** after his first great victory, which was over the Ammonites.

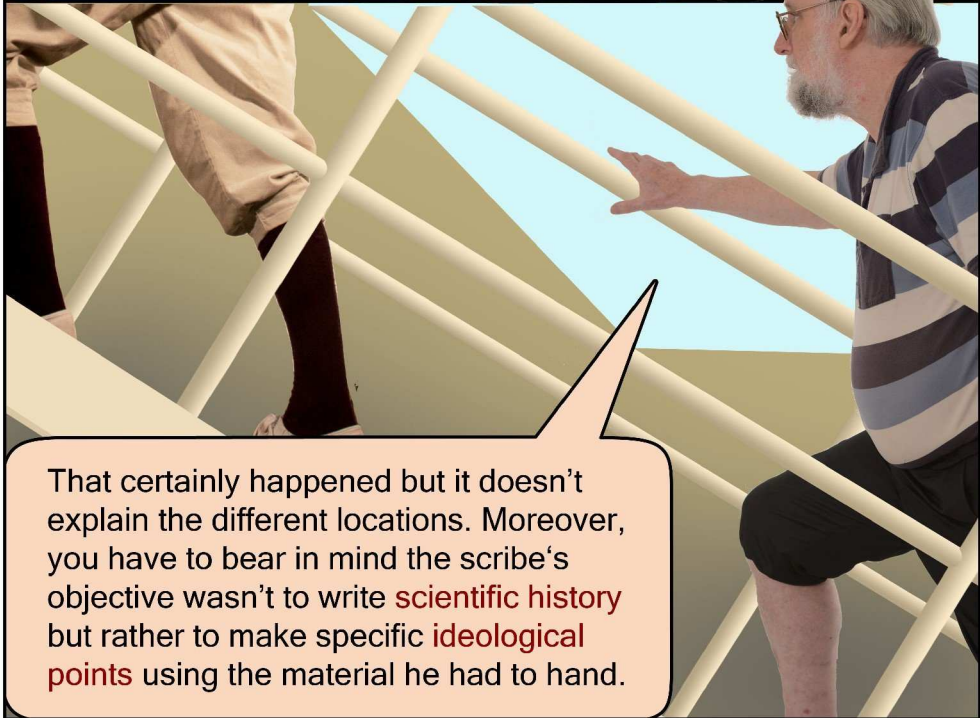
*So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king
in the presence of the Lord. There they sacrificed
fellowship offerings before the Lord, and Saul and
all the Israelites held a great celebration.*

1 Sam 11.15





Couldn't the different stories be the result of editors reworking the material over the years?

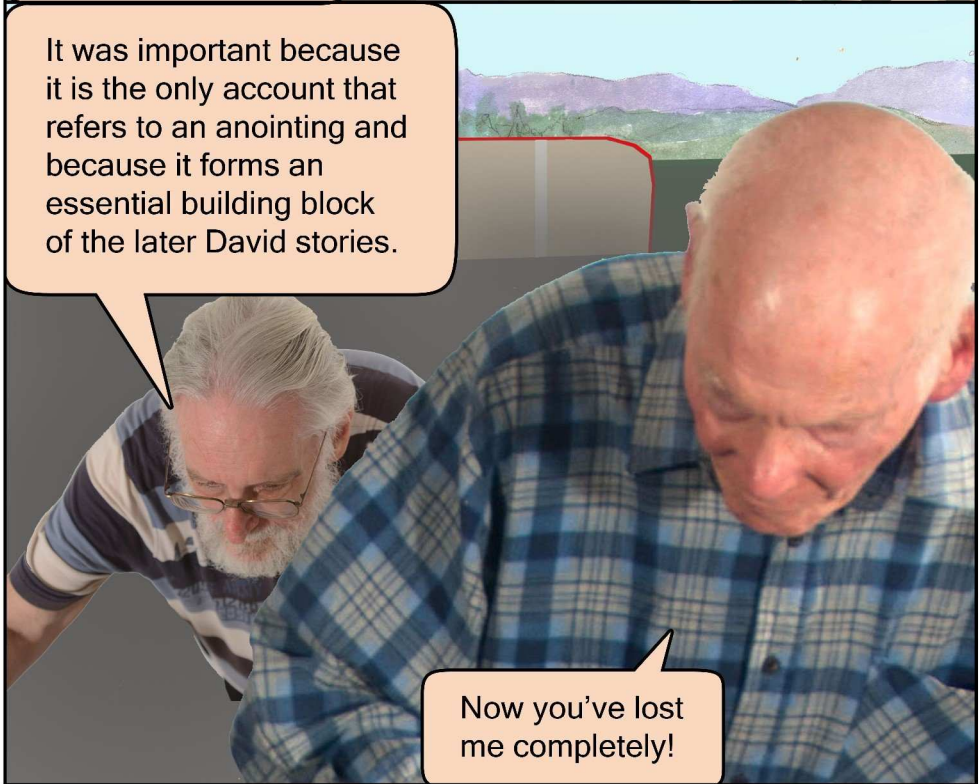


That certainly happened but it doesn't explain the different locations. Moreover, you have to bear in mind the scribe's objective wasn't to write **scientific history** but rather to make specific **ideological points** using the material he had to hand.



So what was the reason for including the **Ramah** story?

It was important because it is the only account that refers to an anointing and because it forms an essential building block of the later David stories.



Now you've lost me completely!

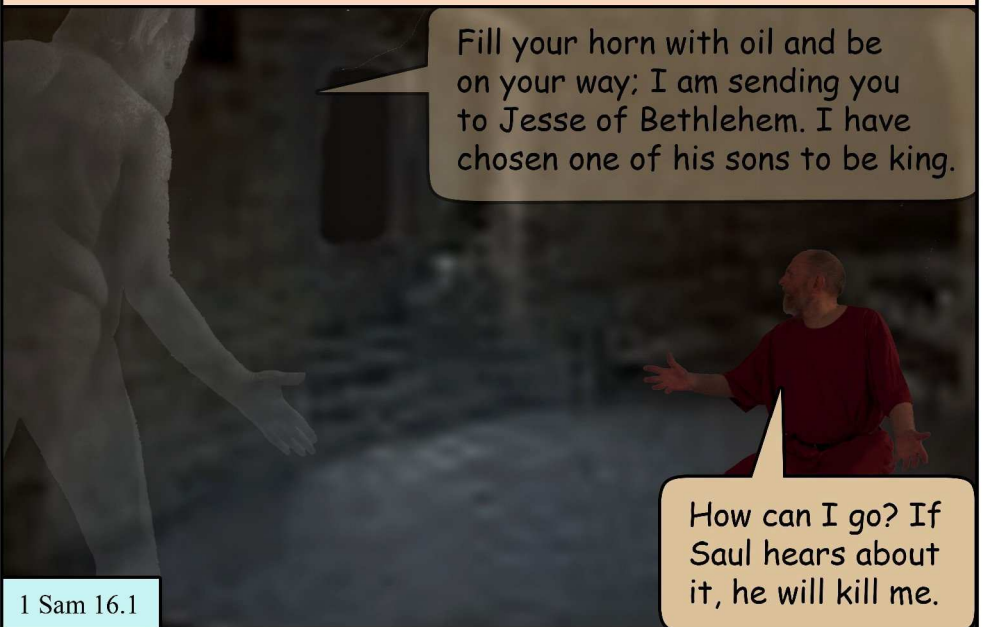
Well, David too was anointed king **at a private family gathering.**



So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David.

1 Sam 16.13

Anointing David was, of course, a treasonable act which Samuel would have paid for with his life had Saul got wind of it.



1 Sam 16.1

This explains very well why in David's case the gathering was in private. However, there is no explanation as to why Samuel 'privately' anointed Saul. Indeed it makes no sense.

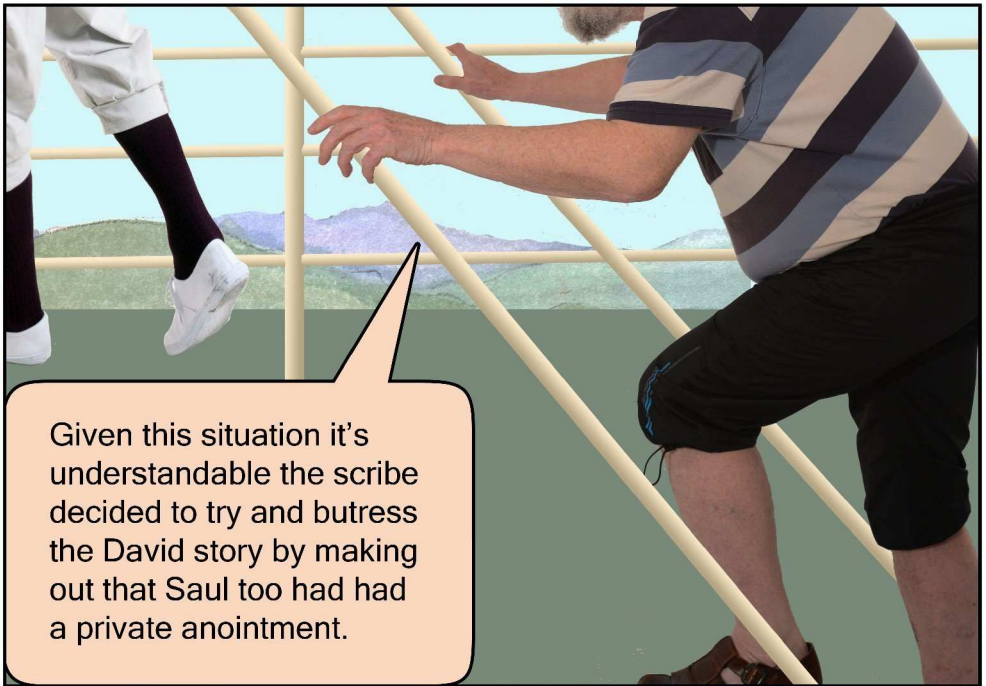
Is something bothering you?

Yes, I don't quite get it. Since you have **secretly** anointed me king - sending even my servants away - who is now to know I am the king?

What's more Samuel seems to have died soon after David's private anointment which means that people would have had serious doubts as to whether it had ever taken place.

But Samuel **did** anoint David king. I **promise** you. I **was** there!

Is that so!

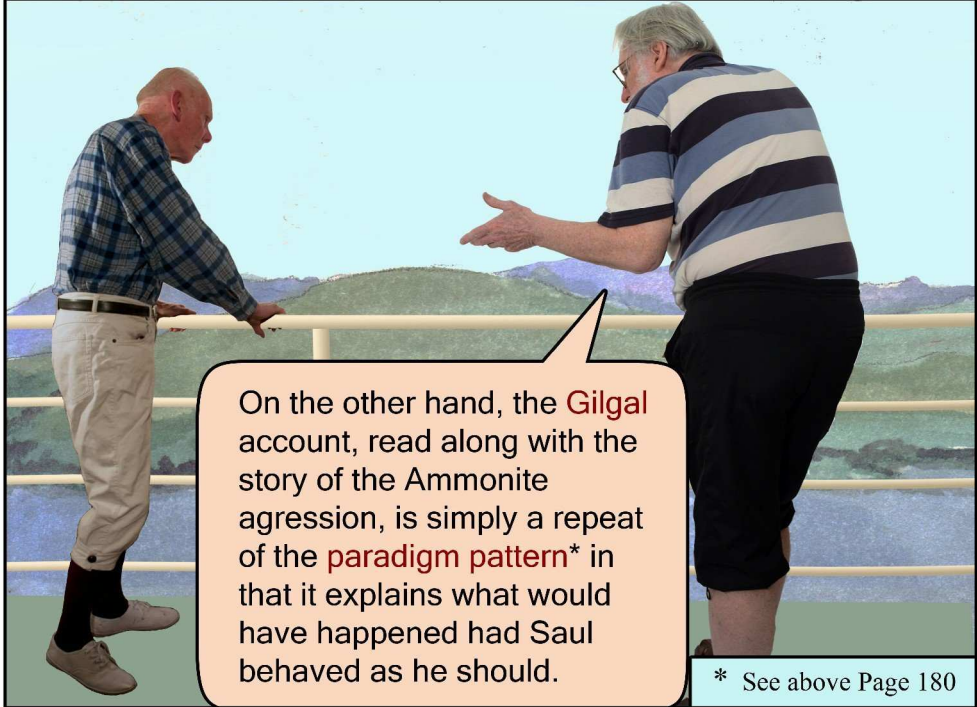
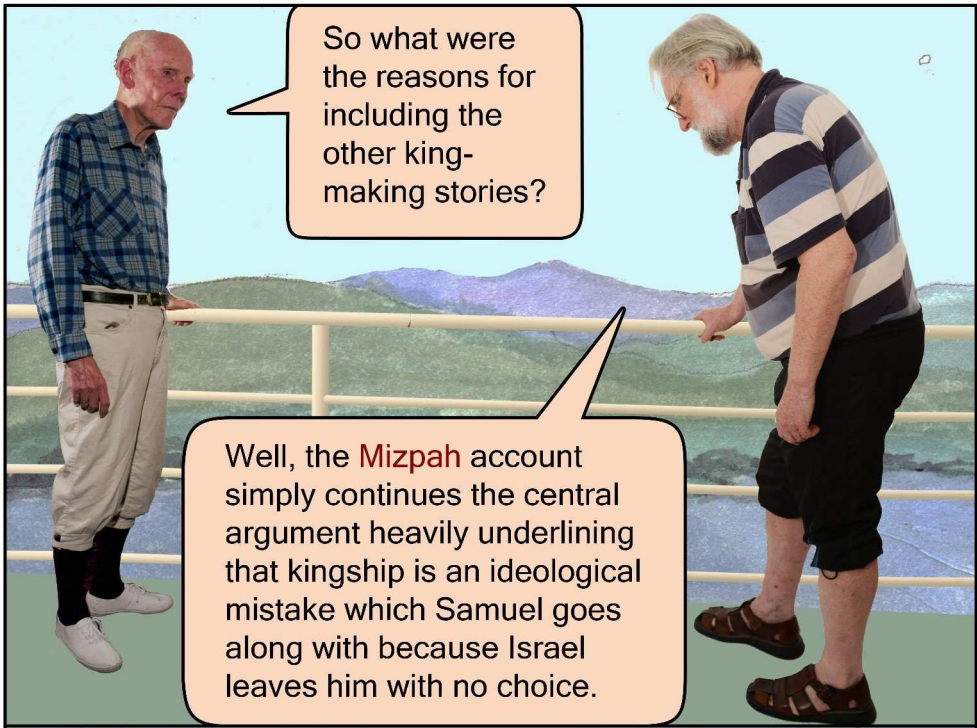


Given this situation it's understandable the scribe decided to try and buttress the David story by making out that Saul too had had a private anointment.



So we are back to the business of the explanation being to do with what happens next rather than what actually happens in the story itself?

Exactly. Anointment becomes a key issue in the David stories while being incidental in those about Saul!



The whole thing begins with a totally unwarranted and unimaginably brutal threat levelled by the Ammonite king against the Israelites living in Jebesh.

1 Sam 11.1-2

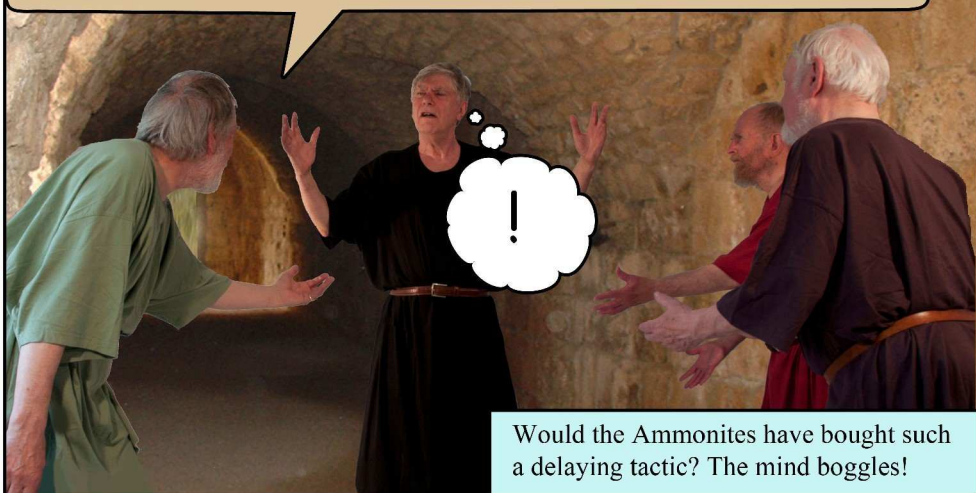


Make a treaty with us and we will be subject to you.

I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.

This, as well as what follows, makes it unmistakably clear the story is another **paradigm** which in no way should be taken as an historical account of something that actually happened.

Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no-one comes to rescue us, we will surrender.



Would the Ammonites have bought such a delaying tactic? The mind boggles!

As the story goes, Saul returned home from work to find everyone distressed by the news that had just arrived.



Learning what had happened he immediately took matters in hand.





Take a piece to every tribe. Tell them that this is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.

Note the echoes of the story of the Levite's concubine (see p. 148 above).



Tell the people of Jabesh that by the time the sun is hot tomorrow, they will be rescued.

The 'joints' would have been bigger with blood everywhere and they only had a few hours to do their rounds ... but this is not history remember.

The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions and during the morning watch they broke into the Ammonite camp and slaughtered them... and those who survived were scattered.

1 Sam 11.11



Saul's dramatic achievement and exemplary behaviour were so great that people chose the moment to turn on those who had previously criticised... but Saul was magnanimous.

Where are the critics?
Bring them here so that
we may put them to death.



No-one will be put
to death today,
for this day Yahweh
has rescued Israel.

This story is unmistakably **a paradigm** designed to show what well-conducted marginal kingship looks like but to make its significance clearer still the author now adds the **Gilgal** incident.

1 Sam 11.14



Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.

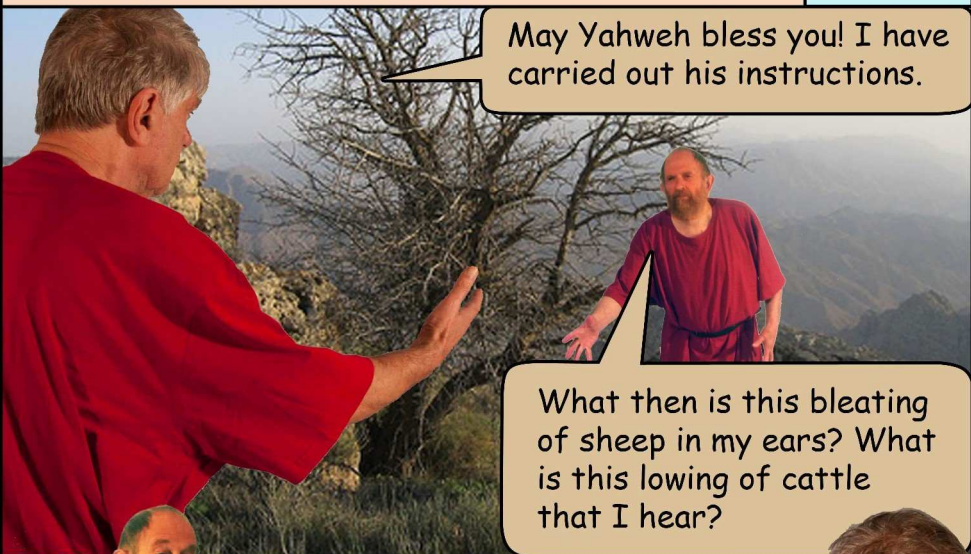
So, if this is **a paradigm** demonstrating how Saul should have behaved, what follows will presumably tell us what actually happened.



Exactly. We are given two stories both highlighting Saul's failure...


The second is just a rehash of the Gideon incident above where Israel's champion is found guilty of not 'devoting to destruction' all Canaanite spoils of war.

1 Sam 15.



May Yahweh bless you! I have carried out his instructions.

What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?



I have sinned. But please honour me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship Yahweh your God.

Saul apologises abjectly but Samuel hesitates, first turning his back on him and then, only half-heartedly, relenting.

The first story is more innovative and so interesting. It involves the Philistines who are put on their metal when Saul's son, Jonathan, defeats their garrison at Gebah. They quickly muster a huge army to teach Israel a lesson.

1 Sam 13. 3-5



Saul calls on the tribes to rally to him at Gilgal but Samuel fails to turn up to perform the necessary sacrifices to start the battle. After waiting a week, people begin to panic.

1 Sam 13. 8-9



Sire they're deserting!

Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.

Of course, as soon as Saul has performed the sacrifices Samuel turns up...

1 SAm 13.11-12

What have
you done?

When I saw that the men
were scattering and that
you did not come, I said, 'The
Philistines will arrive and I
have not sought Yahweh's
favour.' So I felt compelled
to offer the burnt offering.

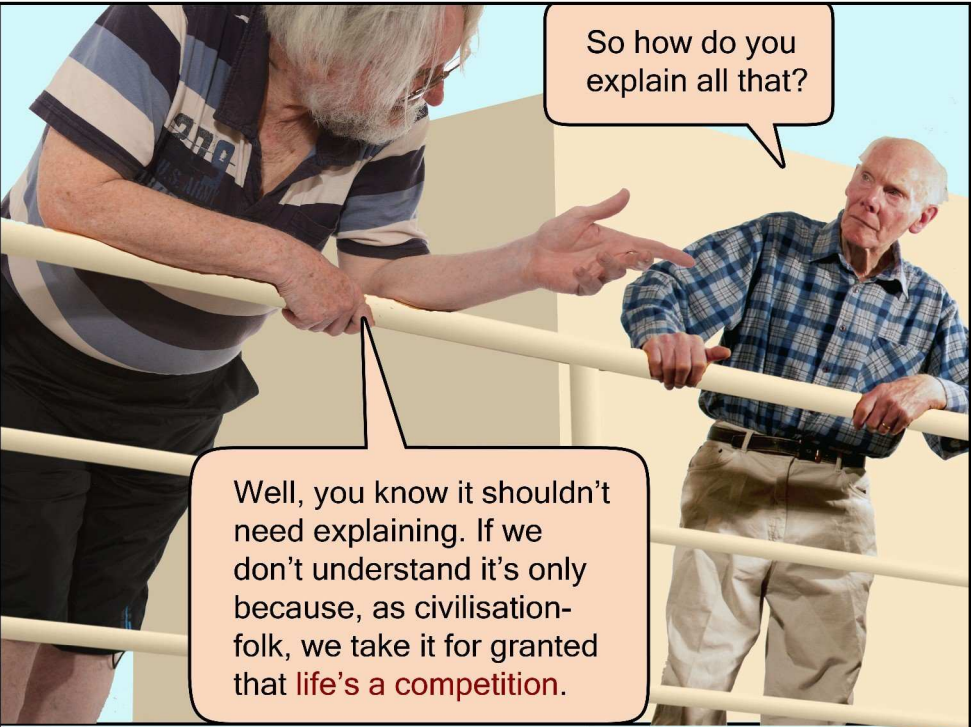
What's interesting is Samuel's intransigence since, for us, Saul's conduct is excusable whereas Samuel's, in being a week late, isn't. Yet Samuel makes no apology. He simply tells Saul in a prophecy he's a 'has-been' who now is history.

You have done a foolish thing, You have not kept the command Yahweh gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure;



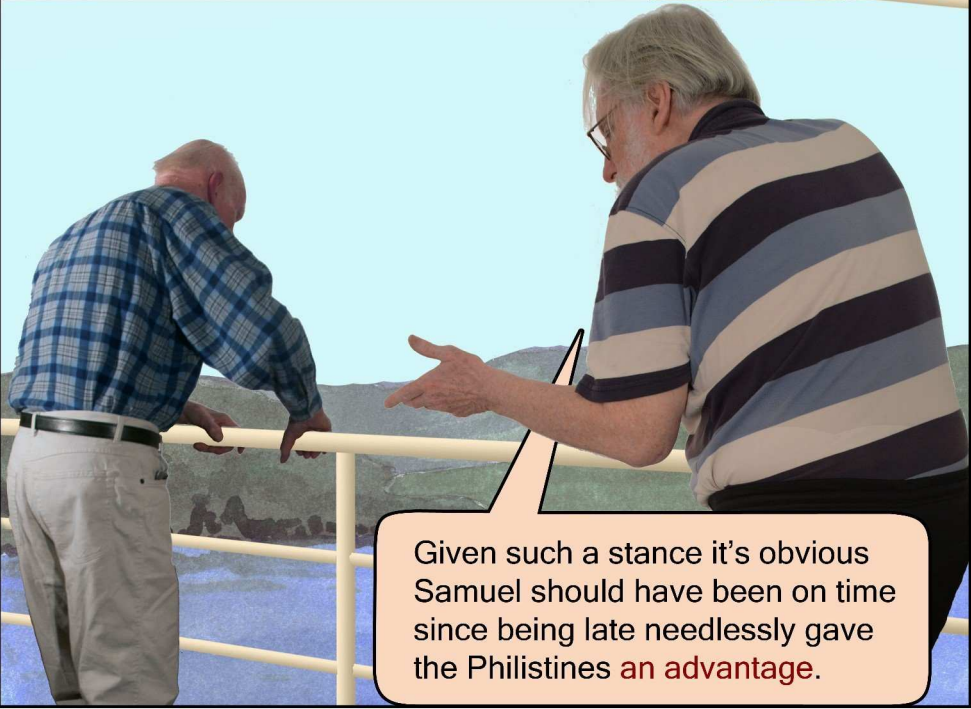
Yahweh has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept Yahweh's command.

1 Sam 13.13-14



So how do you explain all that?

Well, you know it shouldn't need explaining. If we don't understand it's only because, as civilisation-folk, we take it for granted that **life's a competition**.

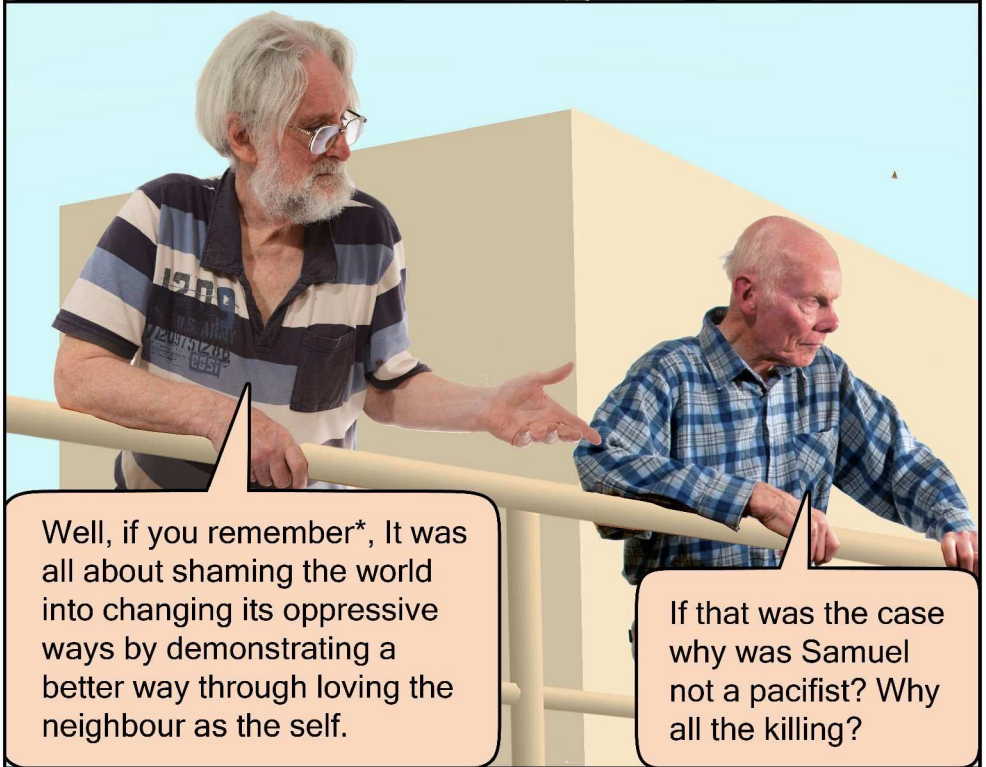


Given such a stance it's obvious Samuel should have been on time since being late needlessly gave the Philistines **an advantage**.



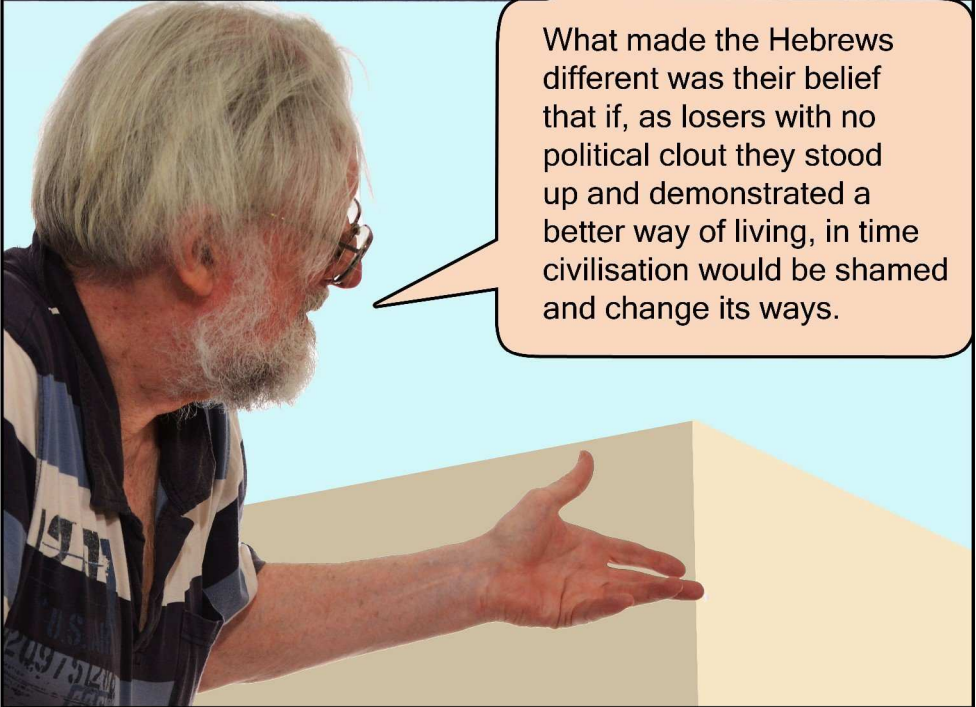
But Samuel wasn't trying to beat Israel's enemies at their own competitive game. As a revolutionary Hebrew he was playing a **different** game.

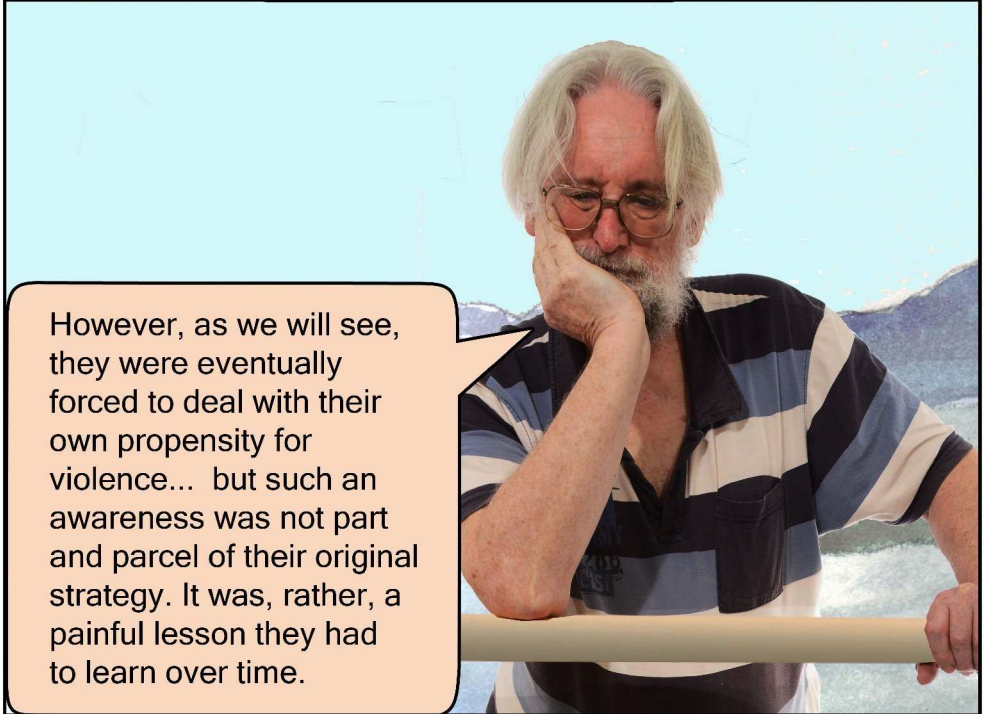
What game was that?



Well, if you remember*, It was all about shaming the world into changing its oppressive ways by demonstrating a better way through loving the neighbour as the self.

If that was the case why was Samuel not a pacifist? Why all the killing?







This brings us straight to a repeat of the **paradigm pattern**: a story exemplifying well-conducted kingship - only here David is the king. Interestingly, however, the Ammonites remain the foe.



David sends a delegation to Hanun to express his sympathy but the Ammonite princes warn their new king to beware.

2 Sam 10.3

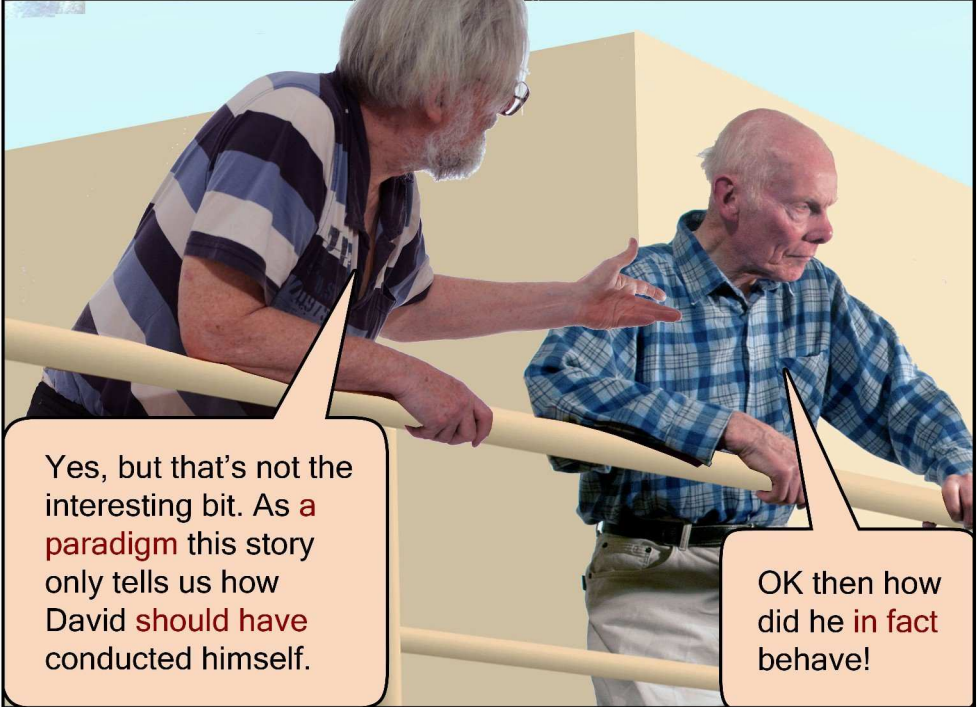
Sire, David is not honouring your father. He's sent these men just to spy out the land.



So Hanun arrests David's envoys and humiliates them, shaving off half of their beards and cutting off their garments at the buttocks, before sending them packing.

2 Sam 10.4





Well, next Spring, at the beginning of the campaigning season, David decided to stay at home and let his comander-in-chief Joab deal with what remained of the Ammonites.

2 Sam 11.1



One late afternoon, having left his couch to walk on the roof of the palace, he looked down and saw a woman below washing herself... and she was very beautiful.

2 Sam 11.2-3



David ordered her to be brought to him. They spent the night together and in the morning she returned to her own house.

2 Sam 11.4



Unfortunately shortly afterwards David got the bad news.

2 Sam 11.5





I have to get Uriah to bed with his wife pronto or I'm fucked!

Send a message to Joab telling him I want Uriah back here at once with all the news.

A couple of days later

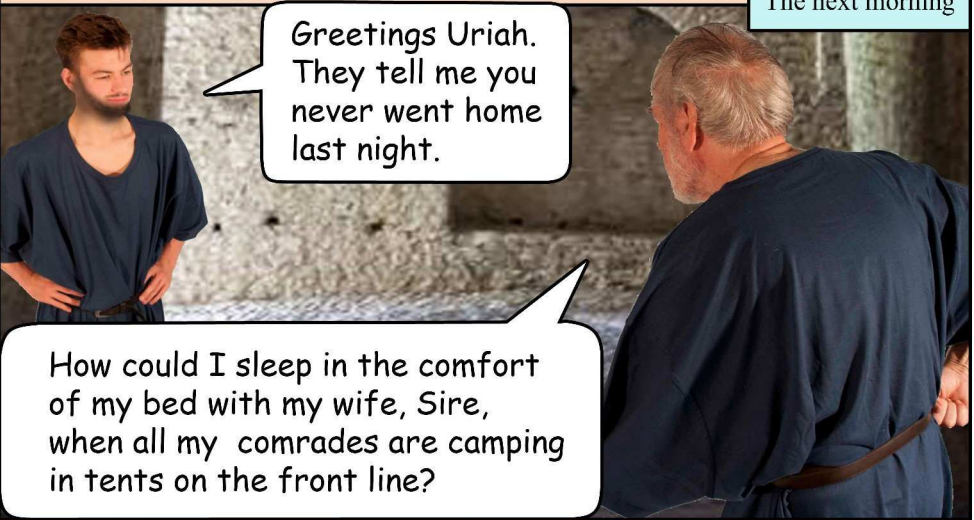


Ah, there you are Uriah. Good to see you. Tell me about the campaign and then you can get home to your wife!

2 Sam 11.6-8

But Uriah, a man with scruples, refused to go home choosing instead to sleep in the palace dormitory with the servants.


The next morning



Greetings Uriah.
They tell me you
never went home
last night.

How could I sleep in the comfort
of my bed with my wife, Sire,
when all my comrades are camping
in tents on the front line?

David informed Uriah he would be sending him back the next day but that evening he invited him to dinner and managed to get him drunk ... but all to no avail!



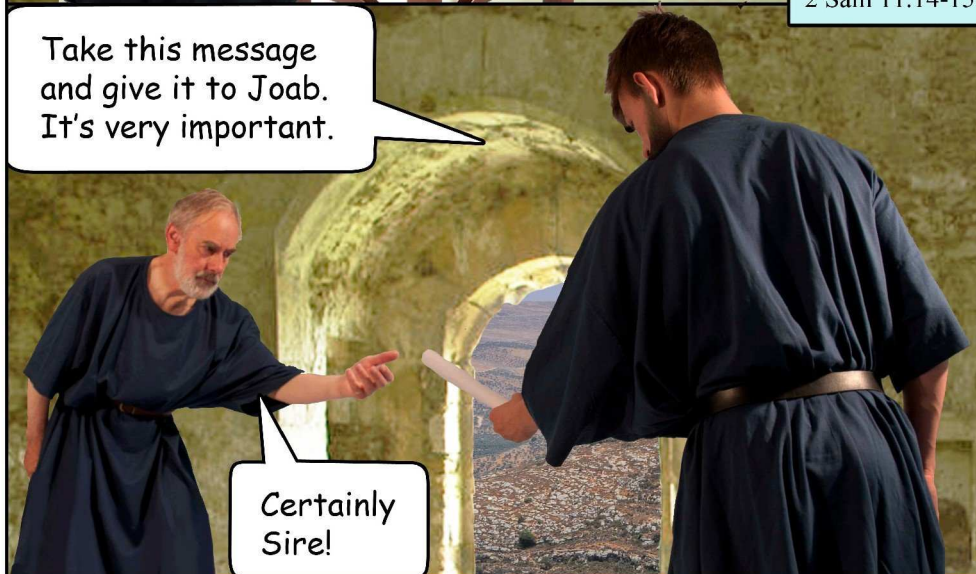
What a bone-head!
What in heaven's name
am I going to do?

2 Sam 11.12-13

The next day David wrote a letter to his commander-in-chief Joab who was besieging the Ammonite city of Rabbah.



2 Sam 11.14-15

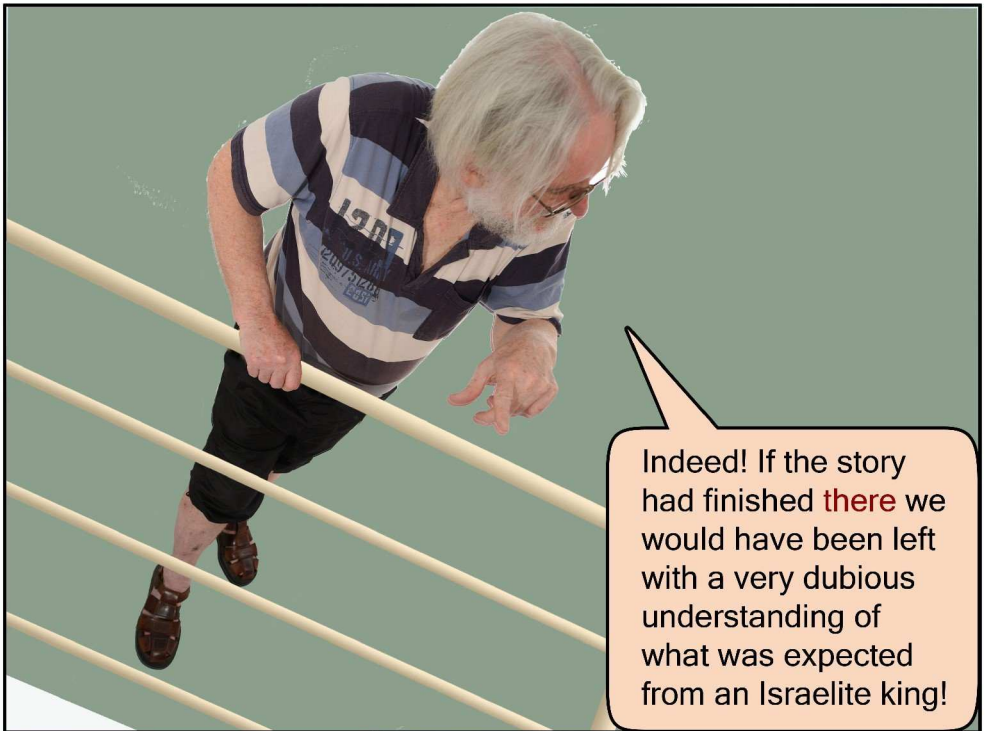


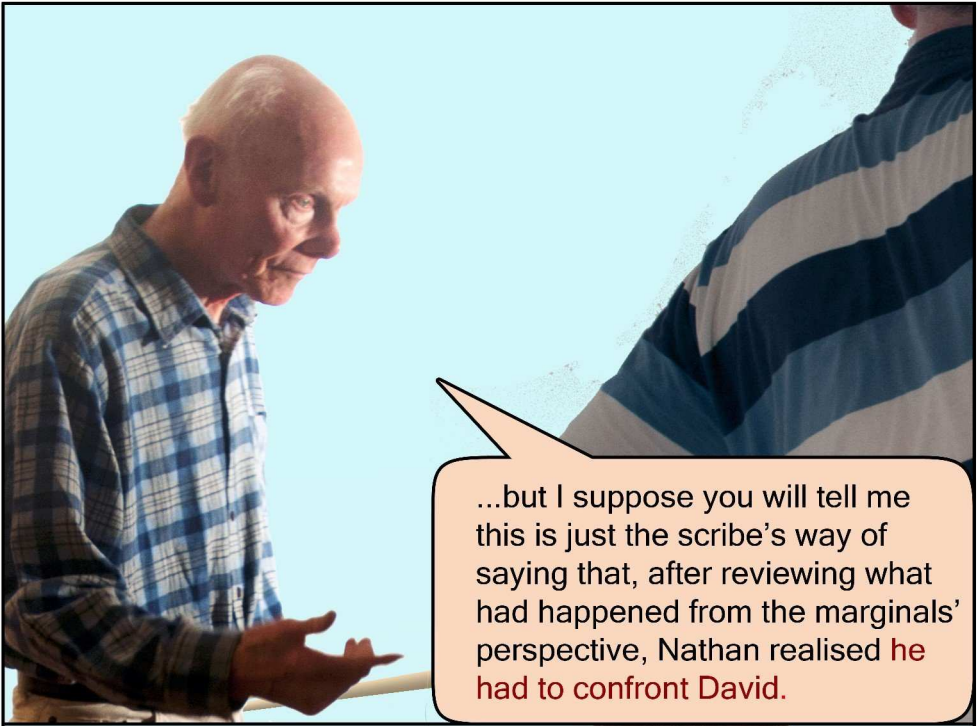
So the faithful Uriah returned to the front line oblivious to the fact that he was carrying his own death warrant.

When David received confirmation from Joab that Uriah had sadly died, valiantly fighting for Israel against the Ammonites, he quietly had Bathsheba moved into his hareem.

2 Sam 11.26-27







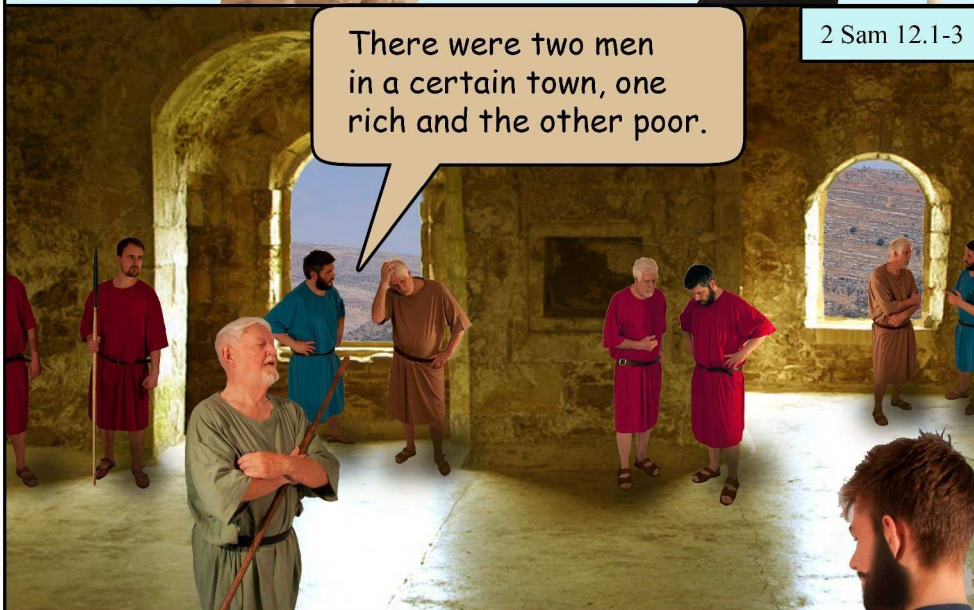
Well choosing his moment carefully and speaking publicly before the whole court, Nathan told David a story... **a parable** in fact!

Yes! another rare parable from the Jewish Bible!



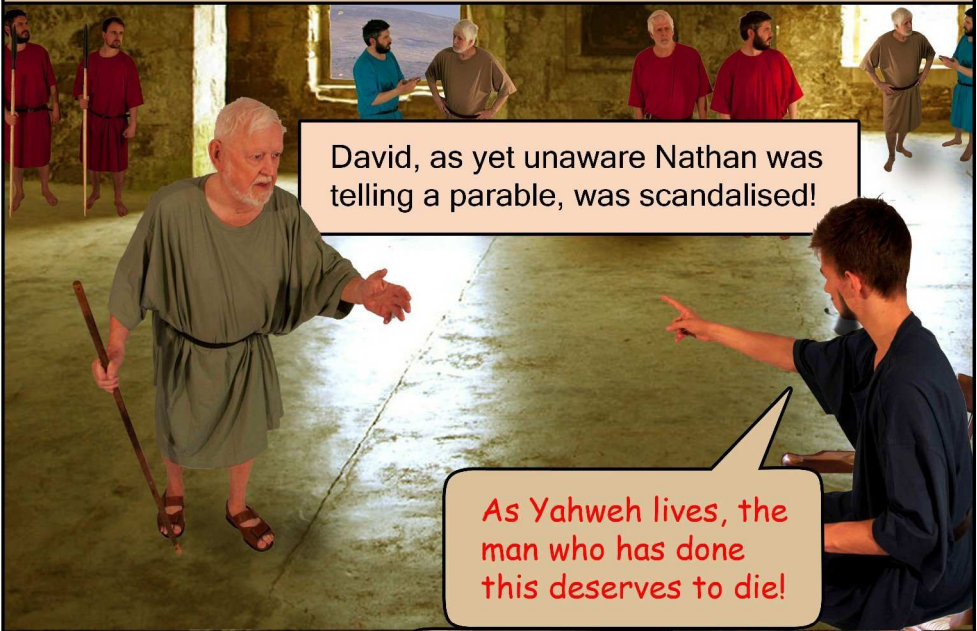
There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.

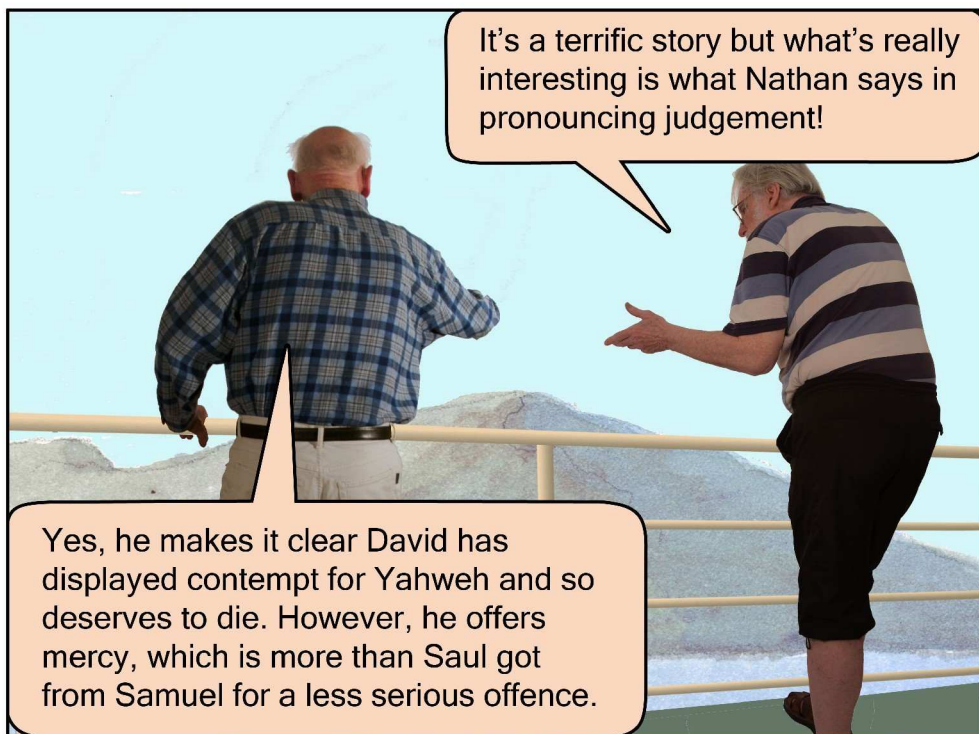
2 Sam 12.1-3



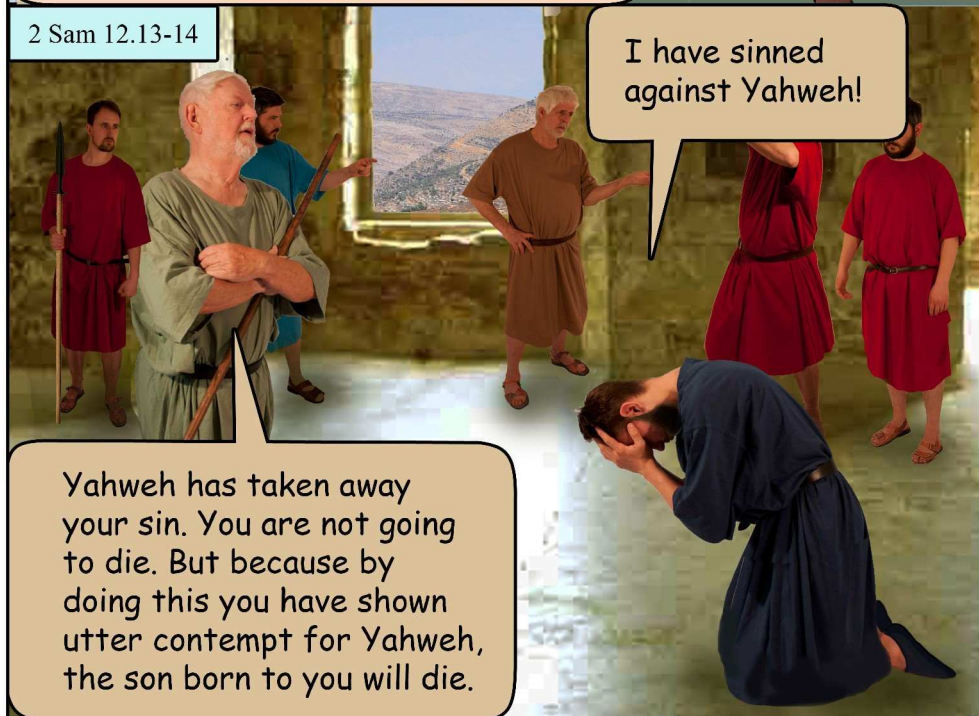
The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

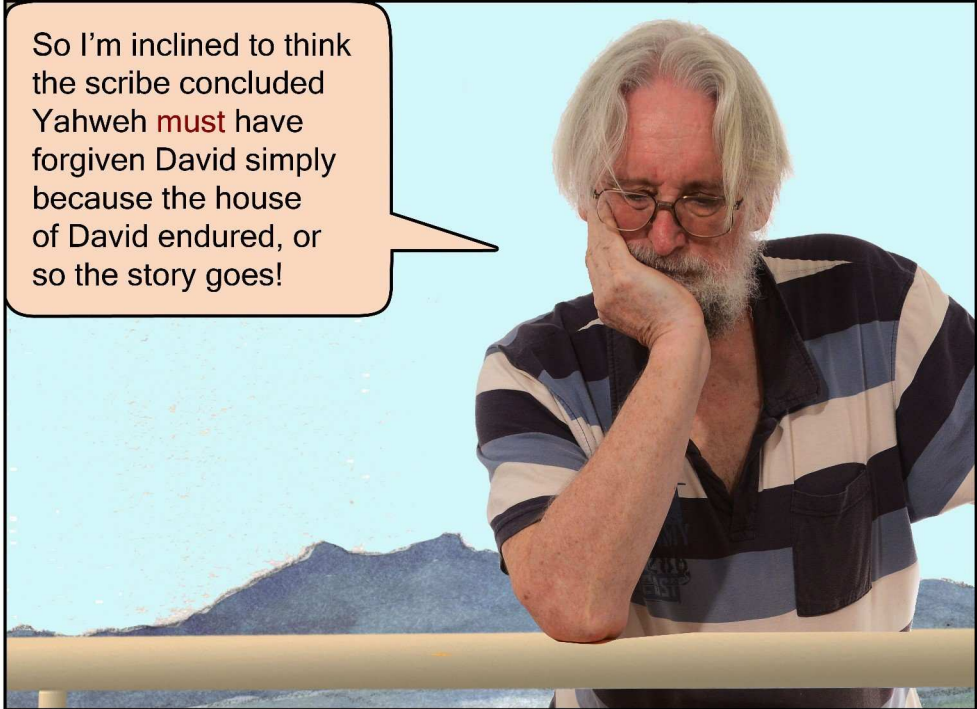
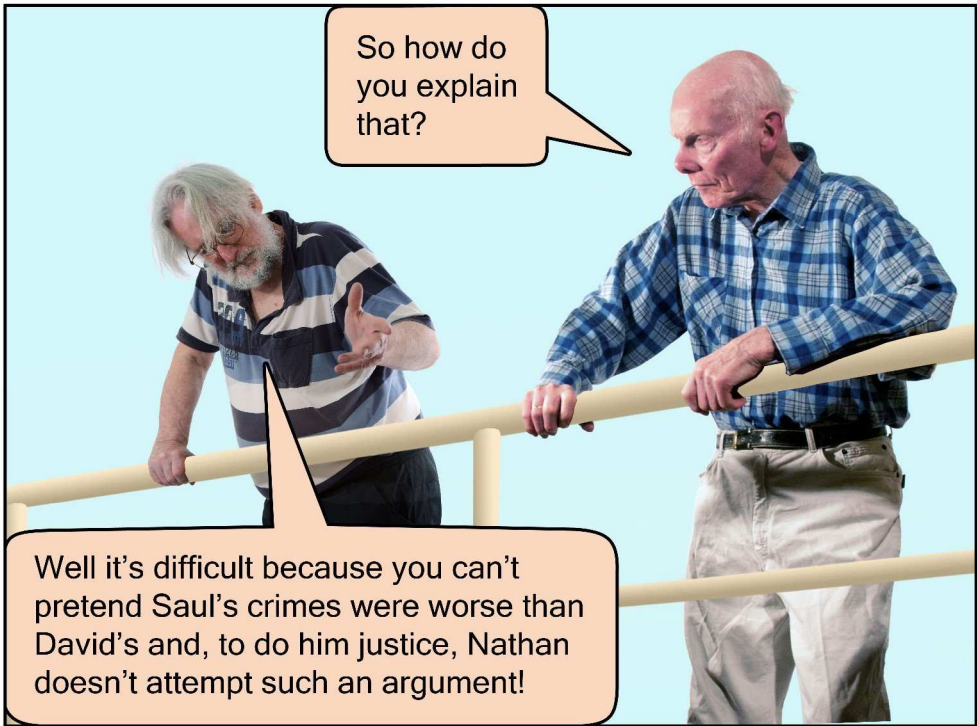
Now a traveller came to visit the rich man, but he refrained from taking one of his own animals to serve him dinner. Instead, since the poor man owed him money, he took his ewe lamb and served that up instead.





2 Sam 12.13-14

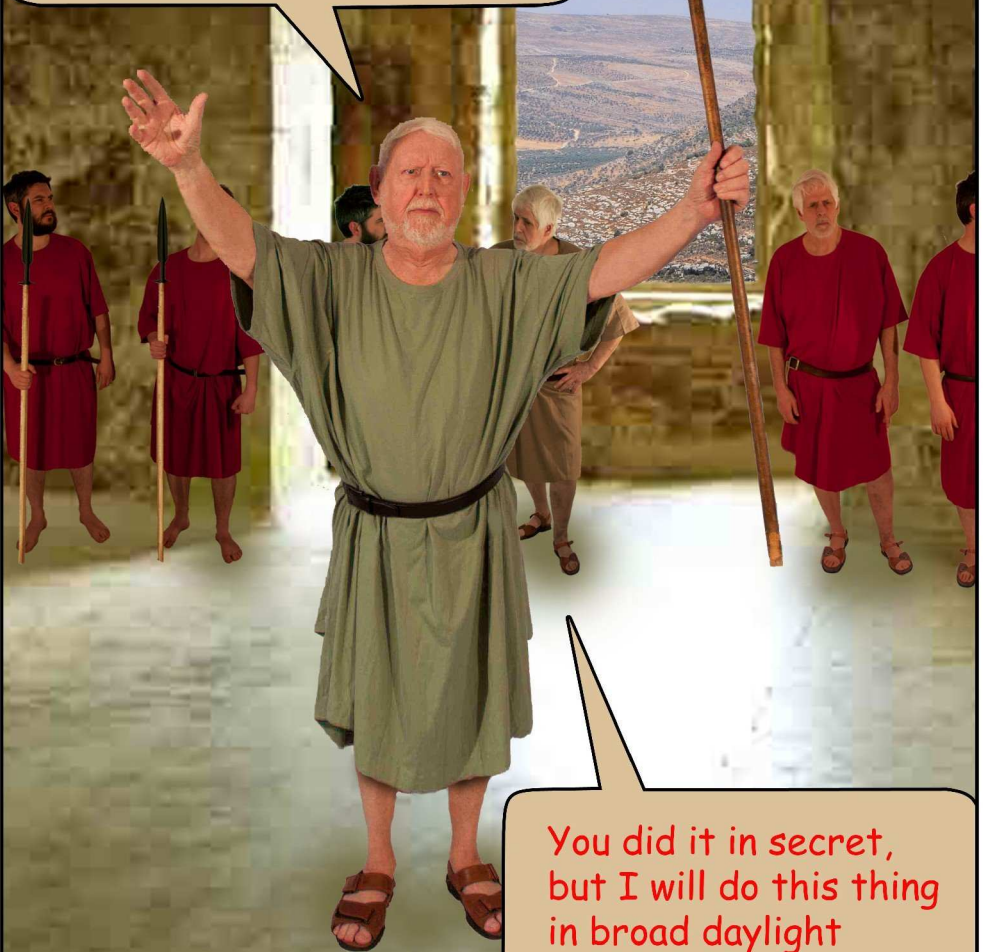




... and this. of course, brings us to the **prophecy**.

2 Sam 12.11-12

From out of your own household
I am going to bring down calamity
on your head. Before your very
eyes I will take your wives and
give them to one who is close to
you and he will sleep with your
wives in front of everyone.



You did it in secret,
but I will do this thing
in broad daylight
before all Israel.

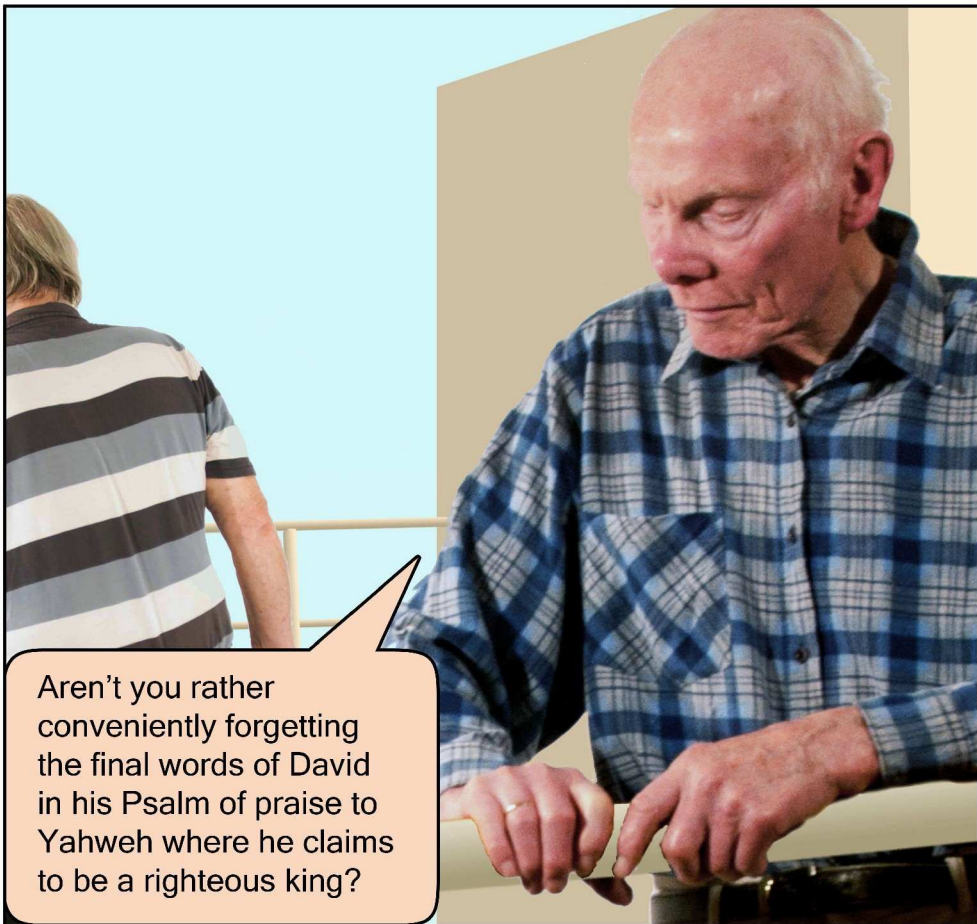
Compare page 217 above

What we have here would seem to be the story-teller's definitive judgement on David since all that follows simply serves to show how this prophecy was fulfilled as David's rule stumbled from one crisis to the next.

What are you infering?

2 Sam 12.15 -1 Kings 2

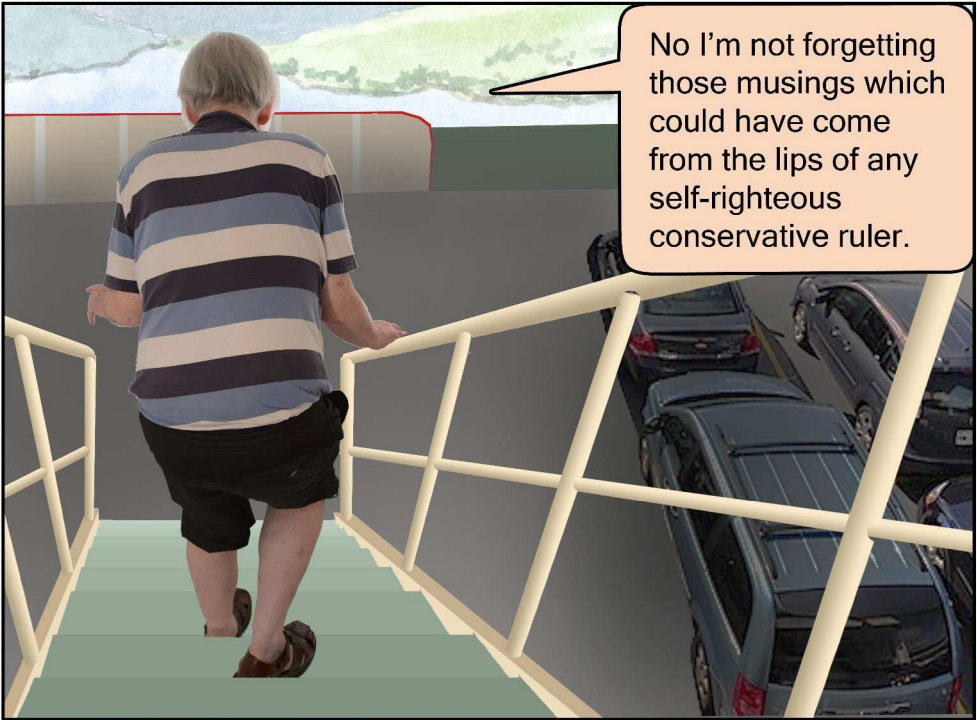
Well, if this is the case doesn't it mean David did no better than Saul, the only difference being that his dynasty survived - at least for a time - a matter they set great store by but to which we are indifferent!



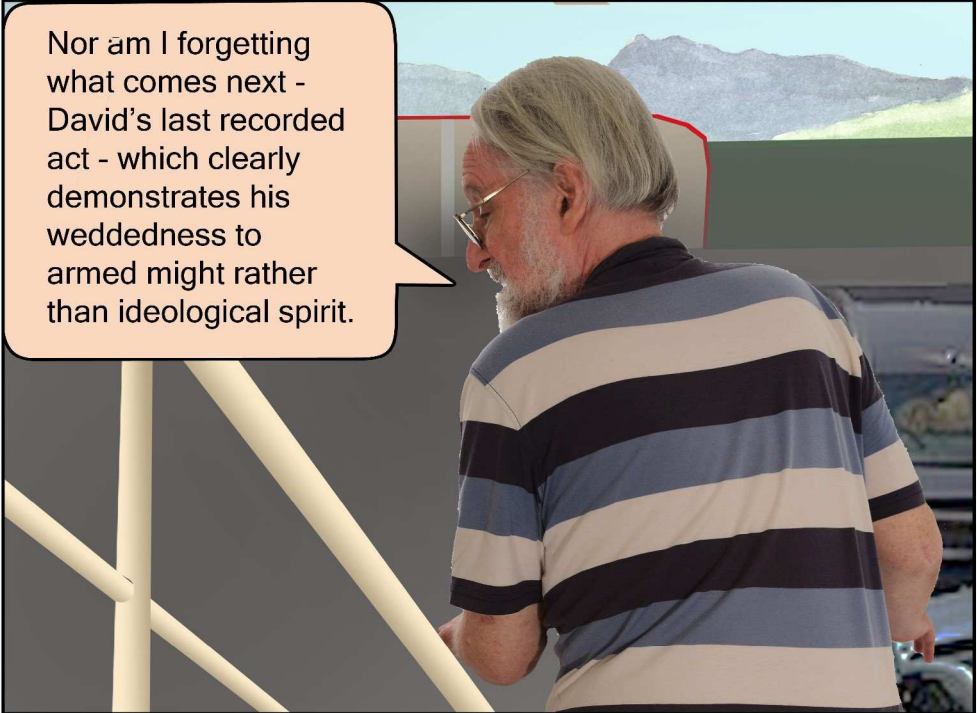
Aren't you rather conveniently forgetting the final words of David in his Psalm of praise to Yahweh where he claims to be a righteous king?

*I have kept the ways of Yahweh;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.
All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.
I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.
Yahweh has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.*

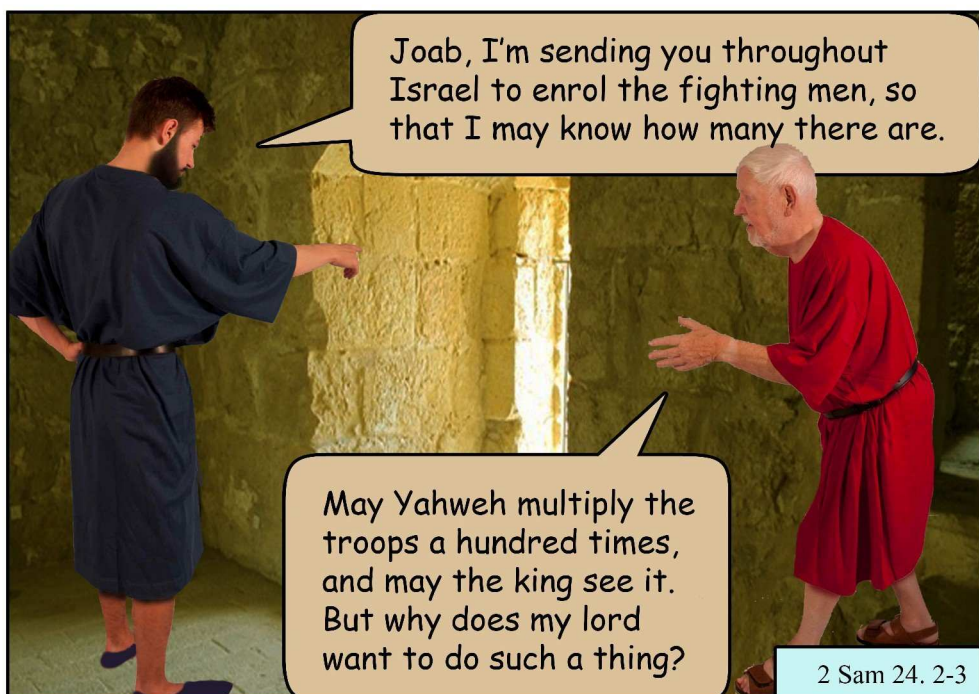
2 Sam 22-23.7.



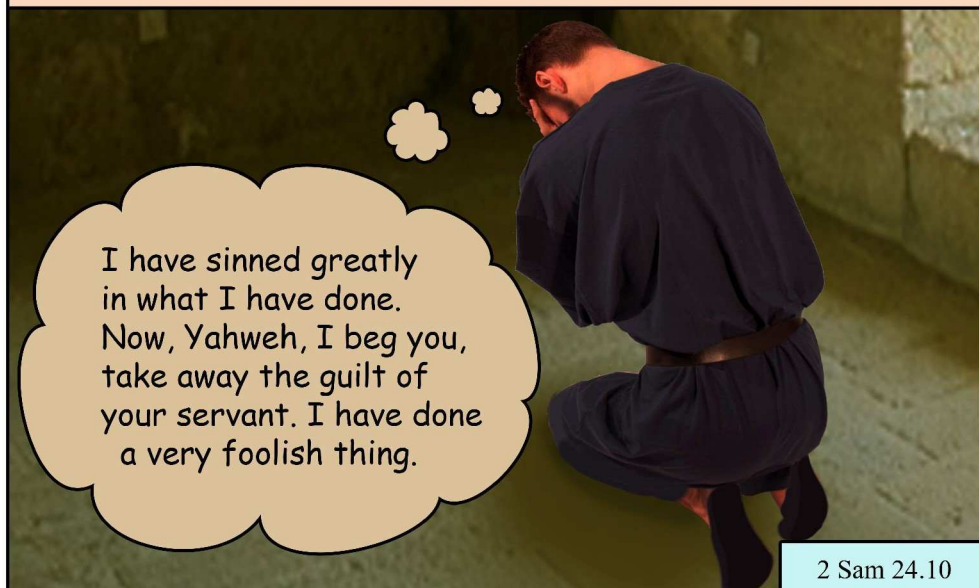
No I'm not forgetting those musings which could have come from the lips of any self-righteous conservative ruler.

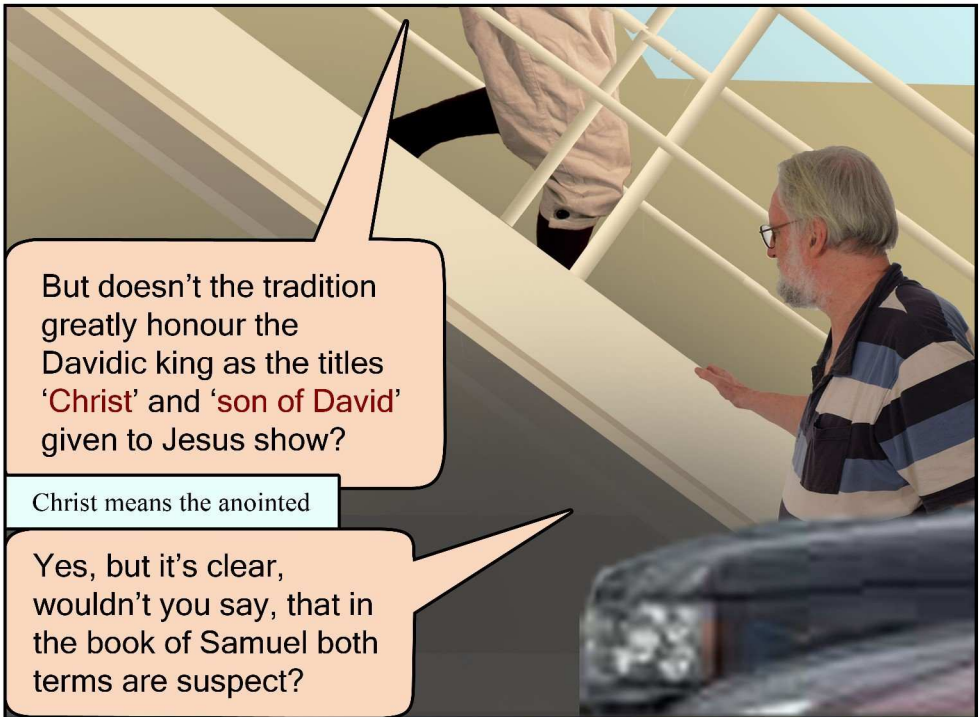


Nor am I forgetting what comes next - David's last recorded act - which clearly demonstrates his weddedness to armed might rather than ideological spirit.



Joab was right. Why indeed? For David's act betrayed a total lack of confidence in Yahweh's ability, as god of the Marginal, to fight his own battles as David's subsequent act of contrition shows...

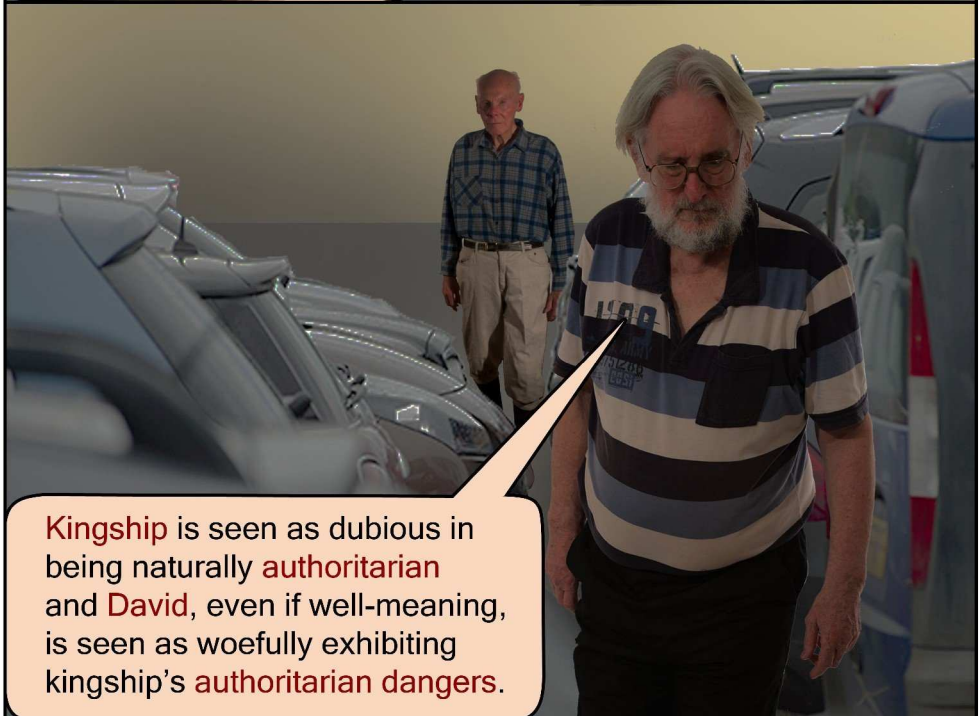




But doesn't the tradition greatly honour the Davidic king as the titles '**Christ**' and '**son of David**' given to Jesus show?

Christ means the anointed

Yes, but it's clear, wouldn't you say, that in the book of Samuel both terms are suspect?



Kingship is seen as dubious in being naturally **authoritarian** and **David**, even if well-meaning, is seen as woefully exhibiting kingship's **authoritarian dangers**.

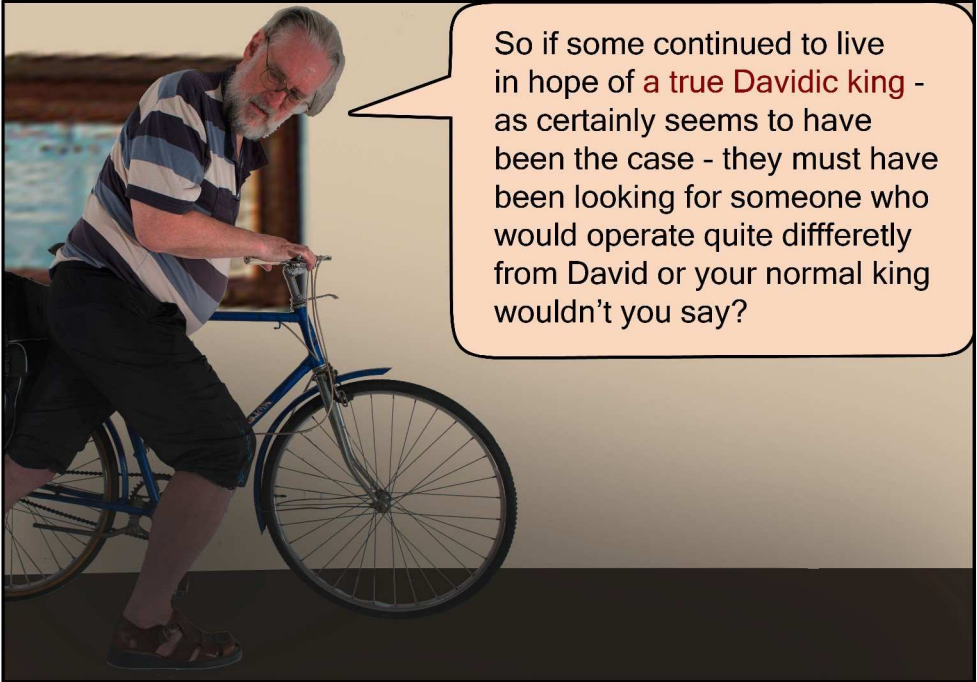
If both terms were suspect what did the expression **Davidic-kingship** signify and why was it held in such esteem?



It was simply the way people referred to their attempts, as a community, to centralise their defensive organisation in the face of external aggression and to do this in such a way as not to jeopardise their ideological commitment.



People didn't talk about the 'Sauline' kingship because Saul had been rejected. But David's house had endured so naturally the ongoing experiment was spoken of as the **Davidic-kingship** without the intention being to sanctify the actual terms.



Put it like this: If we asked some intelligent extra-terrestrials to search human history for a righteous king would they be likely to come up with the son of the carpenter from Nazareth?



On the other hand, things would be different, don't you think, if we asked them to come up with a righteous exponent of the marginal ideology?

*Hooray!
At last we've
got a hit!*

Ping! Ping!

*But why did
they treat him
so badly?*

*No idea.
Strange creatures
these humans!*

5

KINGS

I fancy your equivocal attitude to the Davidic-kingship is now going to come unstuck, as we examine the book of Kings, for it has many positive references on the subject.

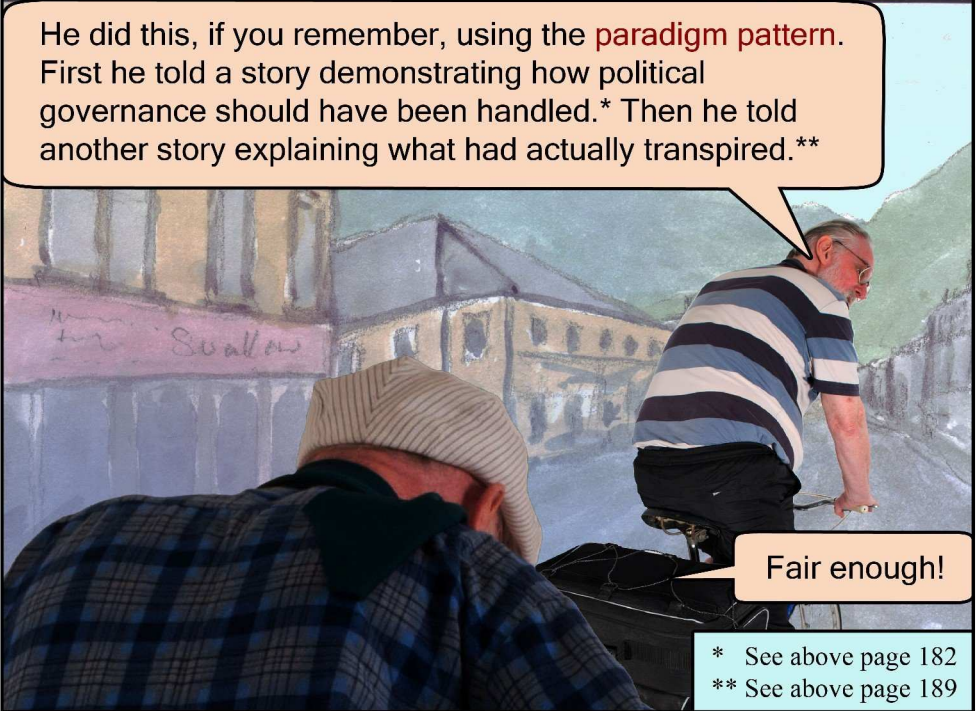
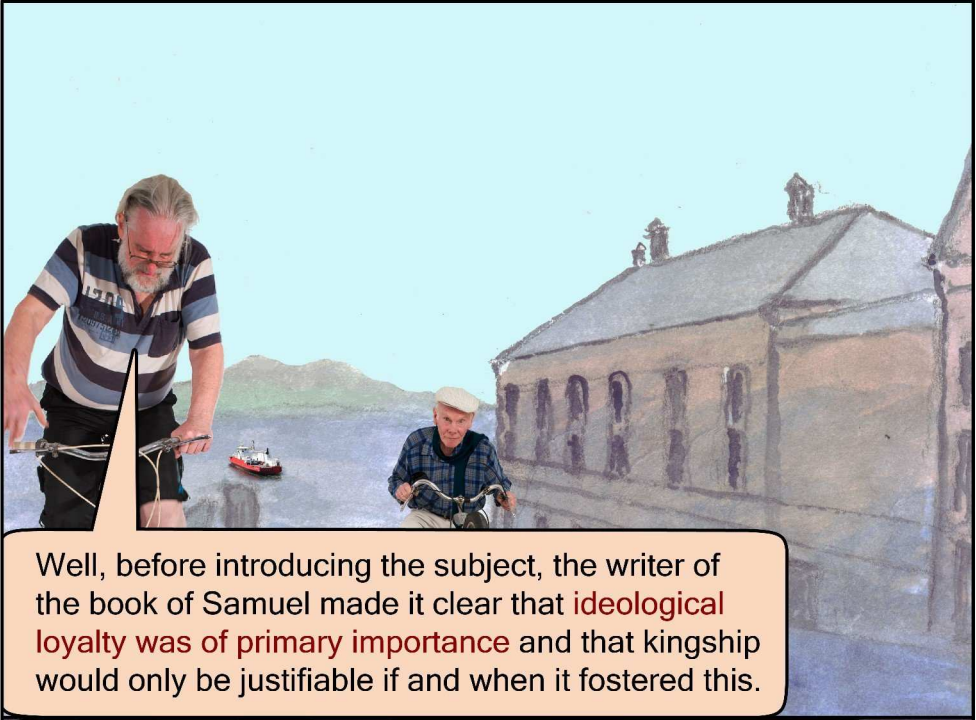


Fair enough but you have to remember that, at best, Davidic-kingship was only ever a **secondary structural matter**.



You're speaking in riddles again!





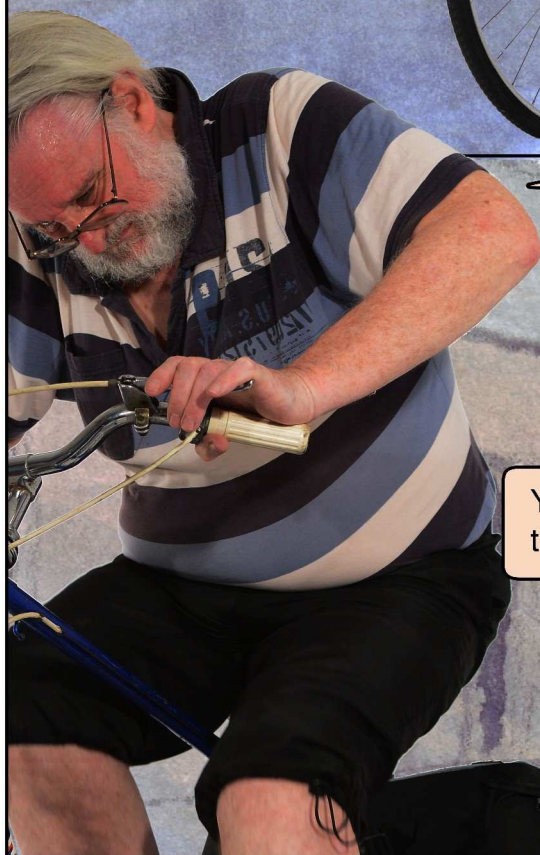
Later he reused this self-same paradigm pattern on two more occasions. First in dealing with **Saul**.

See page 208 above



And then again in dealing with **David**.

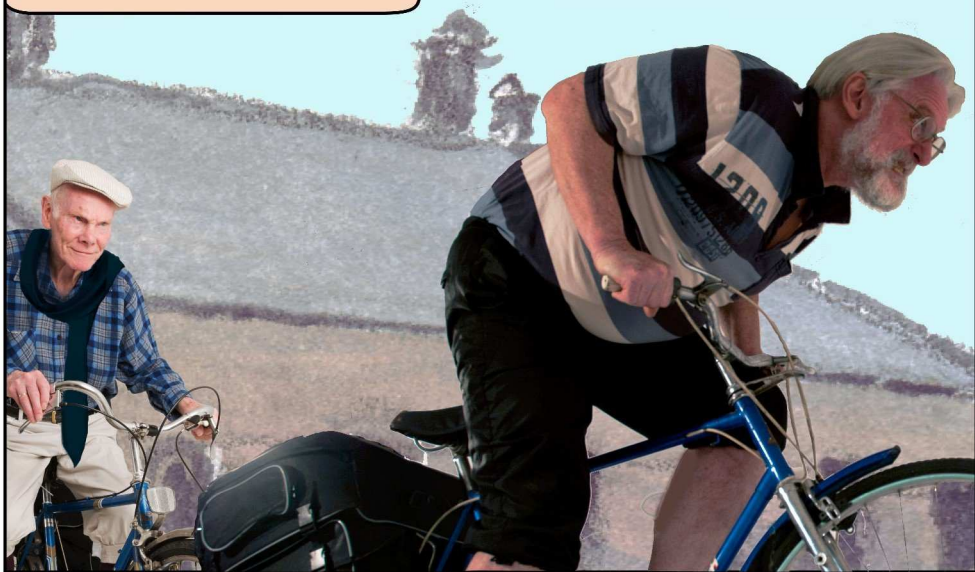
See page 222 above



Yes, I see that now.



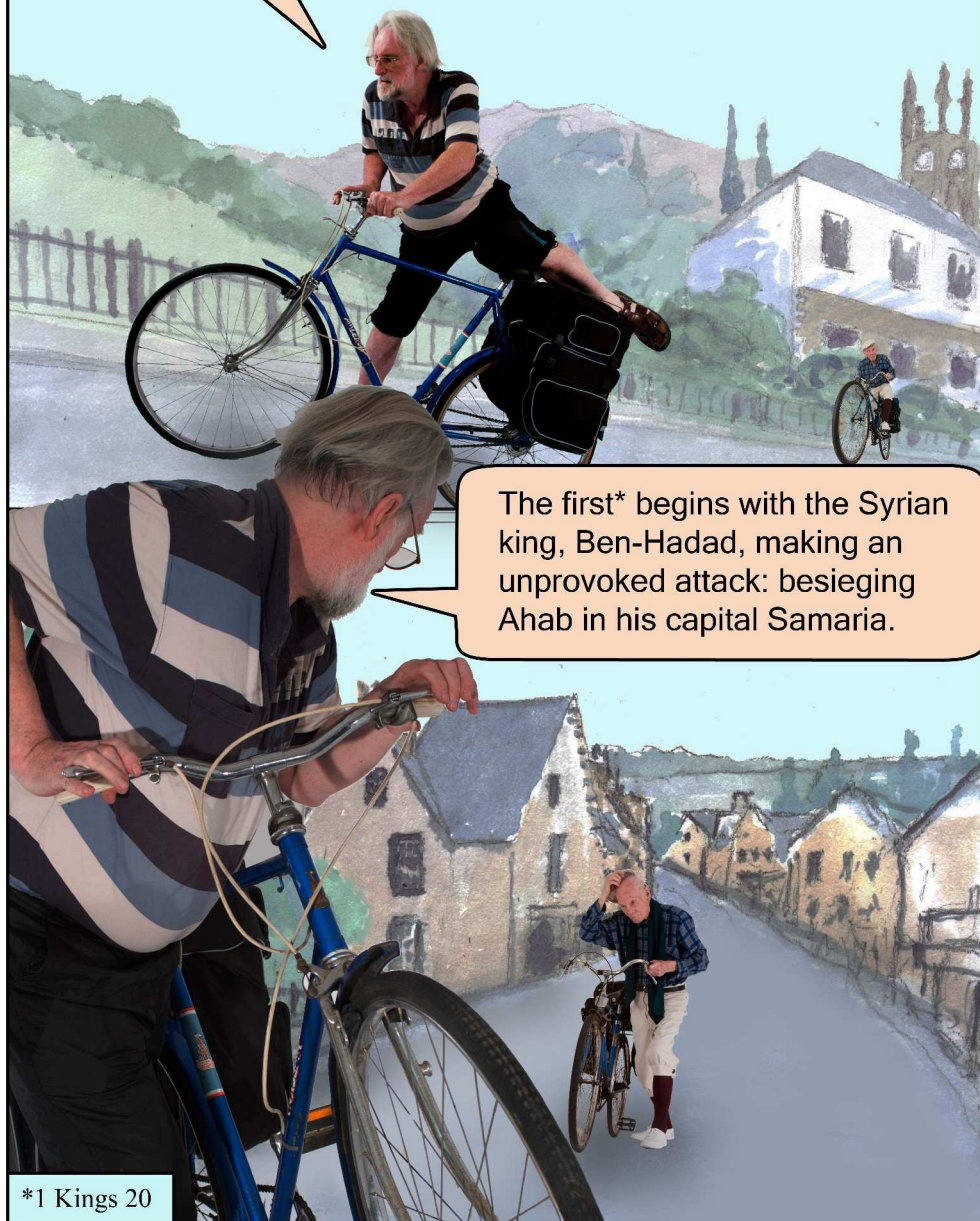
So what do you think he was trying to point out by doing all of this?



You see him as insisting kingship, as a political structure, was subject to revolutionary Hebrew rules so if found wanting it would have to be dispensed with. Is that right?



Exactly! On that basis I now propose we leap ahead and take a look at another example of this paradigm pattern which appears in a pair of stories dealing with Ahab in the book of Kings.

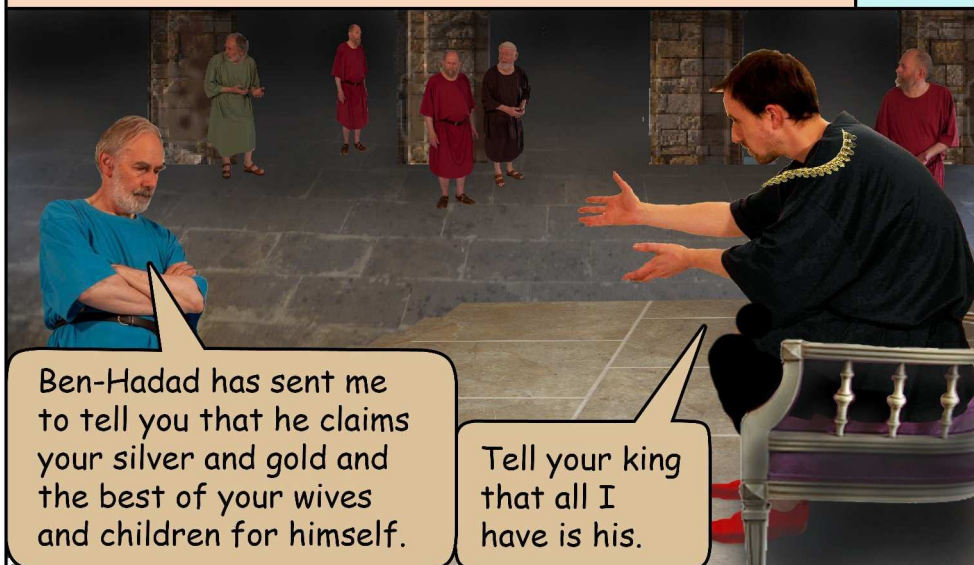


The first* begins with the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad, making an unprovoked attack: besieging Ahab in his capital Samaria.

*1 Kings 20

Camped outside the city, he sends the most outrageous demands ... and at first Ahab is remarkably conciliatory:

Vs. 1-4

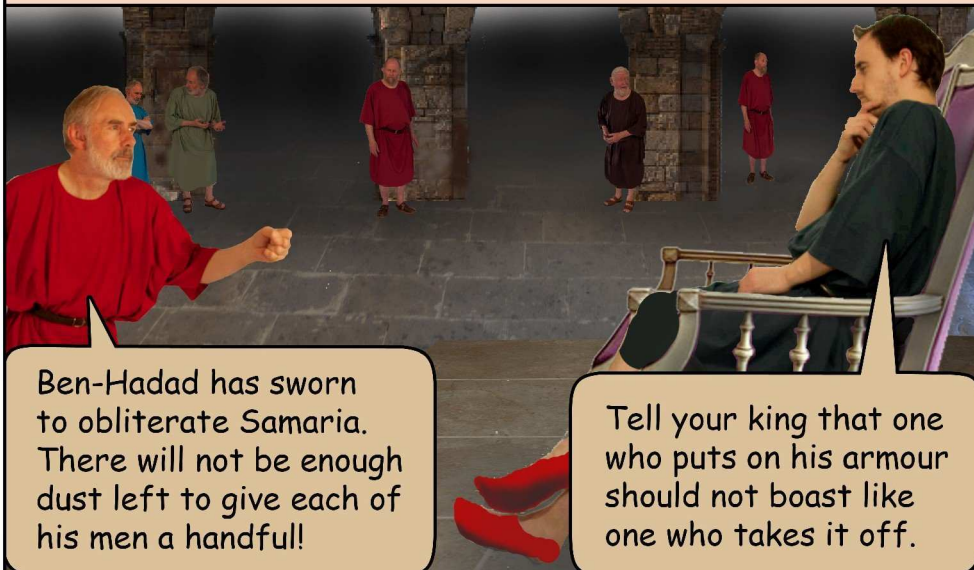


The messenger soon returns to inform Ahab that Ben Hadad's officers would be arriving the next day to relieve the king of everything valuable. So Ahab decided to consult the people.

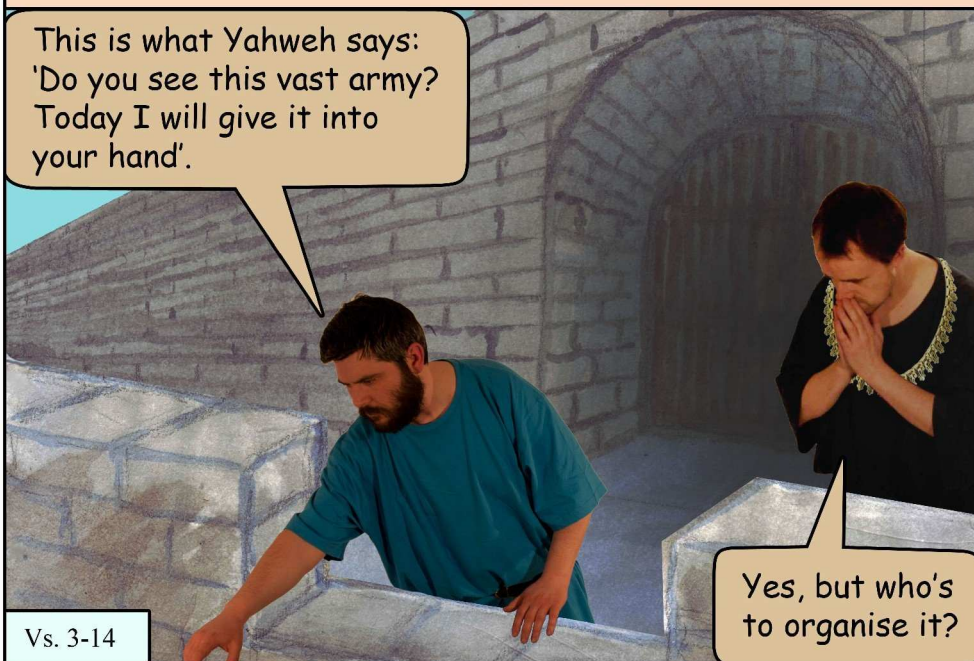


Vs. 5-8

Ahab followed the people's advice but it wasn't long before the messenger was back with an angry rejoinder:



So the die was cast. At this point a prophet approached the king.



Vs. 3-14



And that is precisely what happened and it won't surprise you to learn there was a great victory for Israel that day... !

... or that when sometime later Ben-Hadad was captured Ahab was magnanimous and Ben-Hadad shamed.

Vs. 32-34

There you are brother.
I'm glad to see you alive.
Join me in my chariot for
I intend to set you free!



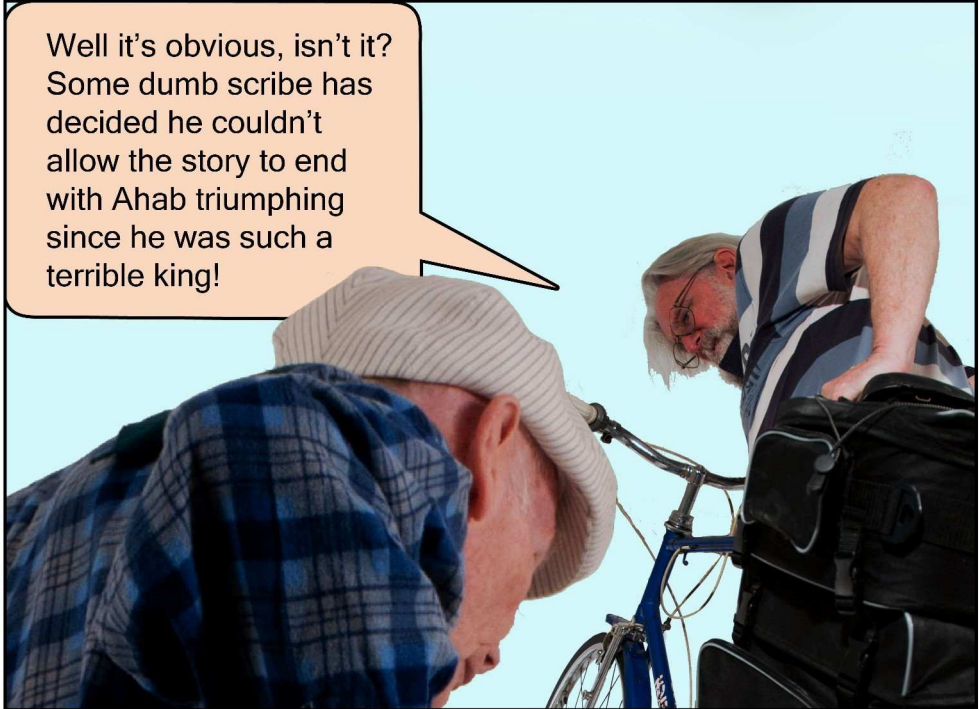
I will return the cities my father took from
your father and you may set up your own markets
in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.

So the writer's not claiming this actually
happened. It's just the '**what should have
happened**' part of his paradigm pattern.



Yes, once you've
twigged it's all
rather obvious!

But there's more of
the story to come.



So when Ahab has mercy on Beh-Hadad, and it pays dividends, he feels he has to counter with a drab little story about a prophet who accuses Ahab of withholding a devoted object!




This is what Yahweh says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people!

Vs. 35-43


Yes, I get your point but can't help thinking the devoted object business, however, objectionable, is quite in line with the tradition and so may well be original.



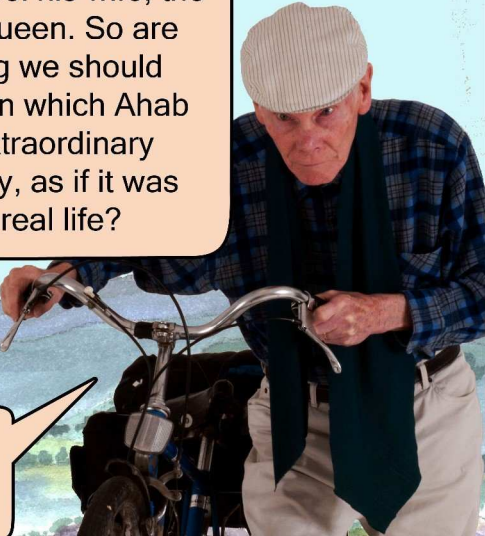
But it makes no sense! We both agree this is a paradigm about how a king of Israel **should behave** and you can't construct a paradigm using **questionable behaviour**.



Then maybe we're wrong in thinking it's a paradigm!



You amaze me! Ahab was renowned for being Israel's most despotic king and for having, in Jezebel his wife, the most despotic queen. So are you really saying we should read this story, in which Ahab behaves with extraordinary political propriety, as if it was meant to reflect real life?



No. I suppose you're right.

Of course I'm right! In any case, if you have remaining doubts these should be dispelled if what follows turns out to be a convincing account of the reality half of the pattern... along the lines of the Uriah story above.*

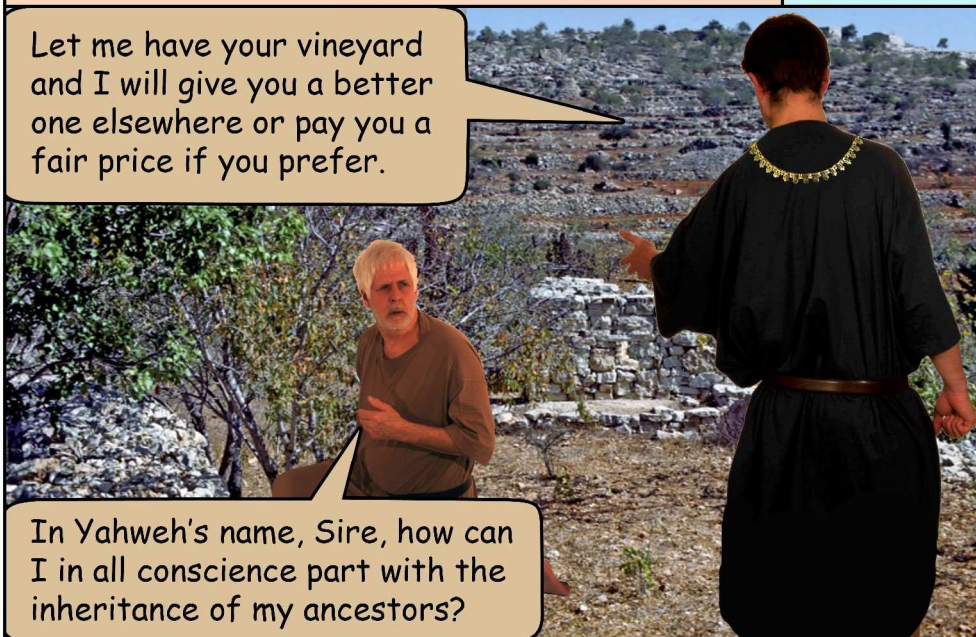
* See p. 225



We are told that a man named Naboth had a vineyard right next to Ahab's palace in Samaria which the king coveted as a kitchen garden.

1 Kings 21: 1-3

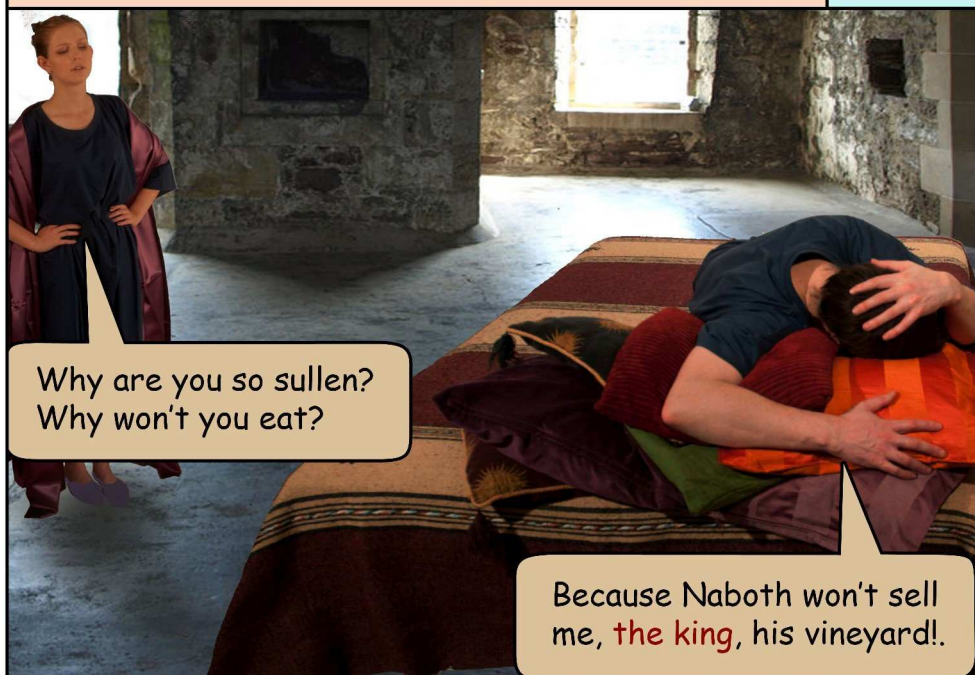
Let me have your vineyard and I will give you a better one elsewhere or pay you a fair price if you prefer.



In Yahweh's name, Sire, how can I in all conscience part with the inheritance of my ancestors?

Thwarted, Ahab went home to lie on his bed sulking and refusing to eat which is where Jezebel found him.

Vs. 5-7



Jezebel immediately sent a letter in the king's name to the elders of the town where Naboth lived, secretly ordering them to find some pretext to get rid of him.

Vs. 8-10



Now put on it the king's seal and deliver it to the elders of Jezreel.

So Naboth was hauled to court where he found himself accused of blasphemy and treason by two paid scoundrels making false witness against him.

We were standing right next to him when he cursed God and the king!

When was this? I never did anything of the kind.

Silence in court!

Vs. 11-13

And before he really knew what was happening, he was taken out of the city and stoned to death.

V. 15

But I never said **anything**!




As soon as Jezebel got the news she hurried off to see the King.

Get up and take possession of Naboth's vineyard for he is no longer alive, but dead.

How on earth did you manage that?



However, what neither of them knew was that Ahab's old foe, the prophet Elijah, had got wind of what was happening which meant he was there when Ahab arrived to claim the vineyard.



Have you found me, O my enemy?

Yes, indeed, and have **you** just had a man murdered to acquire his property?

So there we have it - **a fine parallel to the Uriah story** which, I think you will agree, is hard to better as an illustration of flagrantly despotic kingly rule.



But in case you still feel inclined to quibble, you should note that, just like the Uriah story, this one also ends with a **prophecy** later tediously fulfilled in every detail:

Vs. 21-23

Because you have sold yourself to do evil in his eyes, hear now what Yahweh says: 'I am going to bring disaster on you. I will wipe out your descendents and cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel - slave or free - because you have aroused my anger and caused Israel to sin.'

As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her by the wall of Jezreel.'

Compare p. 237 above

OK you've made your case.
So what do you see this as
telling us about the thinking of
the scribe who wrote Kings?

It shows he too was writing
from a **revolutionary Hebrew**
standpoint wouldn't you say?

Fair enough but what of
the Davidic kingship stuff?
You can't just brush that
all under the carpet!

No you're right. To
understand **that** we
need to further pin
down where our scribe
was coming from.

However, it's important to underline at the start that he was a **true Hebrew revolutionary**, a matter confirmed at many points by the way in which he condemns or justifies the ideological situation he is dealing with using the traditional symbolism:

His heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh his God.

1 K 11.4

He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh.

1 K 11.6

There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land.

1 K 14.24

The people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations Yahweh had driven out before the Israelites.

1 K 14.24

His wives led him astray.

1 K 11.3

He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites.

1 K 11.5

He married the daughter of the king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.

1 K 16.31

He even sacrificed his son in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations Yahweh had driven out before the Israelites.

2 K 16.3

He made an Asherah pole. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them.

2 K 21.3

He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh.

2 K 12.2

He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made.

1 K 15.12

He even deposed his grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah.

1 K 15.13

He destroyed Baal worship in Israel.

2 K 10.28

He smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made.

2 K 18.4

He trusted in Yahweh, the God of Israel. He held fast to him and did not stop following him.

2 K 18.6

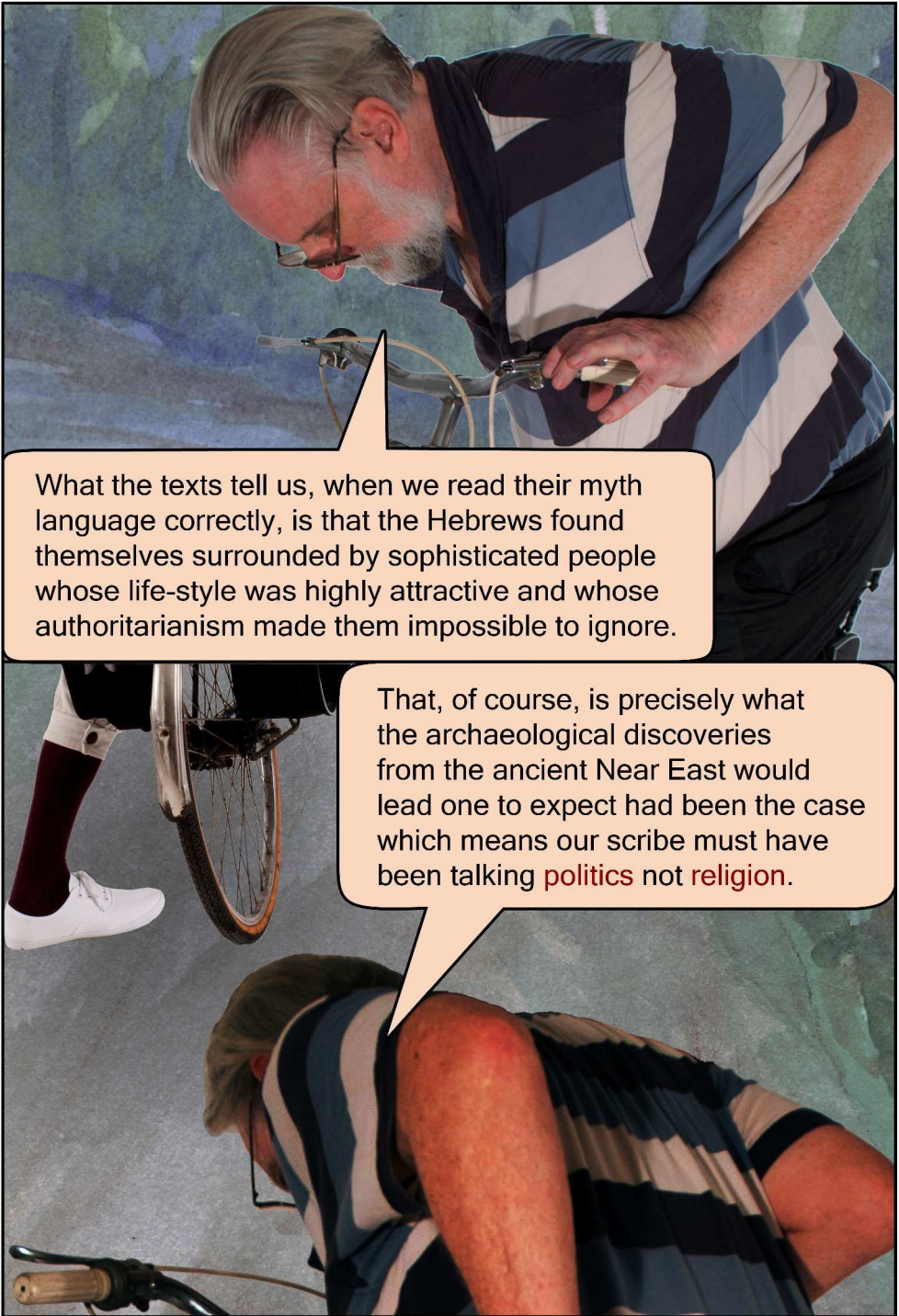
He did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh not turning aside to the right or to the left.

2 K 22.2

Of course you will tell me you don't read these as political remarks but rather as religious or moral judgements...

Just so!

...but that can't be right since it implies the Hebrews found themselves beset by cheap and degrading pagan influences which their own people, for some unexplained reason, found unbearably attractive... a most unlikely scenario for which there is no scrap of evidence.



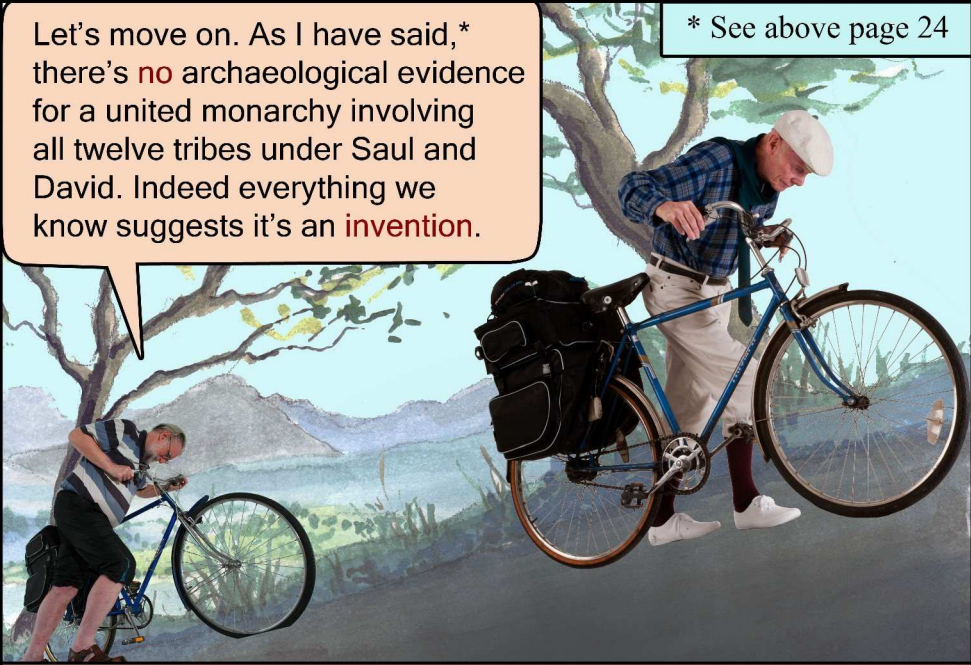
What the texts tell us, when we read their myth language correctly, is that the Hebrews found themselves surrounded by sophisticated people whose life-style was highly attractive and whose authoritarianism made them impossible to ignore.

That, of course, is precisely what the archaeological discoveries from the ancient Near East would lead one to expect had been the case which means our scribe must have been talking **politics** not **religion**.



Let's move on. As I have said,* there's **no** archaeological evidence for a united monarchy involving all twelve tribes under Saul and David. Indeed everything we know suggests it's an **invention**.

* See above page 24



However, everything our scribe wrote shows **he believed in it implicitly** which was why he was so biased against the northern kings since he thought - almost certainly wrongly - **they** were responsible for dividing the Hebrew community.

Of the 20 monarchs of the southern kingdom (Judah) **8** are said to have done **good** in the eyes of Yahweh and **12** are said to have done **evil**.

Of the 19 monarchs of the northern kingdom (Israel) **ALL** are said to have done **evil** in the eyes of Yahweh even though some are praised for doing what the good kings in Judah did.

All of the monarchs of the northern kingdom are accused of **not turning away from the sins of Jeroboam which he caused Israel to commit** - Jeroboam being supposedly the first king of Israel who, as such, was responsible for **the division** of the twelve tribes.

An absolute commitment to the Hebrew community's unity and integrity engendered in our scribe another core belief: that the Jerusalem temple was **the only place** where it was proper to worship Yahweh. Hence his frustration with the fact that, for a considerable time, this wasn't current practice even in Judah:

*Solomon built a **high place**... for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.*

A 'high place' was just a local sanctuary where sacrifices could be made without having to go to a god's temple.

*Under Rehoboam they also set up for themselves **high places**, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree.*

*Asa did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh... Although he did not remove the **high places**.*

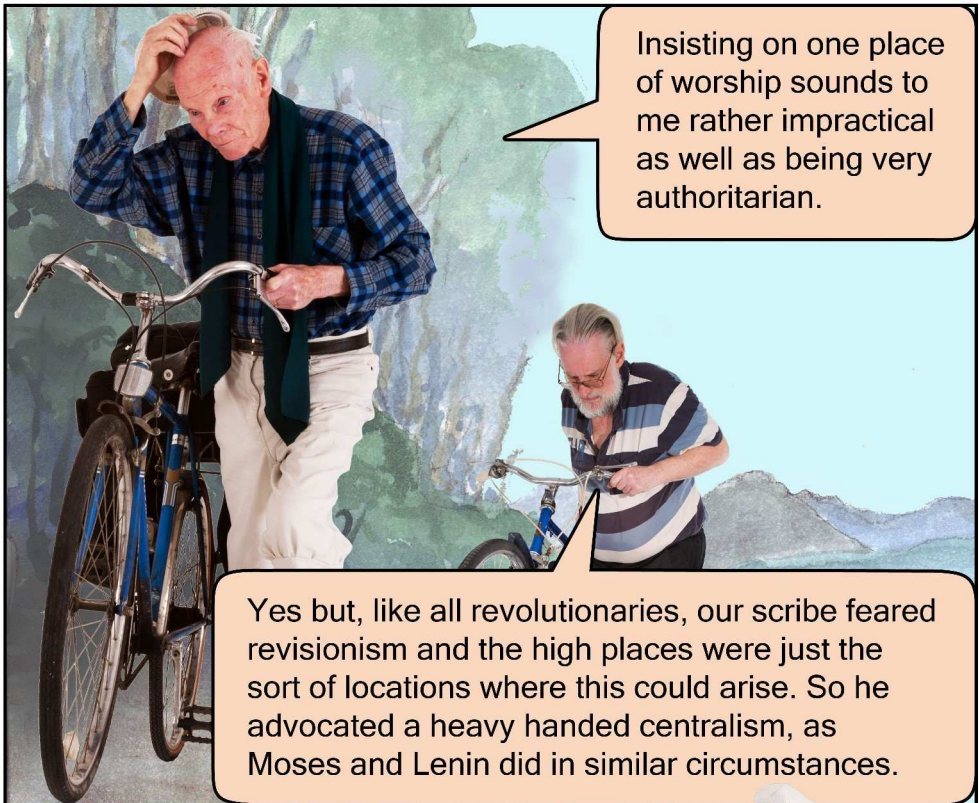
*Under Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah and Jotham: the **high places**, however, were not removed, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.*

*Hezekiah removed the **high places**.*

*Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense at the **high places**, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.*

*Menessah rebuilt the **high places** his father Hezekiah had destroyed.*

*Josiah did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the **high places** of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem.*



Insisting on one place of worship sounds to me rather impractical as well as being very authoritarian.

Yes but, like all revolutionaries, our scribe feared revisionism and the high places were just the sort of locations where this could arise. So he advocated a heavy handed centralism, as Moses and Lenin did in similar circumstances.

Are you telling me you approve of what he did?



Seems to me we are not here to approve or disapprove but simply to understand. We can make up our minds what we think later!

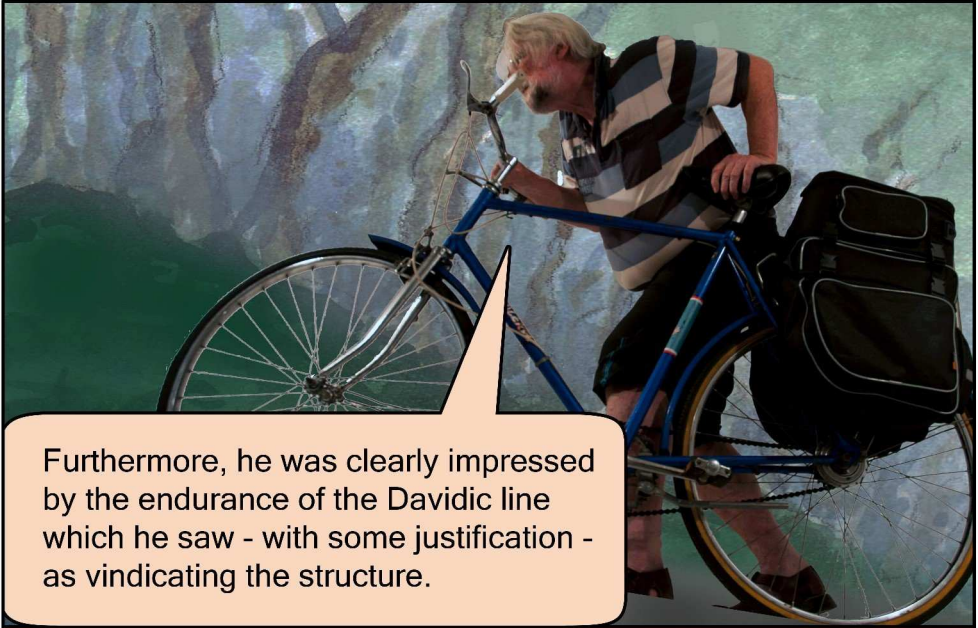
Yes but what about the Davidic king? It seems to me you're avoiding the issue.

No, we're coming to it right now. Clearly our scribe saw the Davidic king as the guarantor of the unity and integrity of the Hebrew community he so much craved.



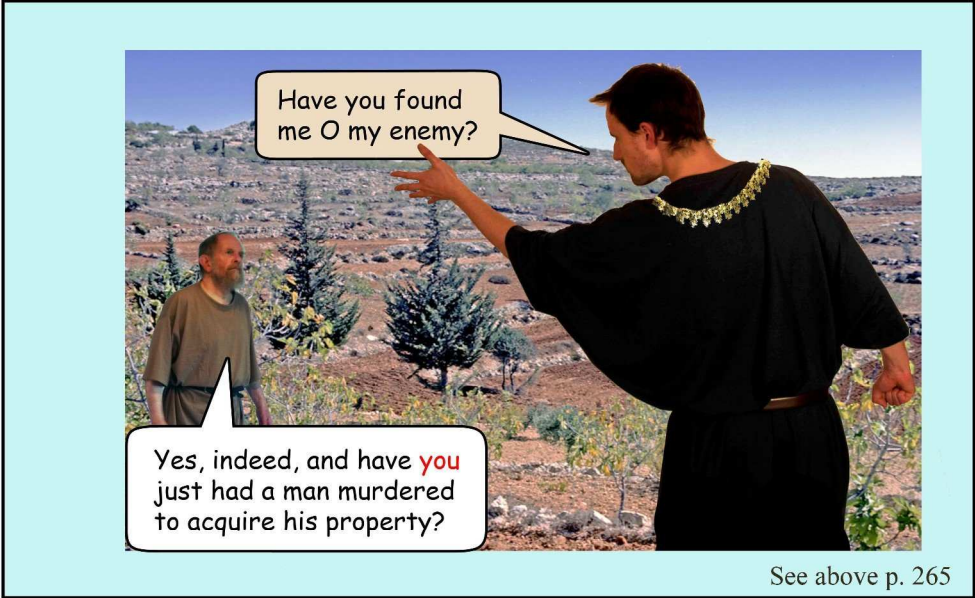
As he saw it, kingship was the people's chosen form of governance to which there was, for the moment, no viable alternative, given the prevailing conditions.





Furthermore, he was clearly impressed by the endurance of the Davidic line which he saw - with some justification - as vindicating the structure.

There were, however, important provisos. First, as a strategic arm, kingship as a whole was always seen as playing second fiddle to the prophets - who had the job of making sure both king and community remained ideologically faithful.

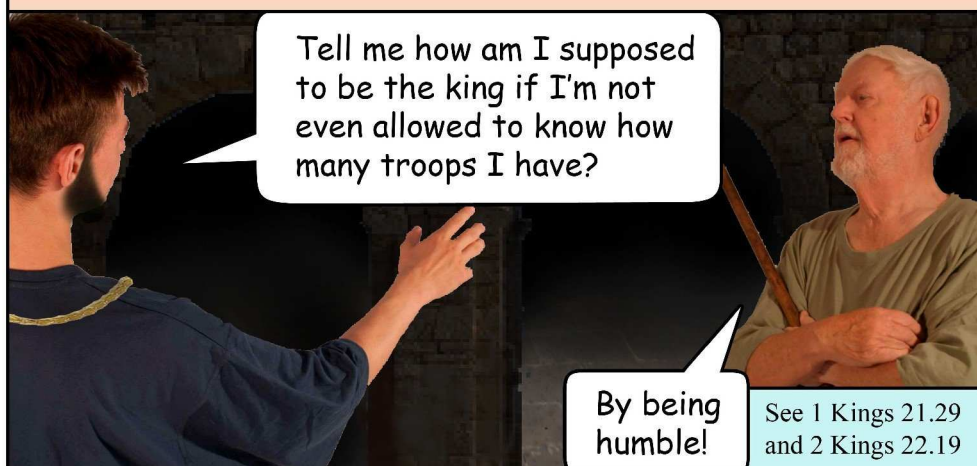


Have you found me O my enemy?

Yes, indeed, and have **you** just had a man murdered to acquire his property?

See above p. 265

Second, the contradiction involved in employing an authoritarian structure to further a revolutionary marginal strategy was unsurprisingly never squared.



Third, though it was highly honoured, the Davidic king was always considered a hidden affront, the painful truth being that Yahweh alone was king in Israel.

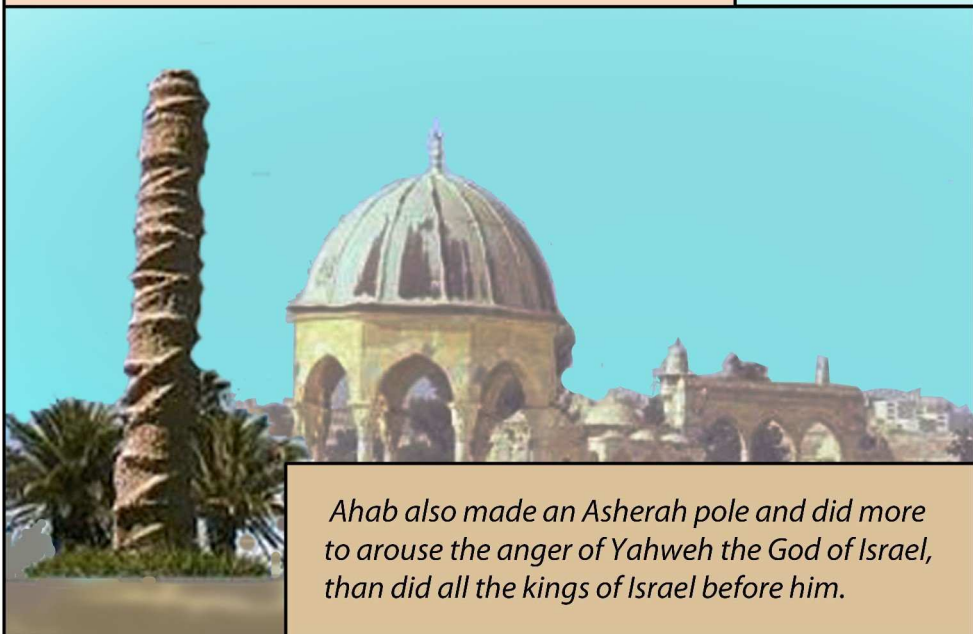


This last point was later taken up by Jeremiah - whose work we will be studying in the next chapter - but for the moment I want to go back to Elijah and look at the vital contribution he made.



Our scribe gives the blackest of summaries of Ahab's reign telling how the king allowed his wife Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, to build a temple to Baal in Samaria.

I Kings 16. 30-33



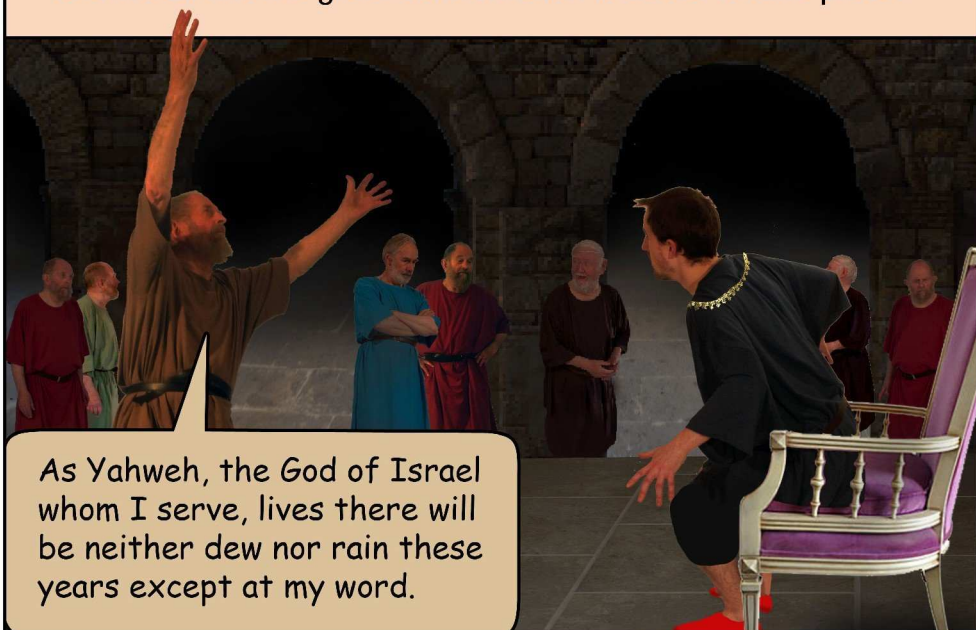
Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of Yahweh the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

He struggles to paint a sufficiently negative picture which may explain why he chooses this as the moment to add a gruesome account of human sacrifice as fulfilment of prophecy.



In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of Yahweh spoken by Joshua, son of Nun.

Finally, he introduces Elijah, who brings Ahab Yahweh's word and we all know a great confrontation is about to take place.



This prophecy is, of course, a direct challenge to Baal who, for Jezebel and the people of Tyre and Sidon, was the lord of heaven, a god of the rain, thunder, fertility and agriculture.



I know you're going to tell me I'm being naive but was there a drought and, if so, was Yahweh responsible for it?



No, it's a fair question. For we are obliged to ask ourselves whether the story was supposed to be taken literally or understood symbolically.

So?

Well, if this - and what follows - is meant to be an historical description of a prophet's miraculous powers then all I can say is that **it makes no sense** for it ends with Elijah as a 'wanted' man on the run!

Yes, there's certainly something of a contradiction in a great miracle worker who turns out to be a failed terrorist!

So if this is how we are supposed to read the story we would have to conclude our scribe was a religious fool with no sense!



There now follows three 'drought-period' stories clearly designed to establish Elijah's credentials as a marginal revolutionary.



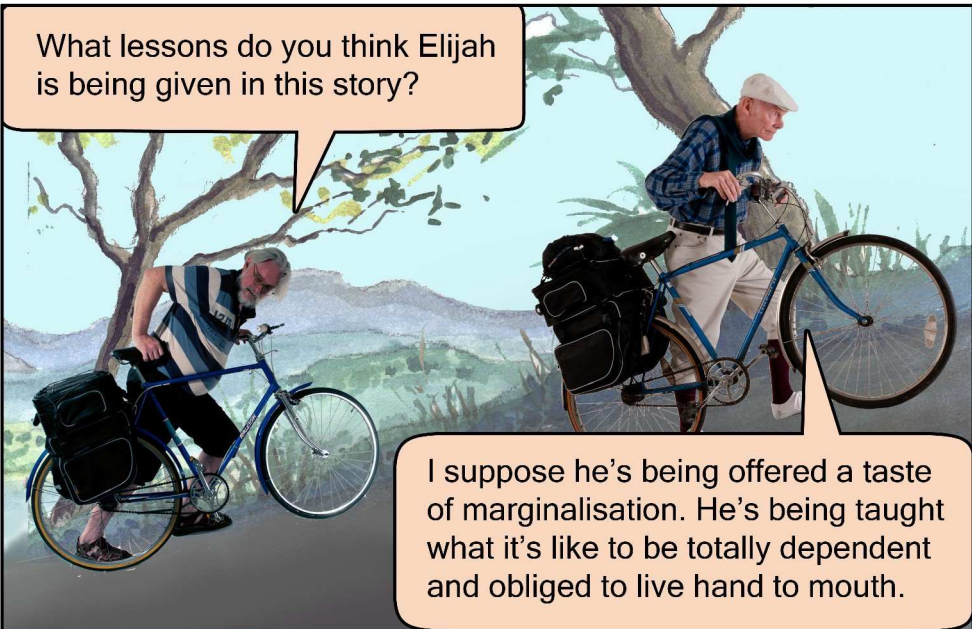
In the first he is sent to the back of beyond to 'hide' in the Cherith gorge, which was situated somewhere on the extreme eastern frontier of Israel's territory.

1 Kings 17. 1-7



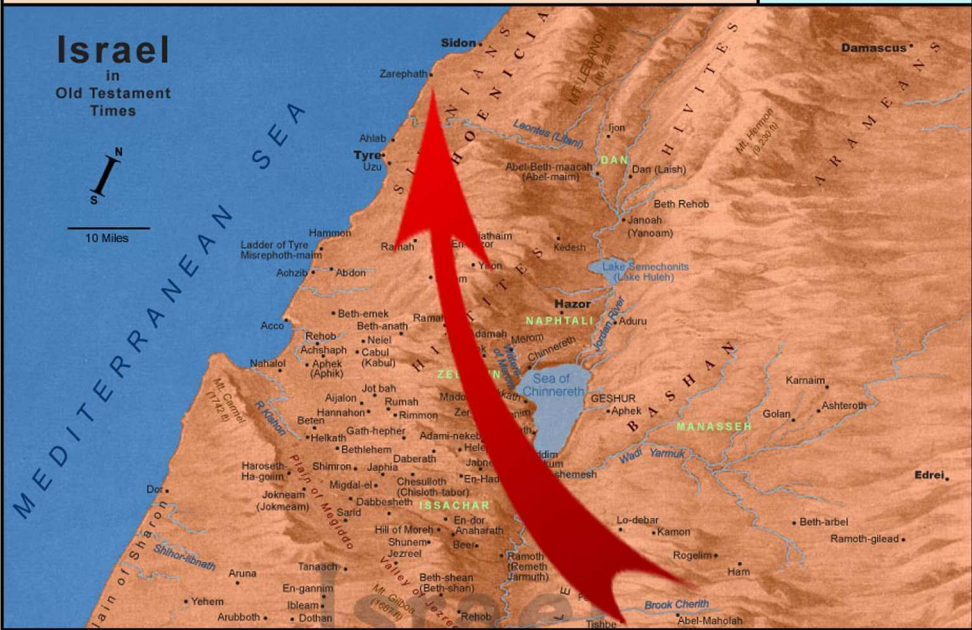
You will drink from the brook and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food.

What lessons do you think Elijah is being given in this story?



Great! In the second story Elijah is now told to go and live in a town called Zarephath in Sidon, which means exchanging the back of beyond for the heart of enemy territory.

1 Kings 17.8-24





You will see: the jar of flour will not become empty and the jug of oil will not run dry until Yahweh once more sends rain on the land.

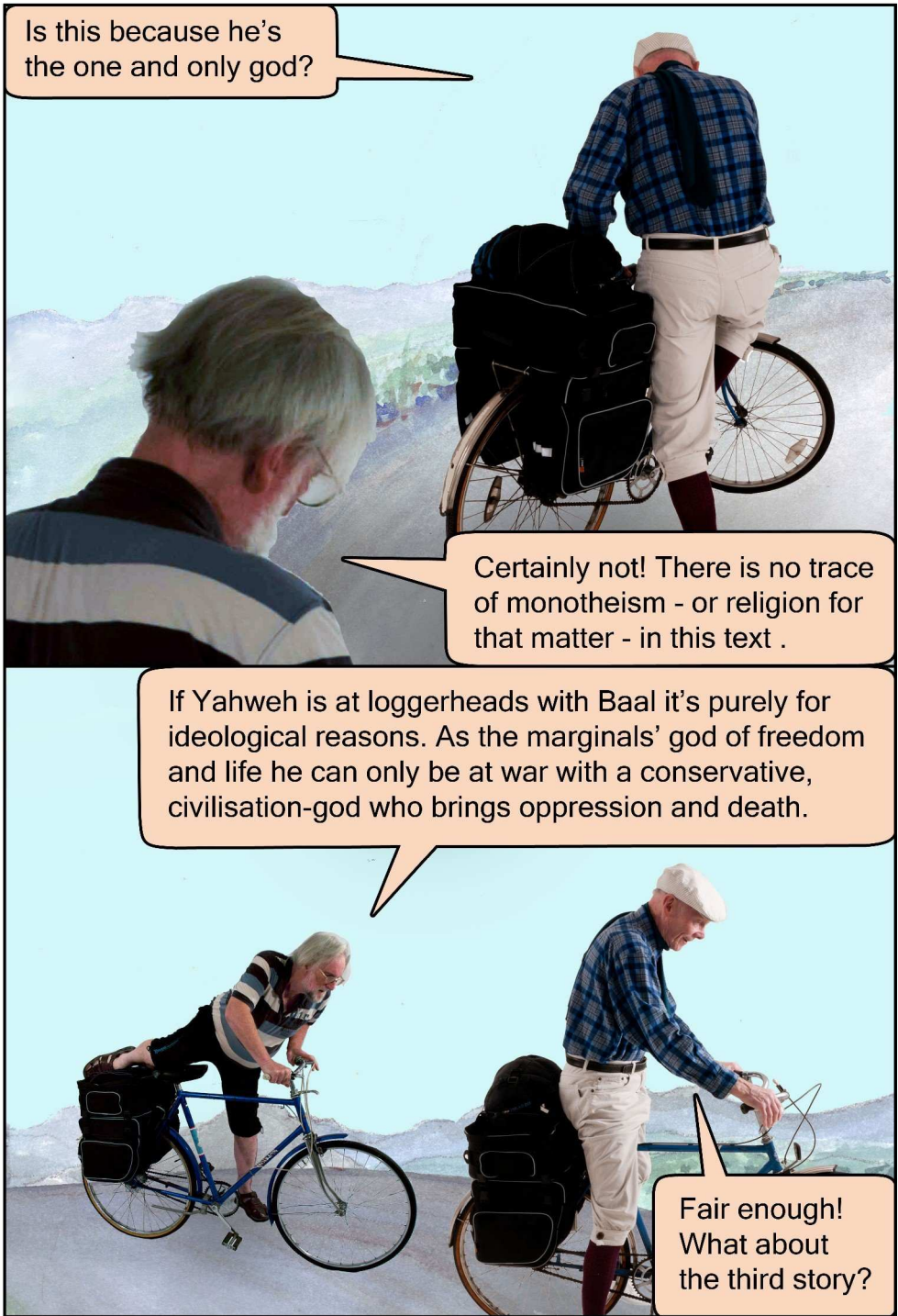


So there was food every day for Elijah and the woman and her family in keeping with Yahweh's word as spoken by Elijah.

Vs. 14-16

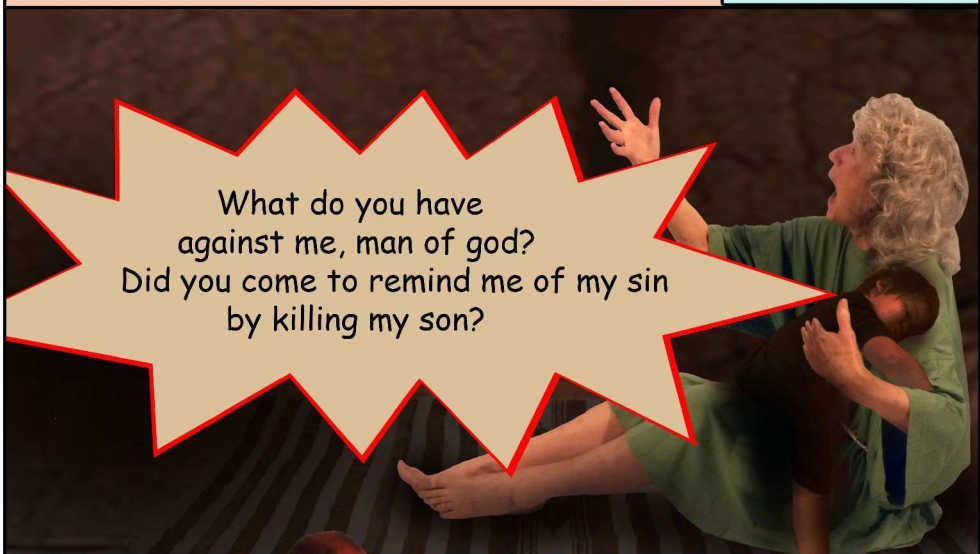







In the third story the widow's little son - on whom all of her hopes for the future depend - falls ill, growing steadily worse till finally he stops breathing...

1 Kings 17. 17-19



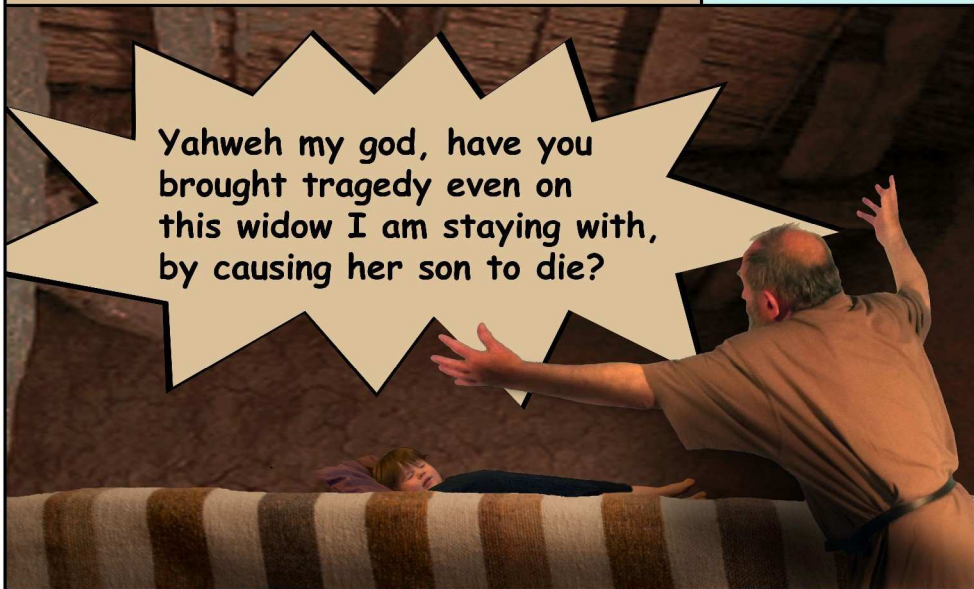
What do you have
against me, man of god?
Did you come to remind me of my sin
by killing my son?




Give me your son.

He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed...

1 Kings 17. 19-21



Yahweh my god, have you brought tragedy even on this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?



Yahweh I beseech you, let this boy's life return to him!

Yahweh heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived.

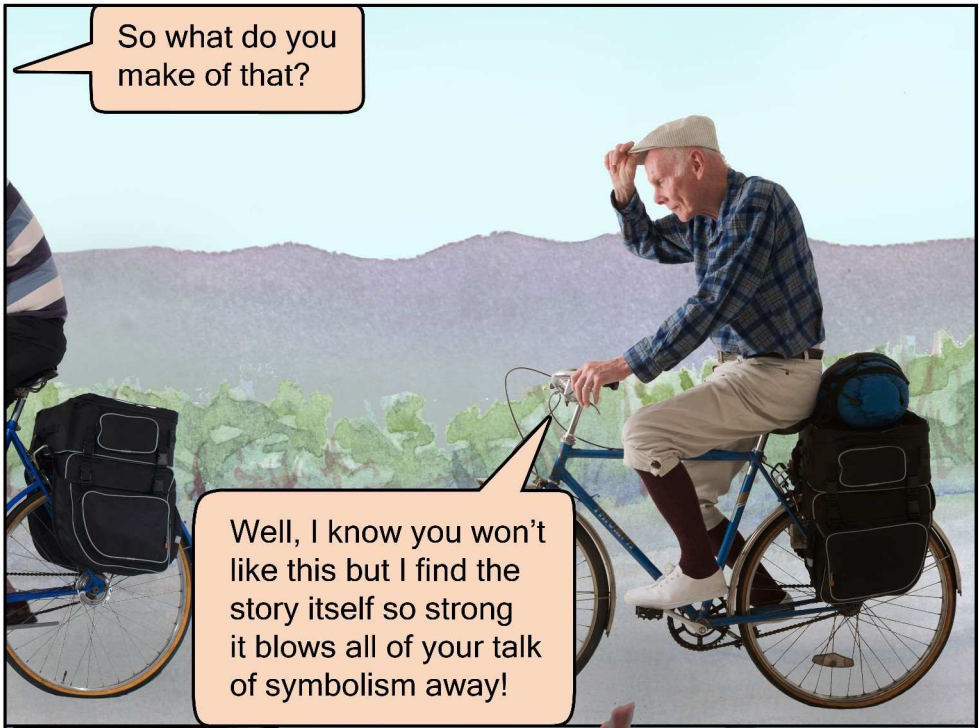
Vs. 22-24

Look, your son is alive!

Ahhhhh!

What are you doing down there Mummy and why are you shouting?

Now I know you are a man of god and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is the truth!





Even though you know that, as such, it constitutes a lie?

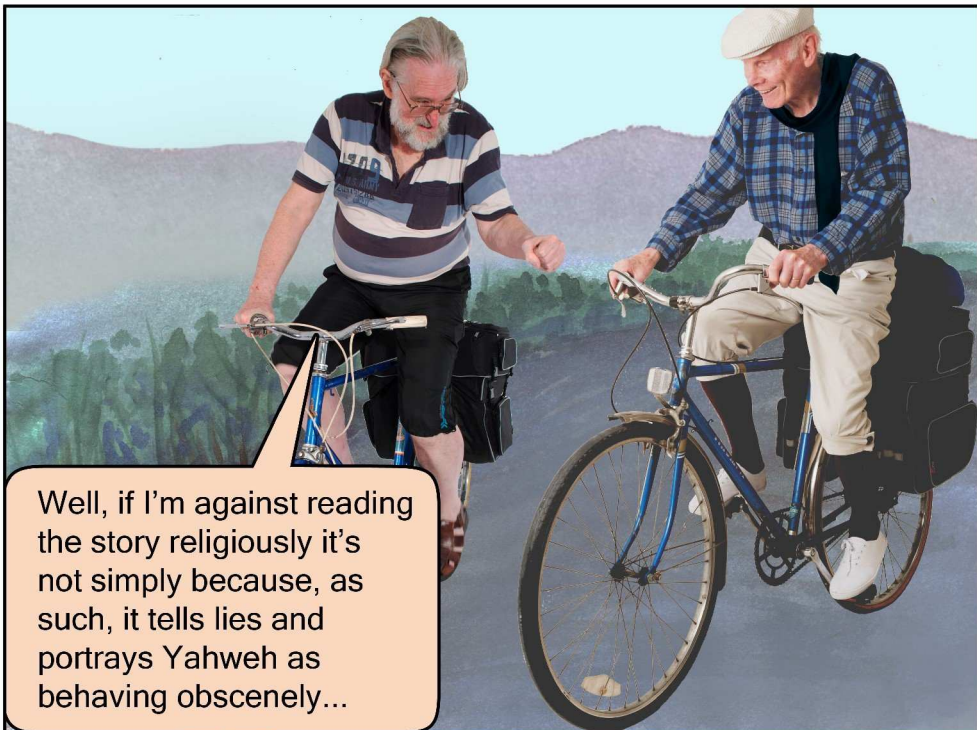
What do you mean it's a lie?



You know as well as I do such things don't happen but, what is worse, if they did happen they would be obscene.

What's obscene?





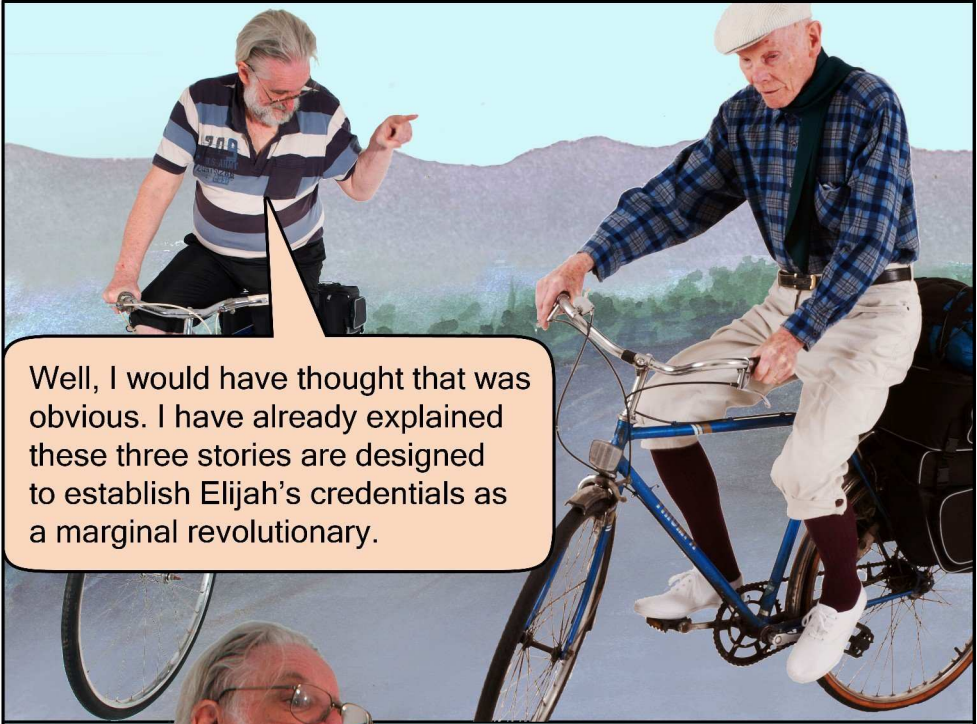
Well, if I'm against reading the story religiously it's not simply because, as such, it tells lies and portrays Yahweh as behaving obscenely...



...It's also because it contradicts itself as you have just conceded.*

* See p. 283 above

Very well, go on and tell me what the point of the story is when it's read politically!



Well, I would have thought that was obvious. I have already explained these three stories are designed to establish Elijah's credentials as a marginal revolutionary.



Here that objective is finally achieved, wouldn't you say, when the widow declares: 'Now I know you are a man of god and that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is the truth!'



This means that we can now study the main body of the narrative knowing full well the kind of man we are dealing with!

OK. Take it away!

After a long time, in the third year, the word of Yahweh came to Elijah:

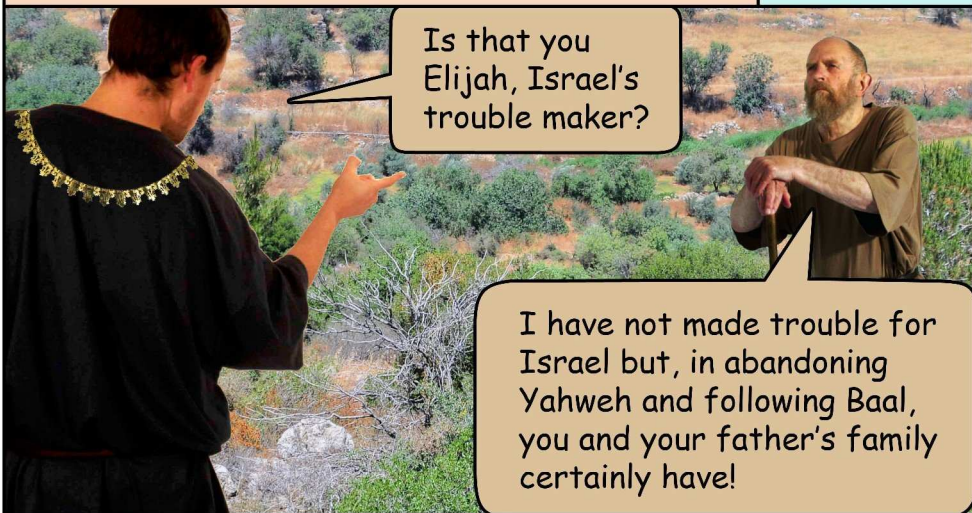
1 Kings 18.1



Go and tell Ahab that I will send rain on the land.

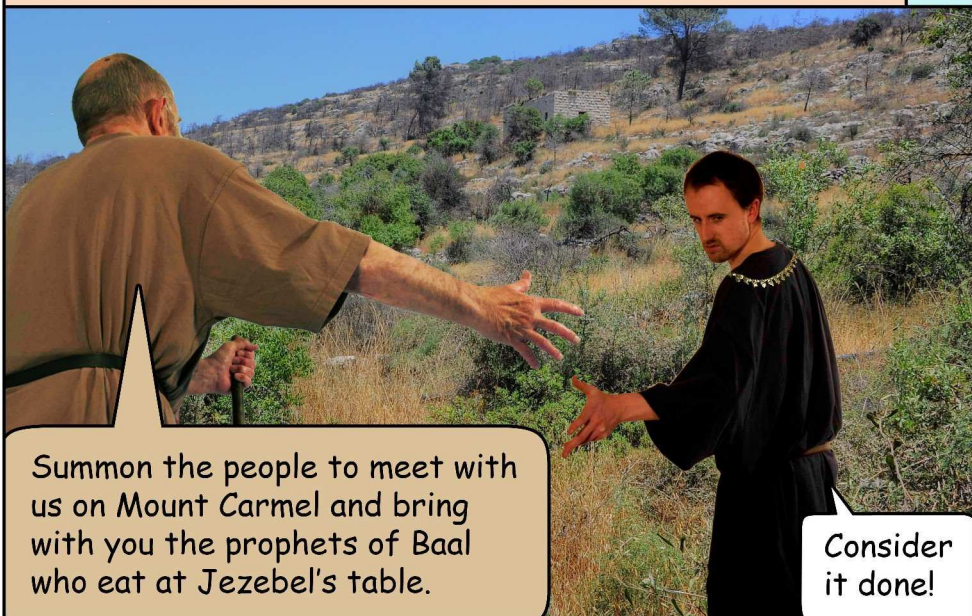
At this point the narrator introduces a little story to remind us of the bad blood that exists between Ahab and Elijah but we will skip it and go straight to their meeting...

1 Kings 18.17-18



After this cordial reintroduction Elijah loses no time in issuing his challenge.

19



So Ahab sends word throughout Israel and collects the prophets of Baal to go with him to Mount Carmel. Elijah too is busy gathering support, but without much success.

How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.

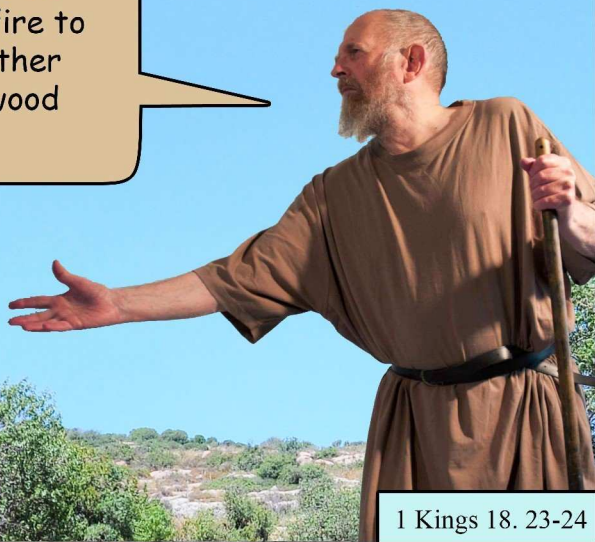


When everyone was assembled on Mount Carmel Elijah addressed the multitude.

I am the only one of Yahweh's prophets left, but Baal has 450 prophets.



Bring us two bulls. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.



1 Kings 18. 23-24

Then they will call on the name of their god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The god who answers by fire—he is God.

OK. Cut the cackle! Let's do it!



Since you are so many you go first!

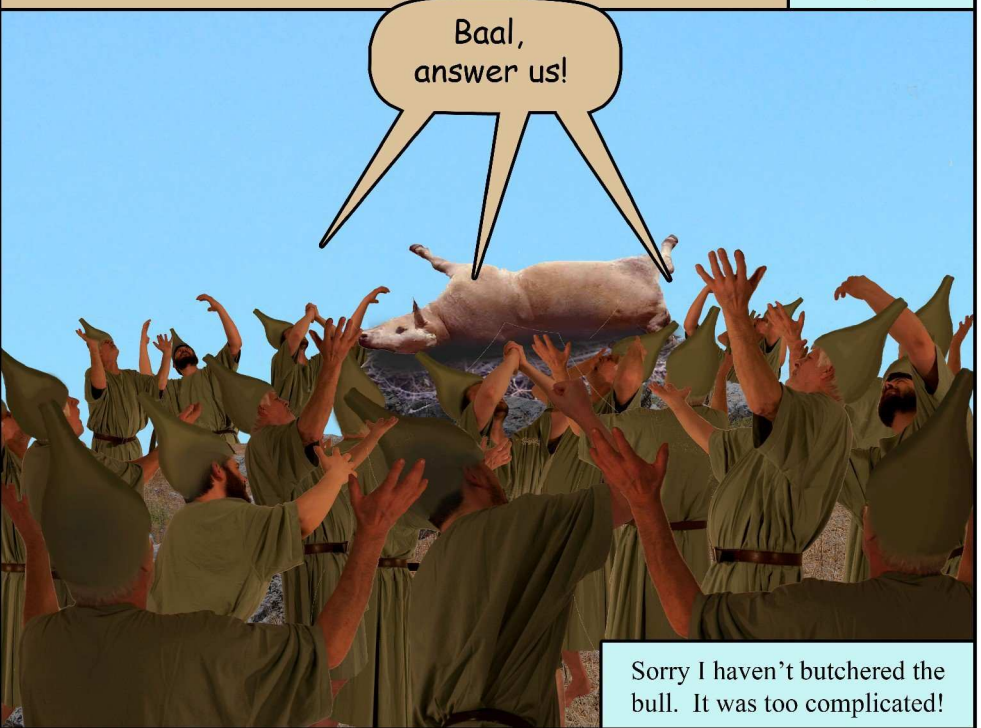


1 Kings 18. 25

So the prophets of Baal prepared their bull and started calling on his name but there was no response. This went on all morning but there was still no response; no-one answered as they danced and shouted around the altar they had made.

1 Kings 18.26

Baal,
answer us!



Sorry I haven't butchered the bull. It was too complicated!

At noon Elijah began to taunt them.

Shout louder! Since he's a god he may be deep in thought, or perhaps he's busy or travelling. Or maybe he's asleep and you'll need to waken him!

So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no-one paid attention.

1 Kings 18. 27-28



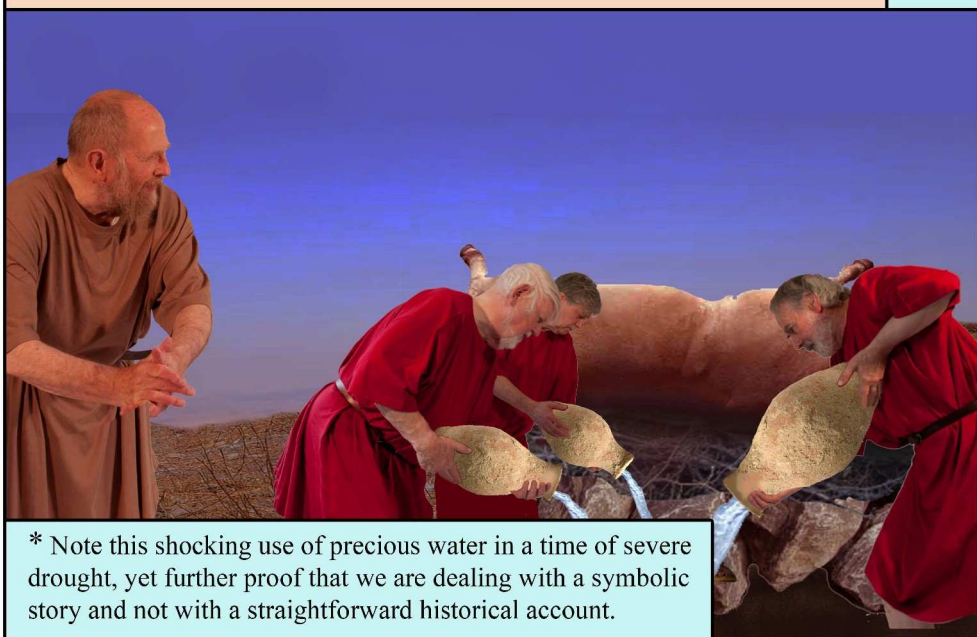
Now it was Elijah's turn. He told everyone to gather around as he rebuilt Yahweh's altar, which had previously been torn down, using 12 boulders standing for the 12 tribes of Israel.

1 Kings 18. 30-32



When he was finished he told the people to pour water over the sacrifice and to go on doing this till everything was awash with the water filling the trench he had dug around the altar.*

33-35



* Note this shocking use of precious water in a time of severe drought, yet further proof that we are dealing with a symbolic story and not with a straightforward historical account.

When the time came for the sacrifice Elijah stepped forward and delivered his prayer.

1 Kings 18 36-39

Yahweh, god of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God and that I have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Yahweh, so these people's hearts will turn back to you again.

I haven't butchered this bull either and I've made the altar with the wrong type of stones but what the hell. It's all going to be annihilated!



Then Yahweh's fire fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil. It also licked up the water in the trench.



Seize the prophets
of Baal. Don't let
anyone get away!



1 Kings 18. 40

Now take them down
to the Kishon Valley
and slaughter them!



Now I want you to pay particular attention to what happens next.



This is a reasonable remark when one remembers Elijah had told Ahab Yahweh was going to bring the long drought to an end (see above p. 279) but, if you were Ahab would you have hung about, given what had just happened?



Yet Ahab meekly agrees, making it clear the story is symbolic.

Meanwhile, Elijah goes to the top of the mountain to await the coming rain.

1 Kings 18.42



When finally he realises the storm is imminent he hurries down and tells Ahab to jump in his chariot and get back to Jezreel before the road becomes impassable.

44-46



Then, to demonstrate the superiority of the Hebrew ideology, he races Ahab's chariot back home on foot.

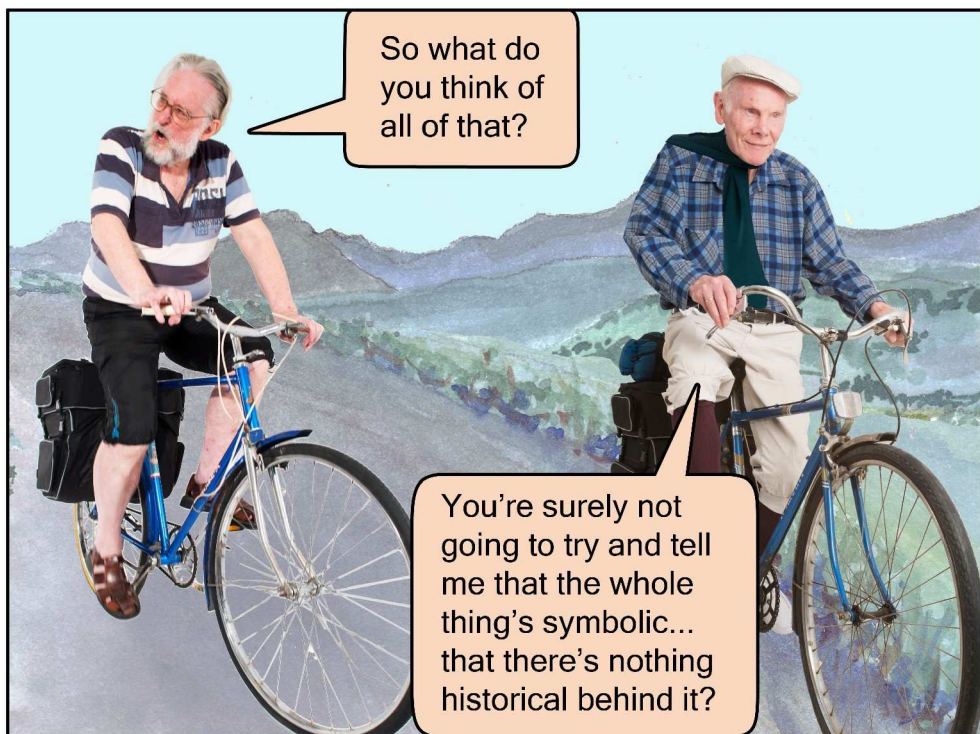
1 Kings 18.46



What is interesting is that it's only now, safe in his palace, that Ahab reacts to what has happened by telling his wife about the fate of her prophets.

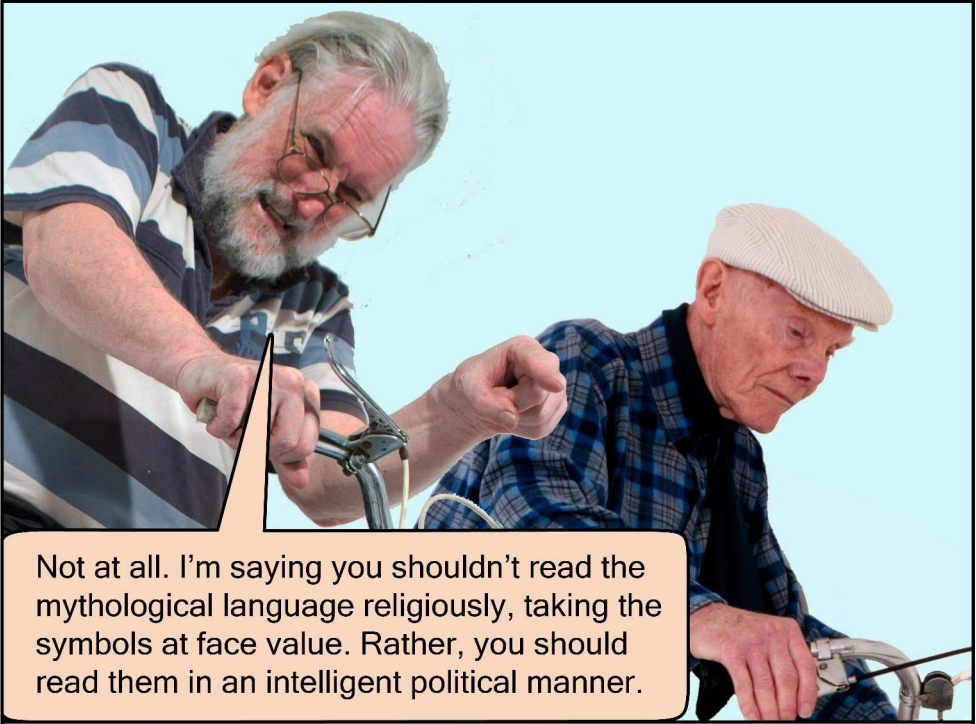
1 Kings 19.1





Of course not! The fact that the story's symbolic means there's almost certainly something historical behind it since the symbolism's designed to express political reality.





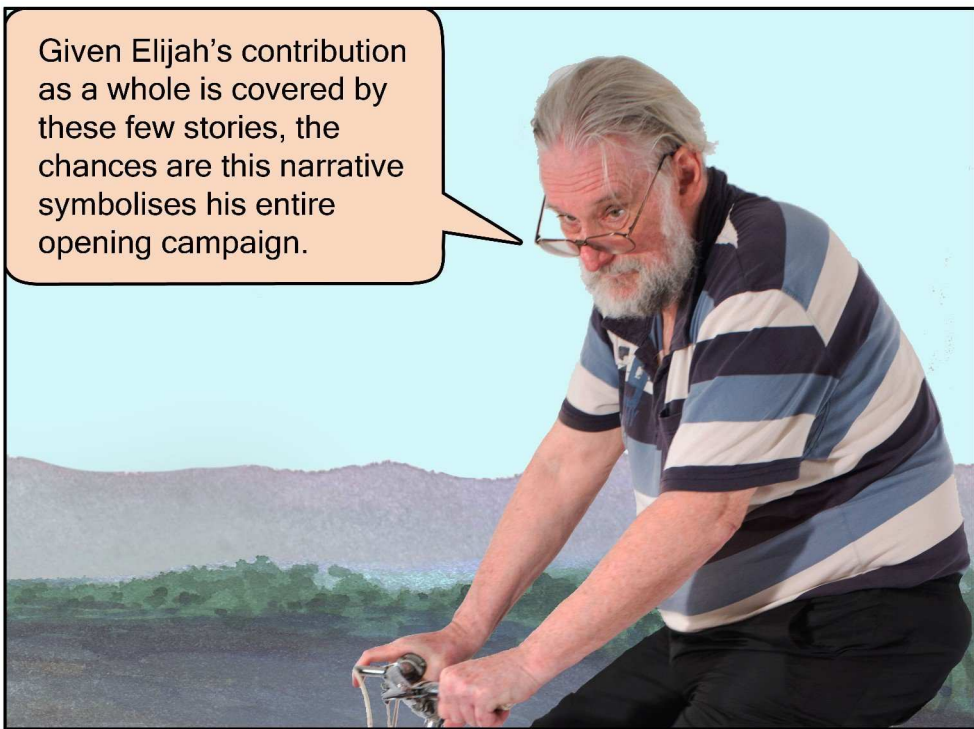
Not at all. I'm saying you shouldn't read the mythological language religiously, taking the symbols at face value. Rather, you should read them in an intelligent political manner.



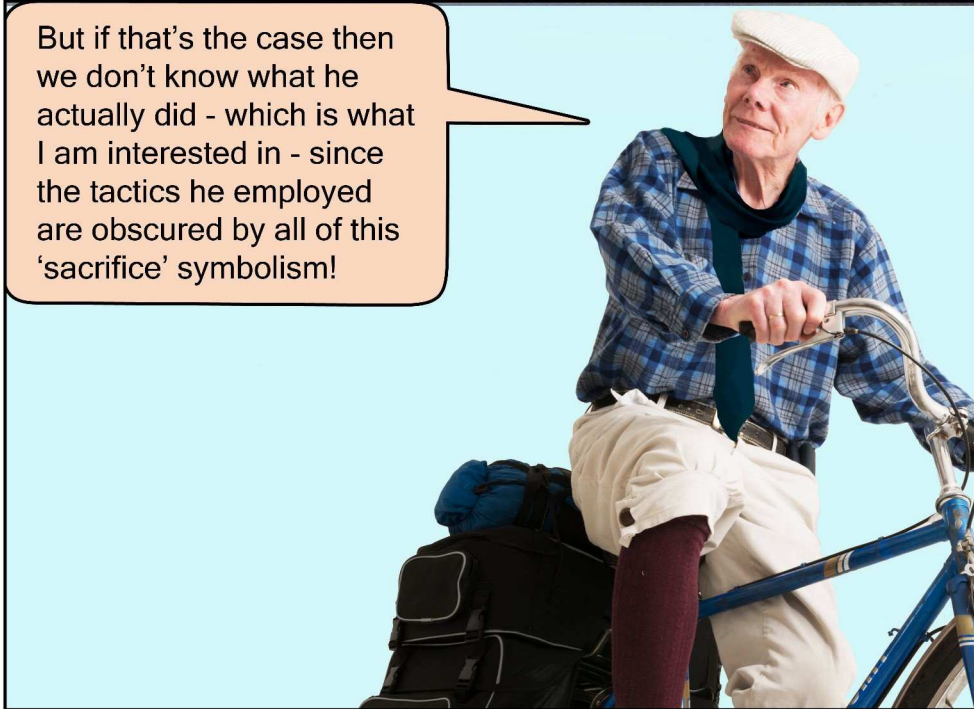
We already know the story's about a confrontation between Elijah and Jezebel - almost certainly historical - so what's the storyteller saying about how things panned out? It's not complicated!

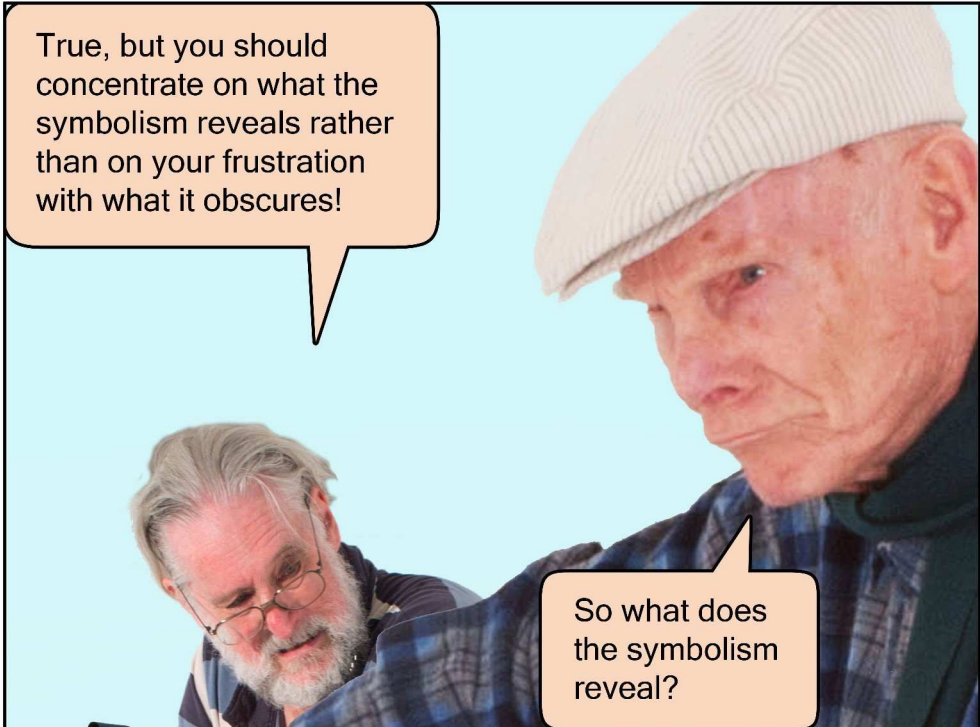


Given Elijah's contribution as a whole is covered by these few stories, the chances are this narrative symbolises his entire opening campaign.

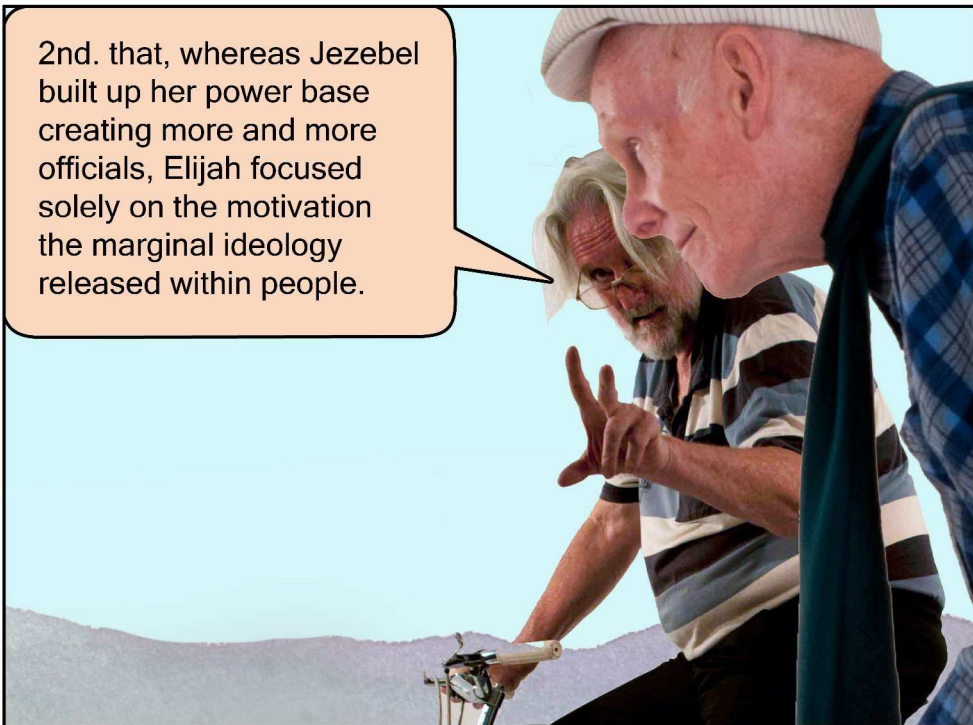


But if that's the case then we don't know what he actually did - which is what I am interested in - since the tactics he employed are obscured by all of this 'sacrifice' symbolism!

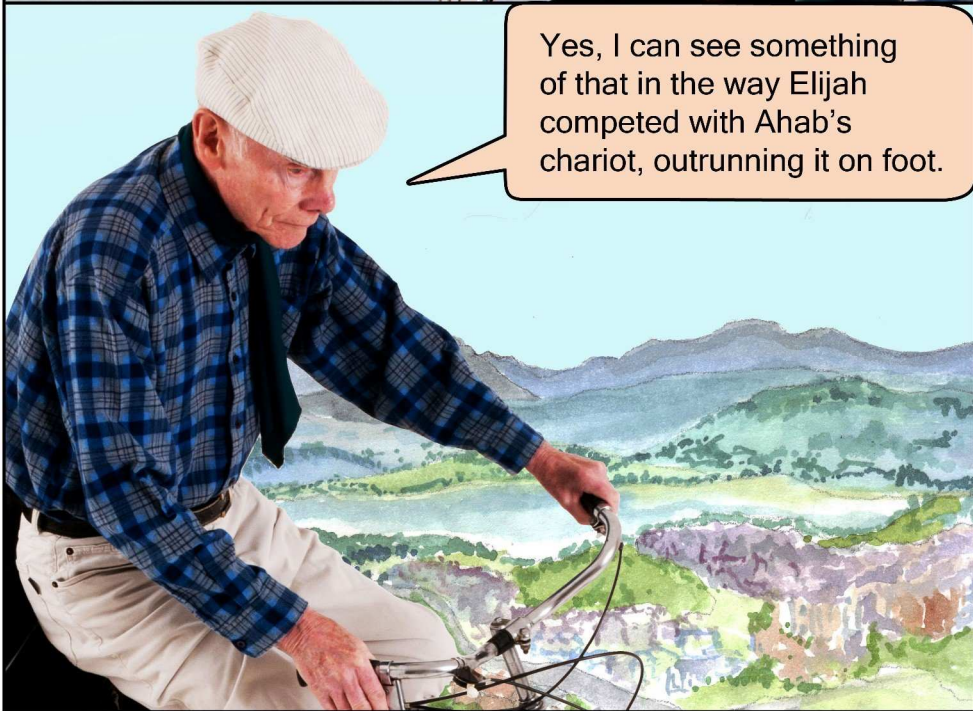





2nd. that, whereas Jezebel built up her power base creating more and more officials, Elijah focused solely on the motivation the marginal ideology released within people.




Yes, I can see something of that in the way Elijah competed with Ahab's chariot, outrunning it on foot.





3rd. that, whereas we civilisation-folk place our bets on Jezebel's tactics winning the day, she was in fact exposed in the people's eyes as a tyrant - which was all that mattered for Elijah.

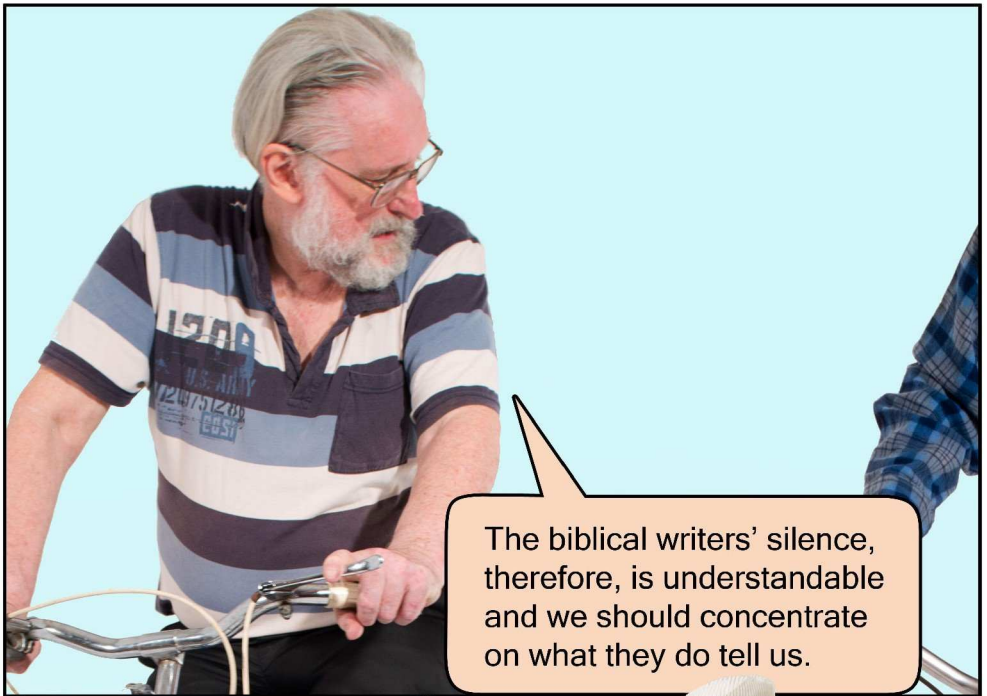
Yes but I want to know how this actually happened.



That's tough for we're not told.

But why is this? If these stories are political as you maintain I can't help thinking we would not have been left in the dark about such an important matter.







Well, fortunately I don't have to say anything since the narrative, itself, deals with the issue!

When Elijah heard Jezebel had vowed to kill him he was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness.

1 Kings 19. 3-5

I have had enough, Yahweh.
Take my life; I am no better
than my ancestors.





Now this is most revealing. It shows Elijah realised that, in spite of his undeniable zeal and training, he had, for some as yet unexplained reason, **failed** in advancing the cause.

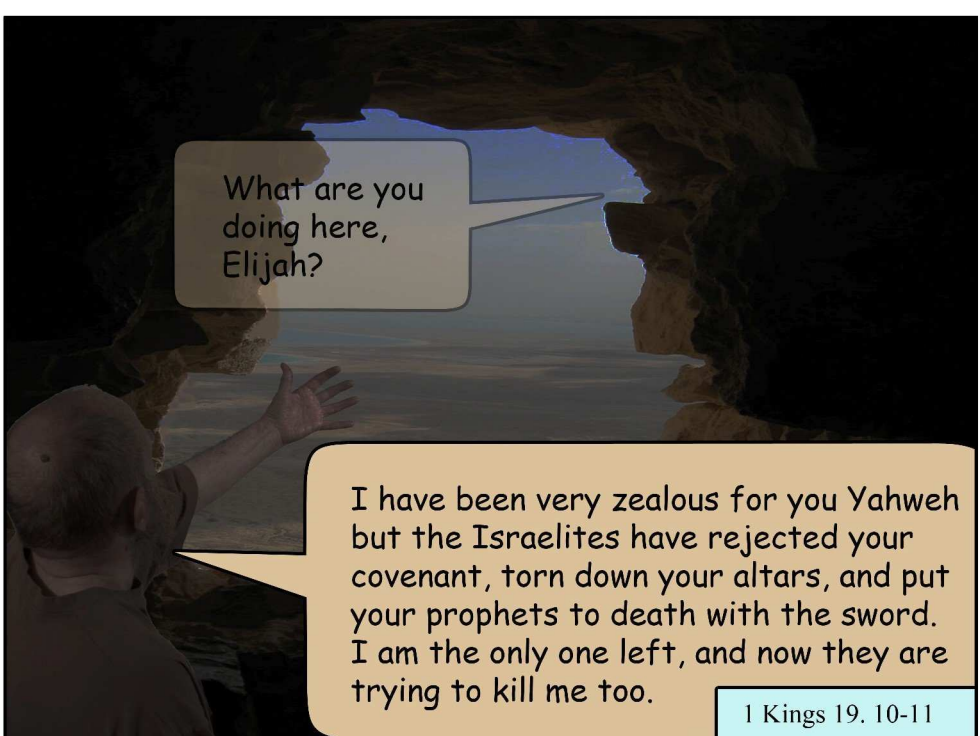
I'm listening.

The next thing we are told is that an angel came to give him food and water so as to build him up for his long journey (40 days and nights) to Horeb the mountain of Yahweh so we know we're now in **for something very special**.

1 Kings 19. 6-9



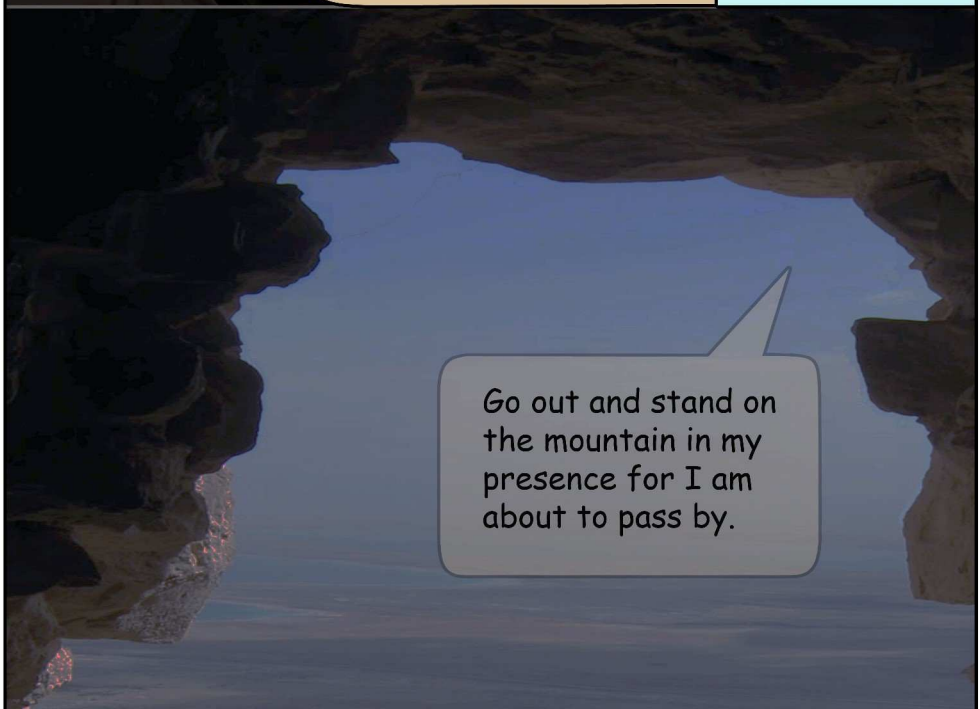
Here's a dry cave where I can stay the night.



What are you
doing here,
Elijah?

I have been very zealous for you Yahweh
but the Israelites have rejected your
covenant, torn down your altars, and put
your prophets to death with the sword.
I am the only one left, and now they are
trying to kill me too.

1 Kings 19. 10-11



Go out and stand on
the mountain in my
presence for I am
about to pass by.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind.



After the wind there was an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake.

1 Kings 19. 11



After the earthquake came a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire.



*And after the fire came a gentle whisper... and when Elijah
heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face .*

1 Kings 19.13



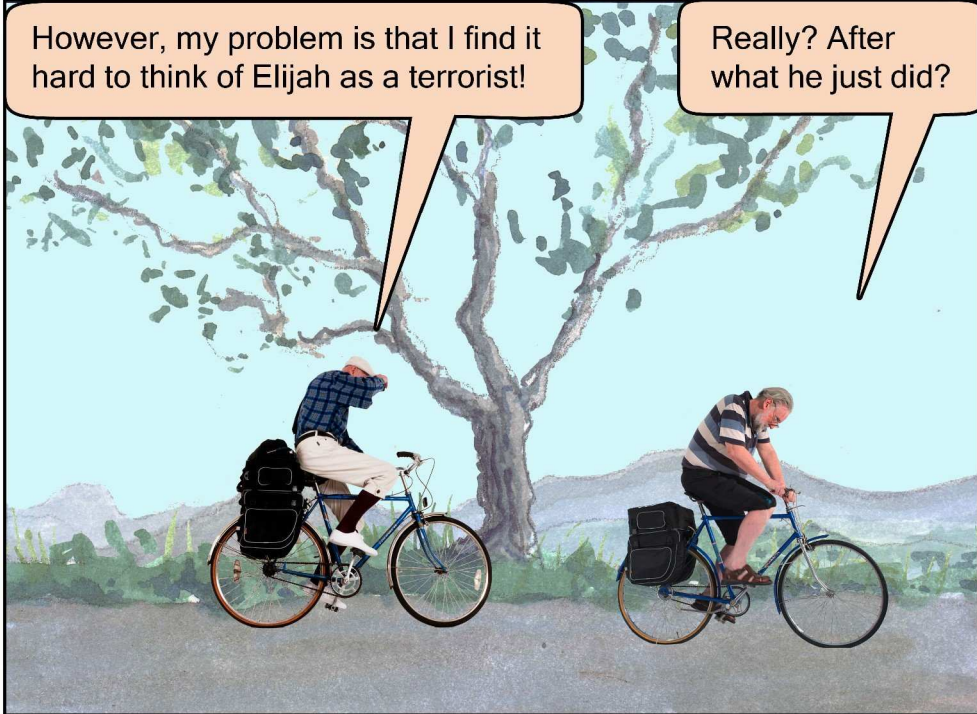
So what do you think this is all about?



Well, given a moment ago you were describing Elijah as a failed terrorist, I fancy you must see Yahweh here as somehow setting him straight.

However, my problem is that I find it hard to think of Elijah as a terrorist!

Really? After what he just did?





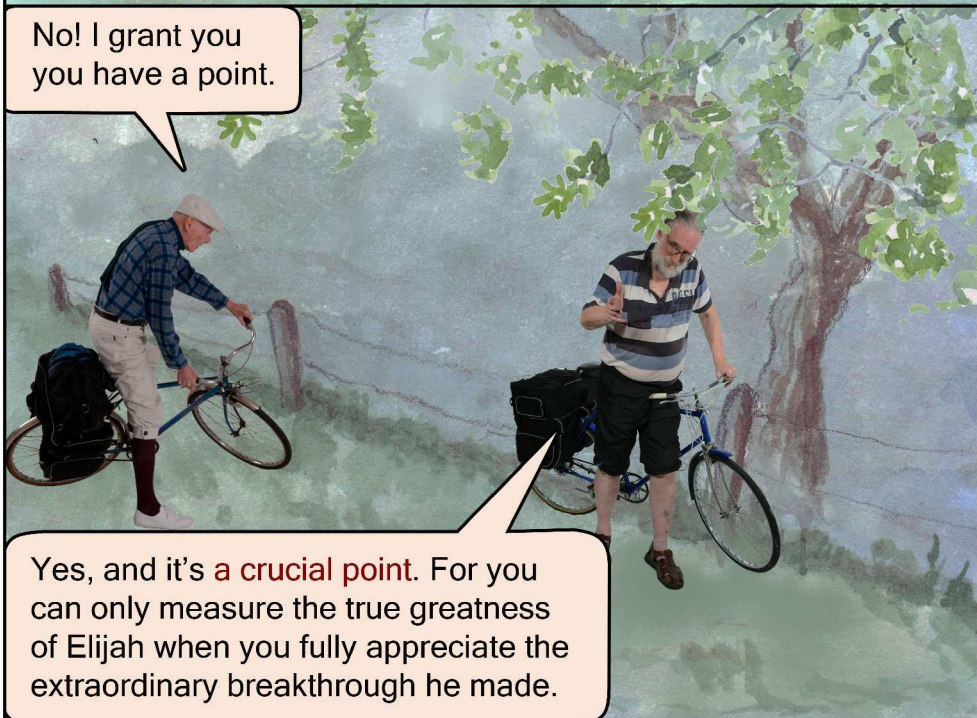
Sometime later

If, what you were saying a moment ago is true, the stance of Moses and the others was inexcusable!

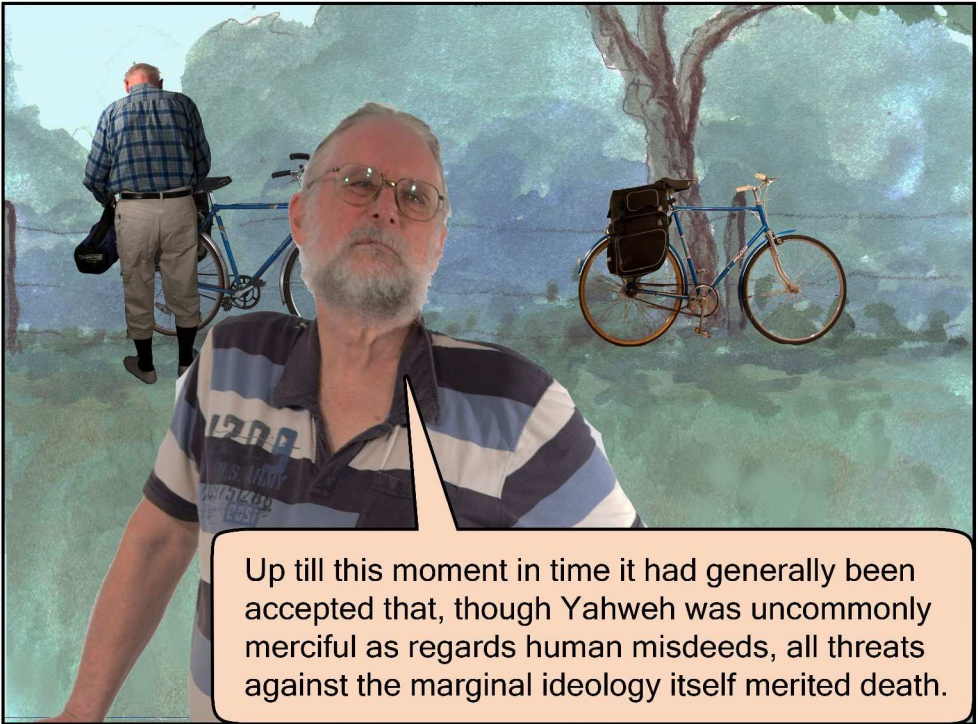
Are you suggesting I was **misrepresenting** them?



No! I grant you you have a point.

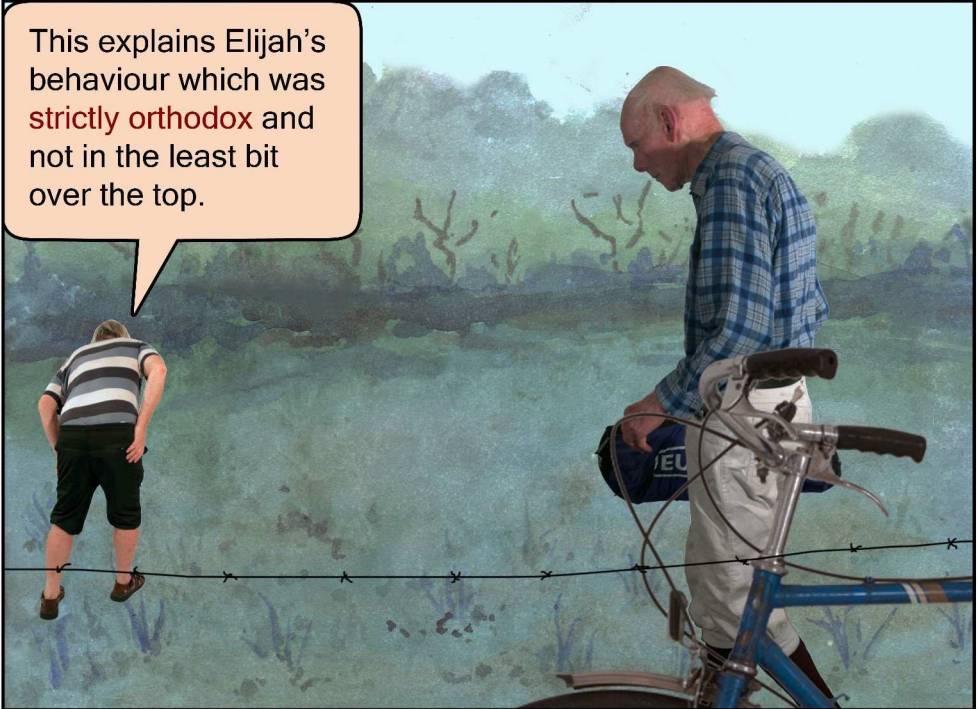


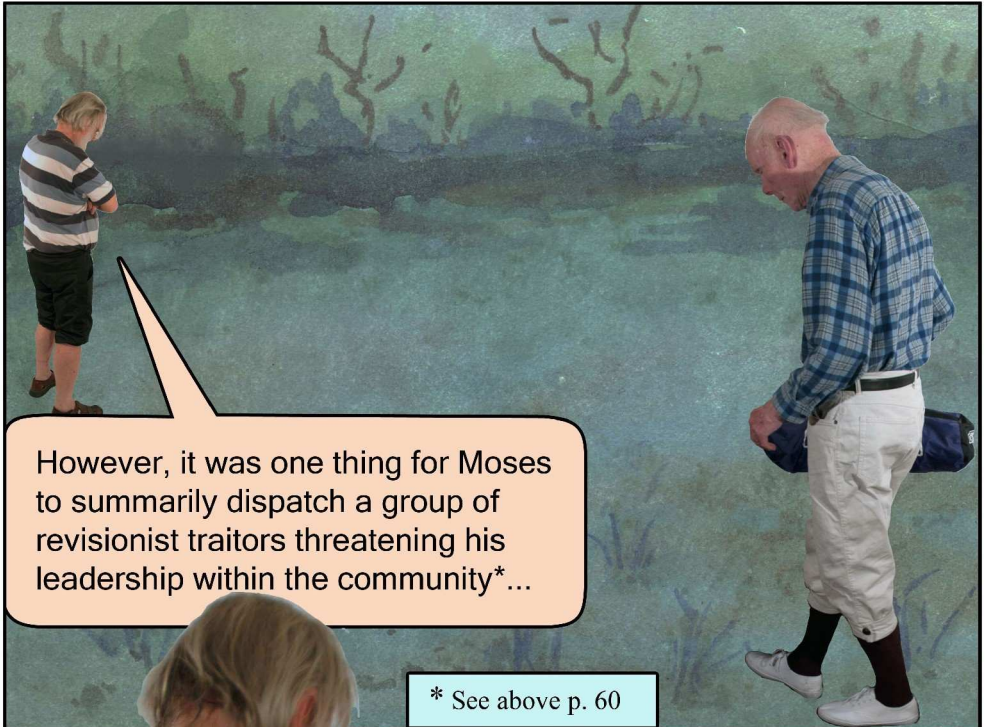
Yes, and it's **a crucial point**. For you can only measure the true greatness of Elijah when you fully appreciate the extraordinary breakthrough he made.

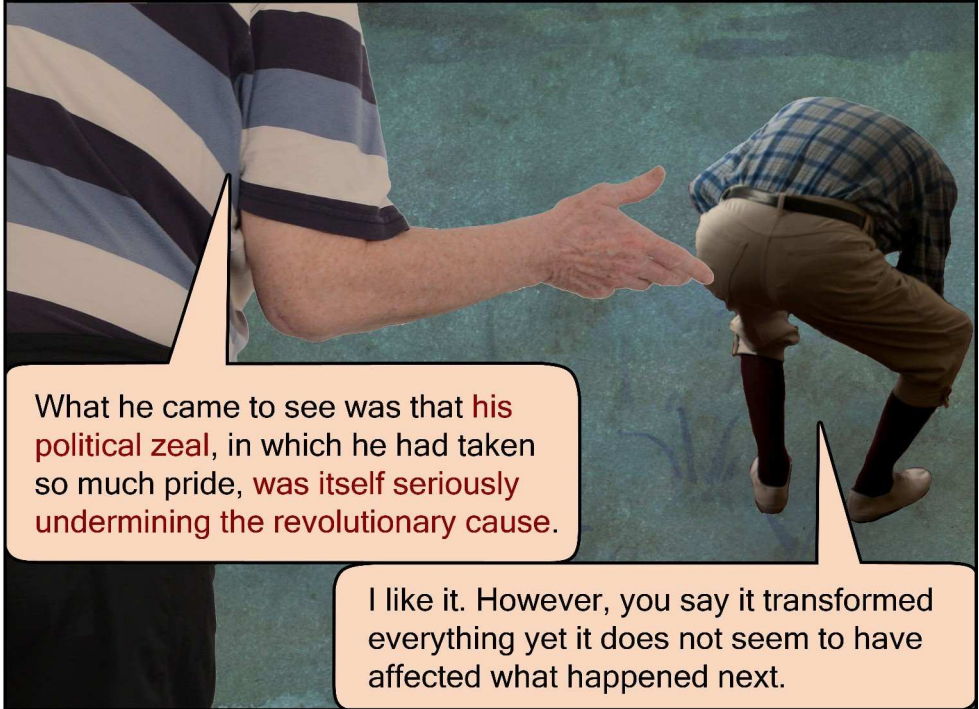


Up till this moment in time it had generally been accepted that, though Yahweh was uncommonly merciful as regards human misdeeds, all threats against the marginal ideology itself merited death.

This explains Elijah's behaviour which was **strictly orthodox** and not in the least bit over the top.







Here we are told Yahweh immediately proceeded to order Elijah to mount a three-cornered armed assault against Baalism which, for my money, amounts to yet more bloodshed!

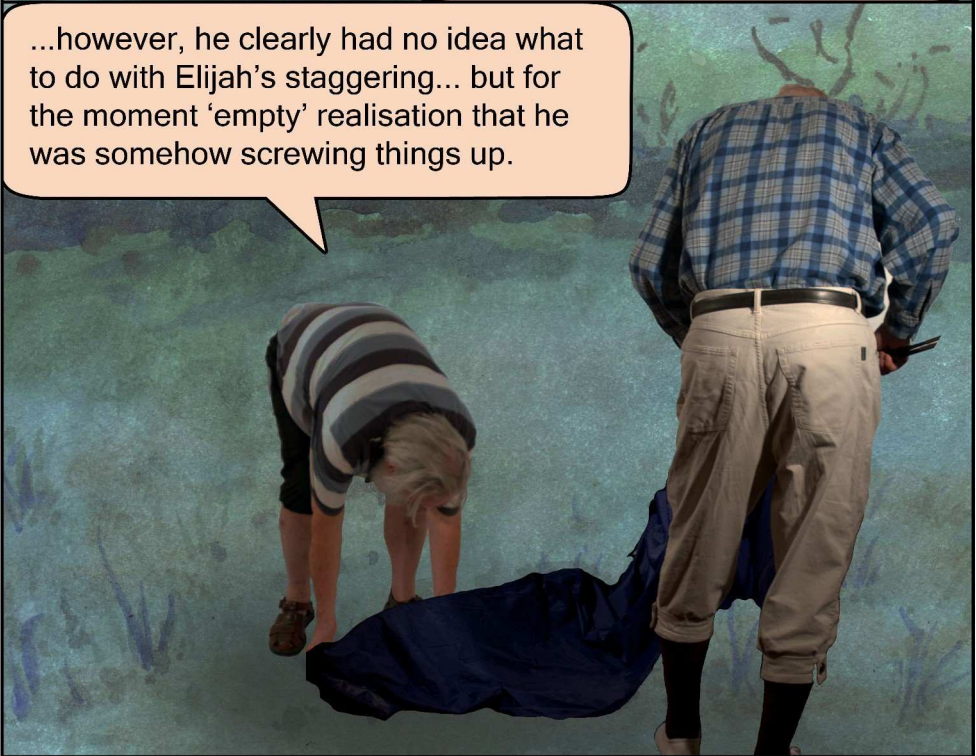
Go to Damascus and anoint Hazael king over Aram. Then anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king over Israel. Finally, anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

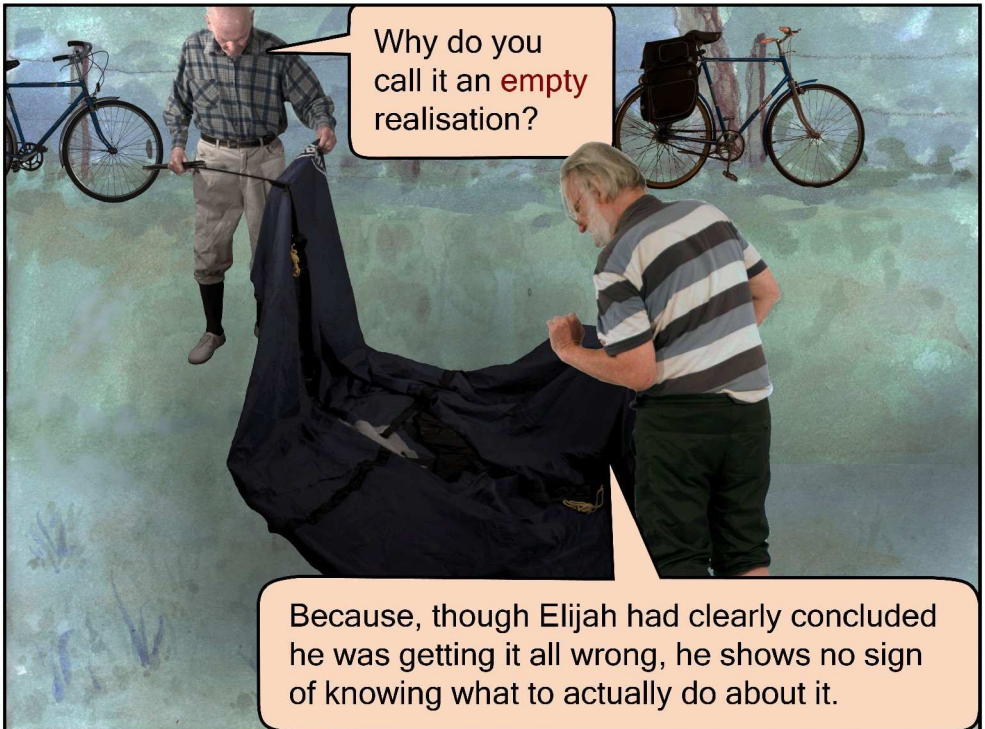
1 Kings 19.15-17



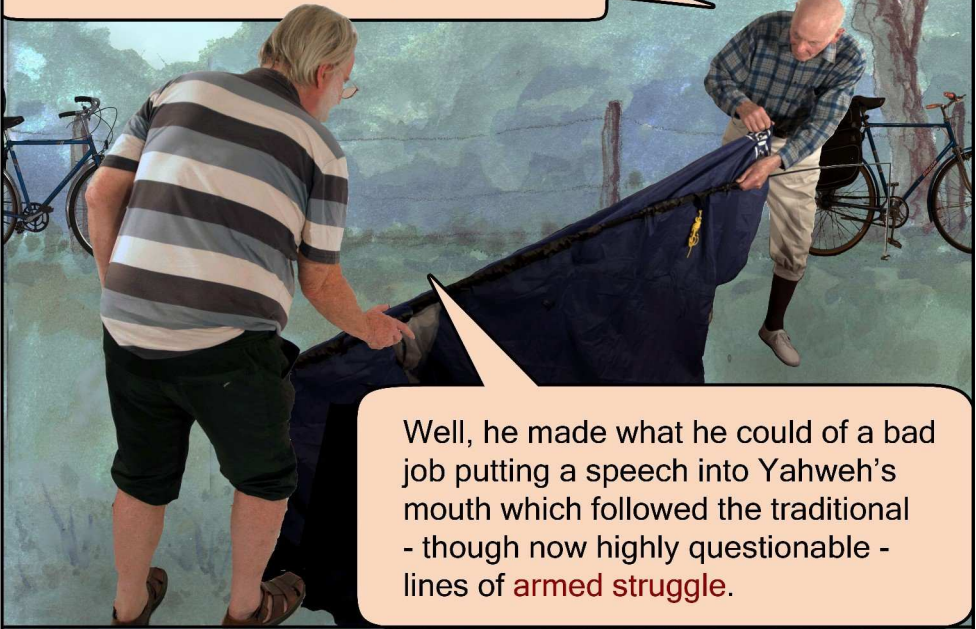
Yes! What we see here is our revolutionary writer hitting a brick wall! He was in the habit of showing prophetic utterances being fulfilled...

...however, he clearly had no idea what to do with Elijah's staggering... but for the moment 'empty' realisation that he was somehow screwing things up.

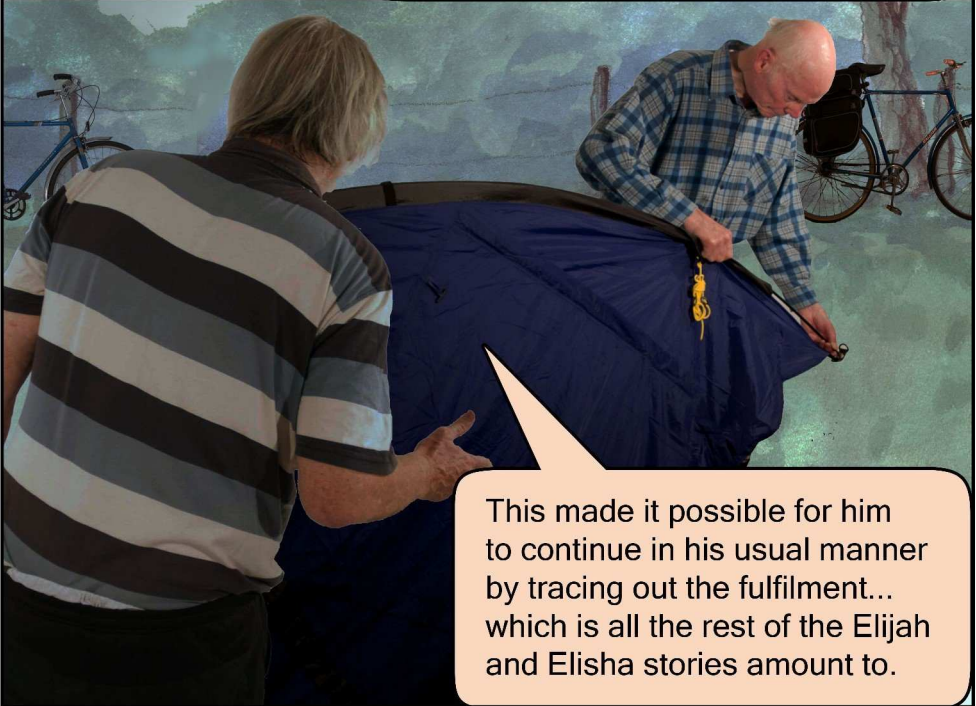




OK so our storyteller had no prophecy to work on so how did he proceed?

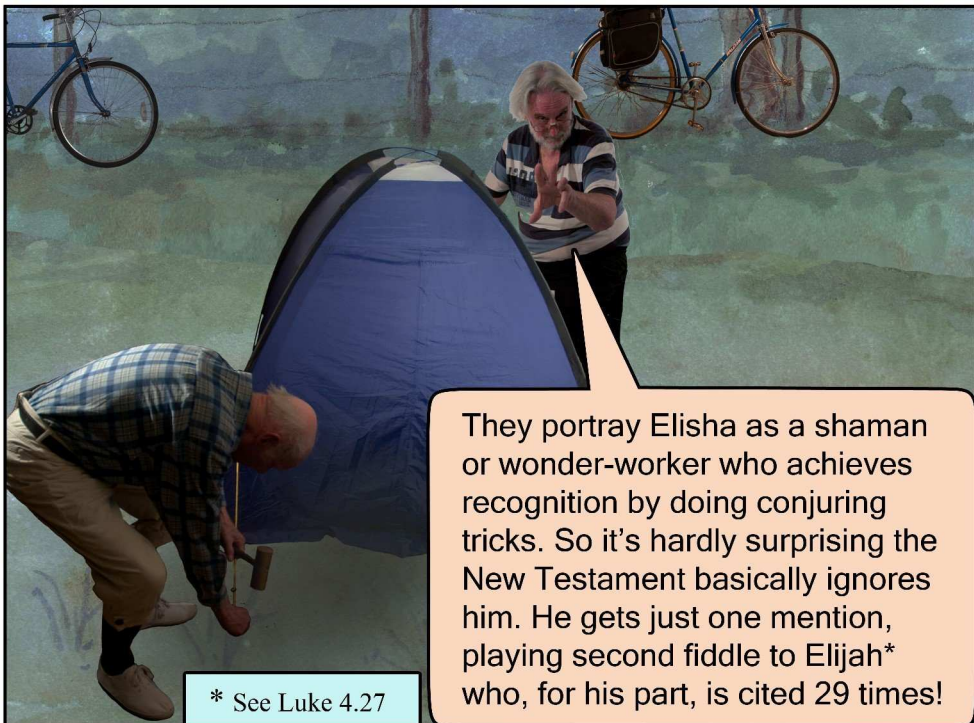


Well, he made what he could of a bad job putting a speech into Yahweh's mouth which followed the traditional - though now highly questionable - lines of **armed struggle**.



This made it possible for him to continue in his usual manner by tracing out the fulfilment... which is all the rest of the Elijah and Elisha stories amount to.





* See Luke 4.27

They portray Elisha as a shaman or wonder-worker who achieves recognition by doing conjuring tricks. So it's hardly surprising the New Testament basically ignores him. He gets just one mention, playing second fiddle to Elijah* who, for his part, is cited 29 times!

But what about the story of Elijah being taken up into heaven in a fiery chariot? *



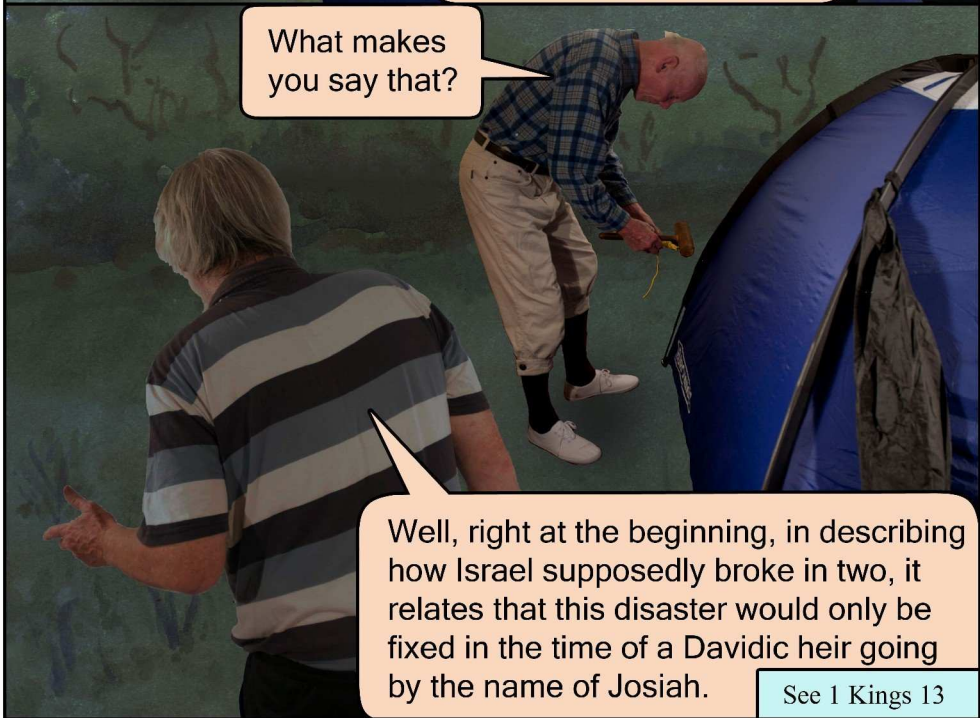
*See 2 Kings 2.12

That was just a colourful way of saying what he achieved was crucial and became part of the tradition.



So with Elijah covered have we finished with the book of Kings?

Not quite. Interestingly, the text itself does not centre attention on Elijah.



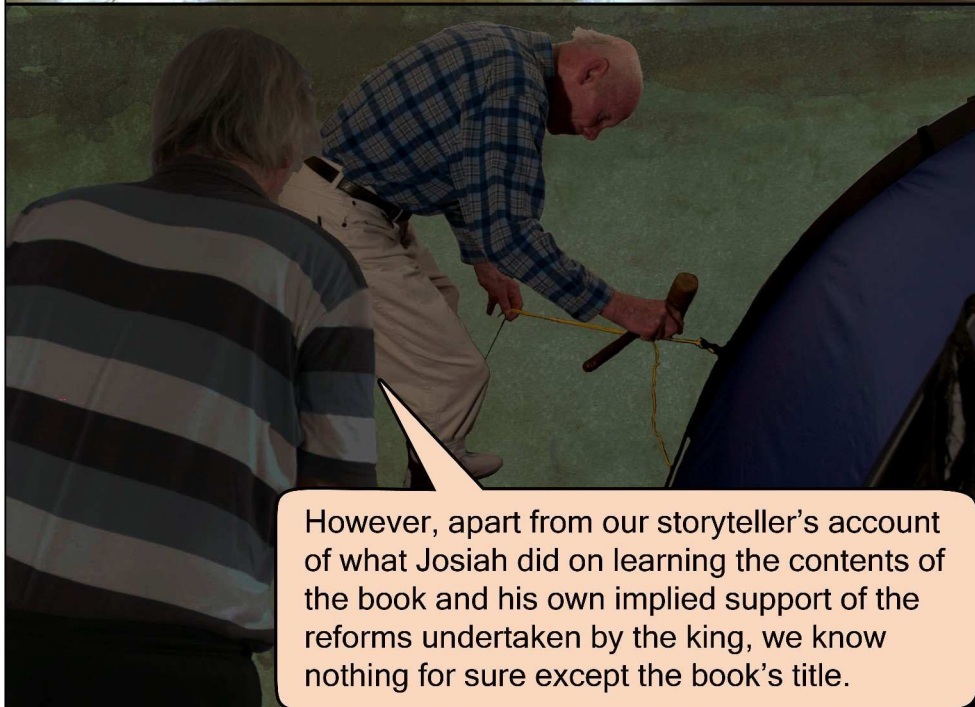
What makes you say that?

Well, right at the beginning, in describing how Israel supposedly broke in two, it relates that this disaster would only be fixed in the time of a Davidic heir going by the name of Josiah.

See 1 Kings 13

So it's clear the focus of the book of Kings is on the reforms which Josiah introduced as a result of the discovery of **The Book of the Covenant** in the Temple archives.

2 Kings 22.8

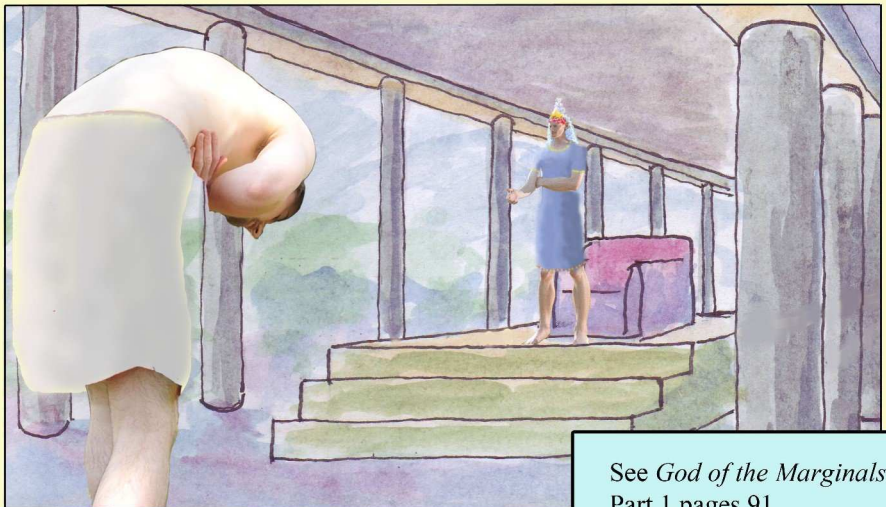


However, apart from our storyteller's account of what Josiah did on learning the contents of the book and his own implied support of the reforms undertaken by the king, we know nothing for sure except the book's title.

However, that in itself tells us quite a lot because, as we have seen, **COVENANT** is a key word in the revolutionary Hebrew tradition. So let's remind ourselves what was involved.



In the first place, whereas civilisation's relationships reeked of **DOMINANCE** - symbolised in the burning fire of deity which humans had to be protected against by hierarchical officialdom...



... in the Hebrew covenant the relationship between the people and their god was a **PARTNERSHIP** symbolised in the fire which, miraculously, did not consume.



See *God of the Marginals* Part 1 p. 89

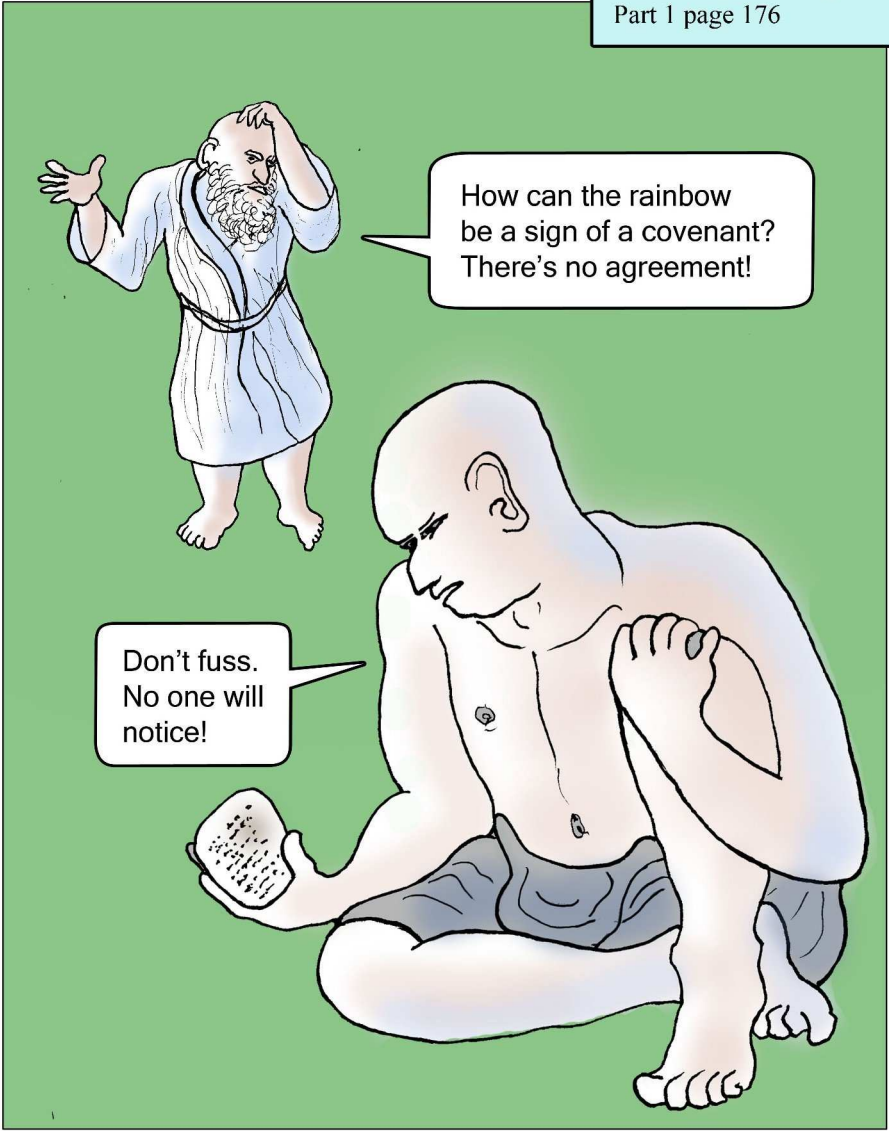
Having said that, there was nothing **equal** about this partnership, as the obligations undertaken show, since the community had to fulfil its side of the contract first just hoping it would work... confident that when the time came Yahweh would do his bit.



See *God of the Marginals* Part 1 p. 232

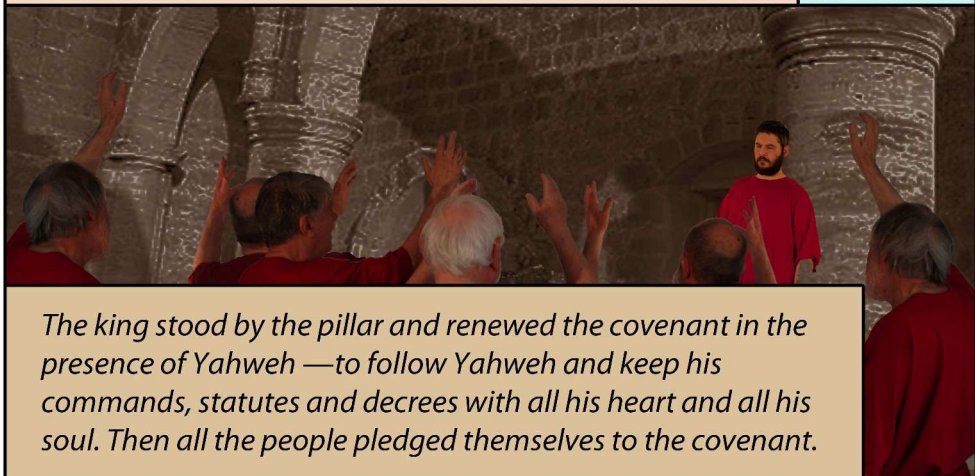
Of course, we have to be vigilant, remembering the rainbow in the second ending of the Flood story. For this clearly shows the revisionist writers were not above **pretending** that the covenant was all part and parcel of their conservative ideology.

See *God of the Marginals*
Part 1 page 176



However, our scribe makes it quite clear what is being talked about here. For as soon as Josiah realises how badly the community has failed under the leadership of his ancestors he immediately takes action to renew the covenant.


2 Kings 23. 3



The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of Yahweh—to follow Yahweh and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

In this way he demonstrates the community's **free participation** and **hope**... However, sadly, on this occasion they were out of luck, as our scribe points out!

2 Kings 23. 27



I have determined to remove Judah from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'My Name shall be there.'

So are we meant to believe
Yahweh disclosed his
intentions to our scribe?

Of course not. That would
have been religious eye-
wash and our scribe was a
true Hebrew revolutionary.

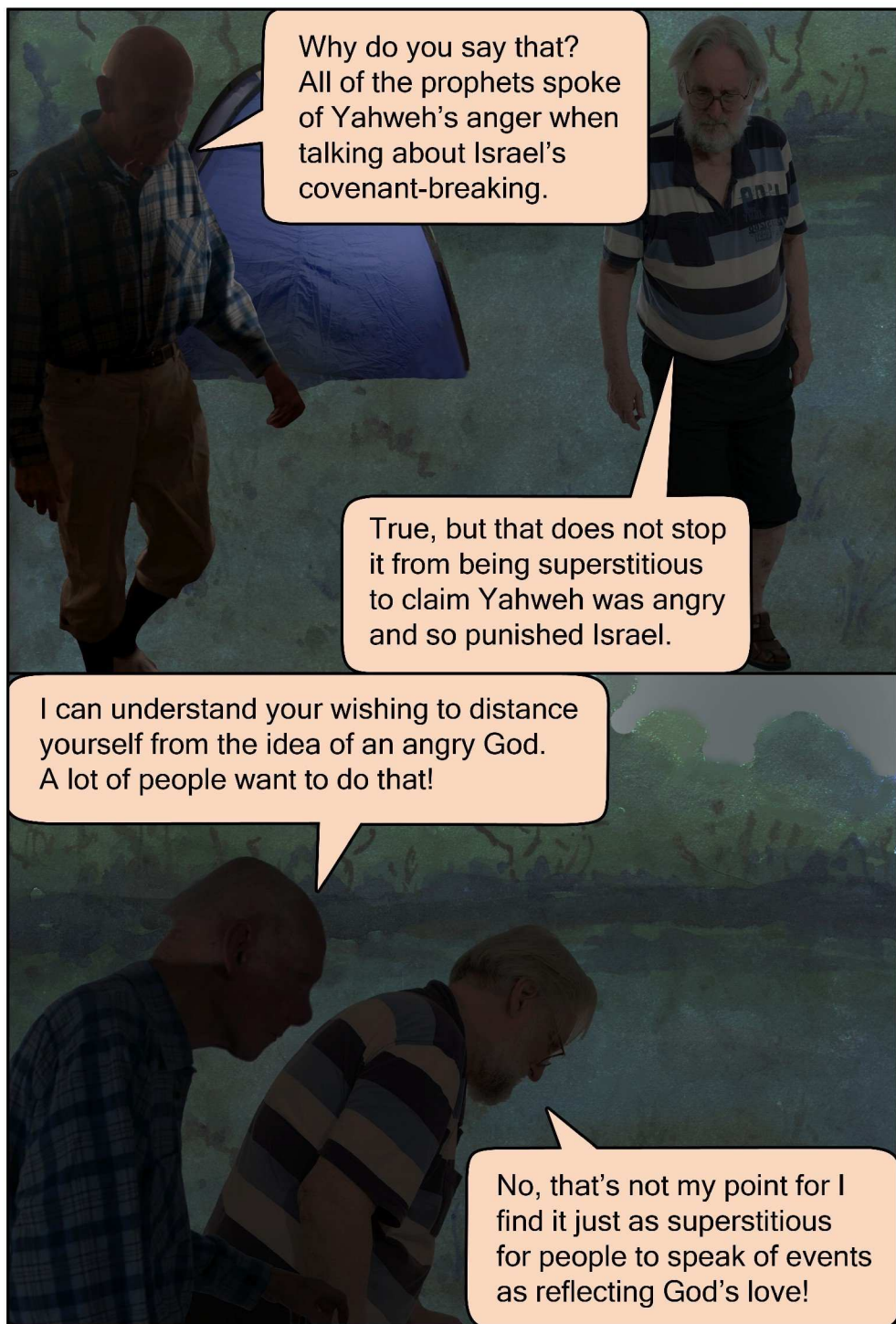
All he meant to convey
was that Josiah's reforms,
though well intentioned,
proved to be of no avail.

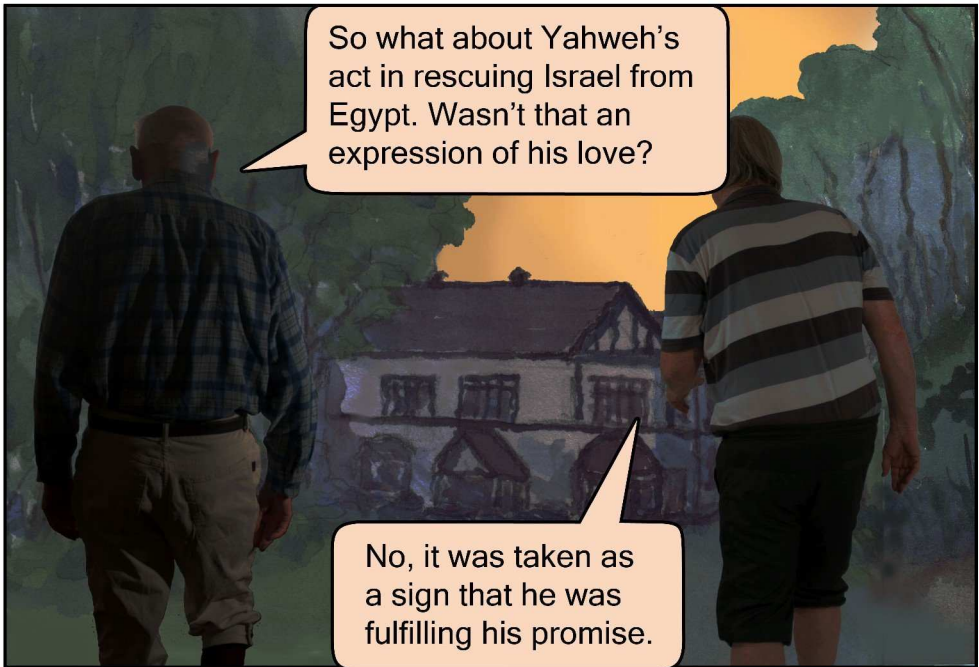


If you wish! That said, it was a bad mistake for him to speak of the cataclysm that engulfed Judah as 'Yahweh's anger'.

But Yahweh did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him.

2 Kings 23.26





That said, I'm not denying people were always falling into the superstition trap but we ourselves should be careful otherwise we will end up making asses of ourselves, as Christians do all of the time.



6

JEREMIAH



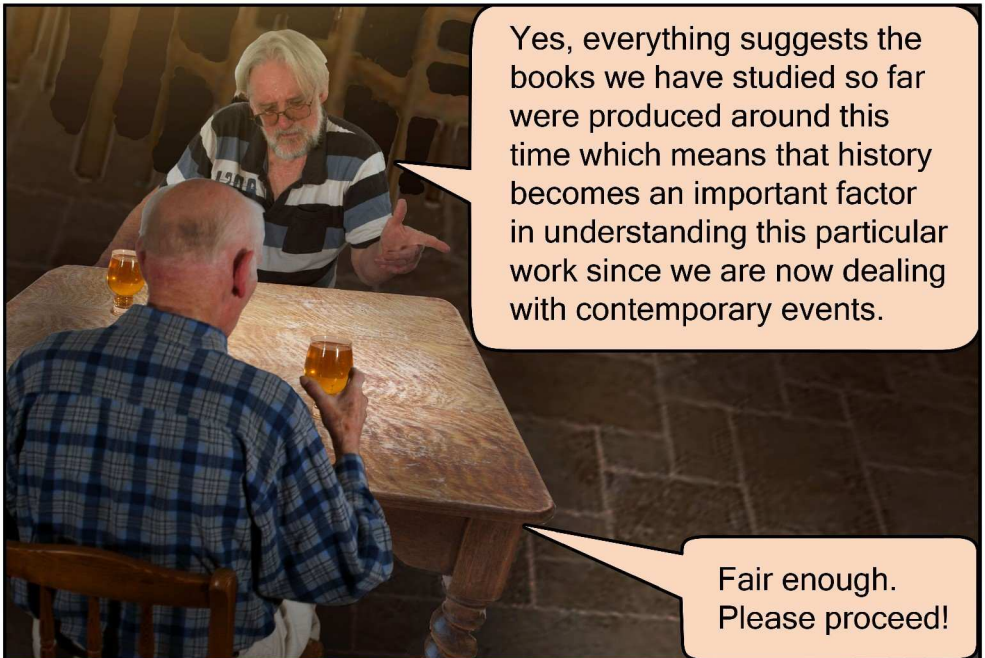
But it's probably also due to the fact that it's the first work to display clear signs of editorial revisionism.



So let's give ourselves a fighting chance of understanding what's going on by reviewing the underlying history.



Ah so we're talking **history** now are we?



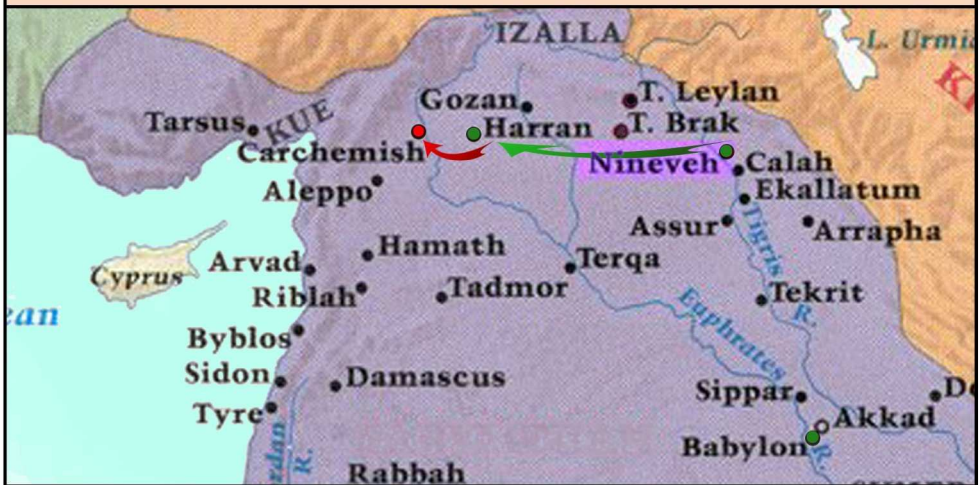
Yes, everything suggests the books we have studied so far were produced around this time which means that history becomes an important factor in understanding this particular work since we are now dealing with contemporary events.

Fair enough.
Please proceed!

We begin with the Babylonians - the new rising power in the ancient Near East. In 612 BCE they had captured Nineveh forcing the Assyrians (who had previously destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel) to withdraw to Harran in the west.



In 610 BCE the Egyptian pharaoh Necho, an ally of the Assyrians, sent help but it proved ineffective and in 609 Harran was taken by the Babylonians and the Assyrians forced back to Carchemish.



Necho then set out from Egypt with a new force under his own command. Taking the coastal road he arrived at Meggido where he was waylaid by Josiah king of Judah who was an Assyrian vassel. However, the Judeans were defeated and Josiah killed.



Josiah was succeeded by Jehoahaz*, one of his younger sons, but Neco intervened. He took the new king hostage first to his field camp in Riblah in Syria and then back to Egypt where he eventually died in captivity.

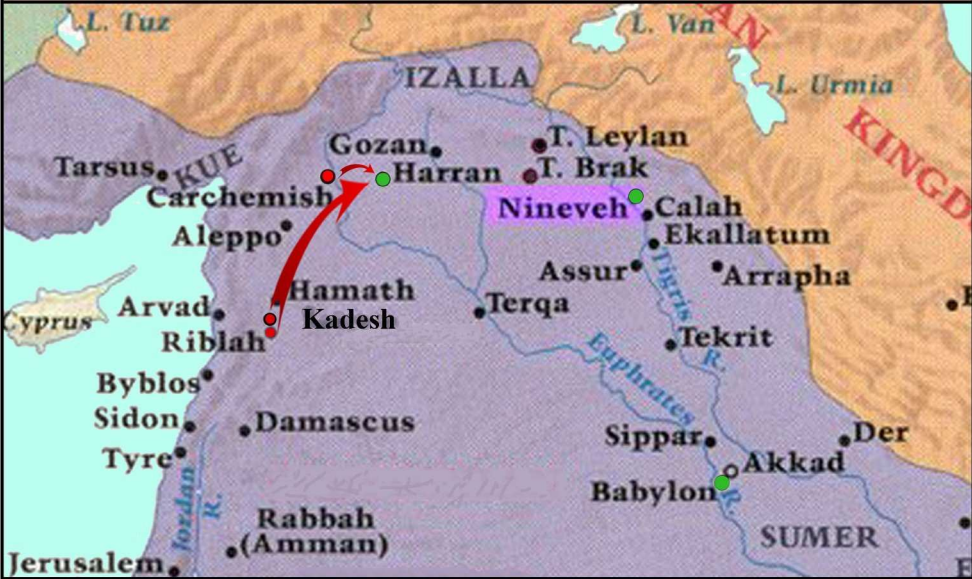
*Originally his name was Shallum



Back in Judah Jehoahaz's older brother, Jehoiakim*, was made king ruling now as Neco's vassal.

*Originally his name was Eliakim

Of course, Judah was a minor problem for Neco. He proceeded north against the Babylonians taking Kadesh and, joining with the Assyrians, laid siege to Harran.



However, they failed to capture the city and retreated back to Carchemish where the Assyrians disappear from history.

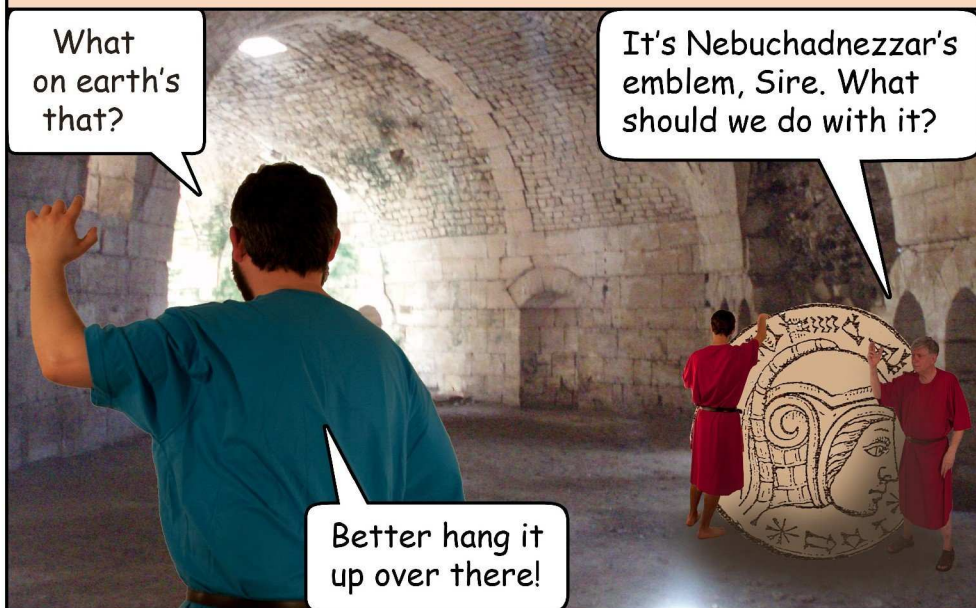


Now for a few years there was a stand-off since neither the Babylonians nor the Egyptians were able to get the upper hand...

The deadlock was finally broken in 605 when the old Babylonian king passed command of the army to his son Nebuchadnezzar. He surprised and defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish.



As a result, the whole of Syria-Palestine came under Babylonian domination causing Jehoiakim to grudgingly transfer allegiance away from Egypt to Babylon.



Neco, for his part, was barely able to keep the Babylonians out of Egypt. However, in 601 BCE he managed to regroup and throw them back, recovering Gaza.



Jehoiakim seized the opportunity afforded by this reverse to rebel and so Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem but Jehoiakim died before Nebuchadnezzar could get his hands on him.



So it was left to Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin*, to surrender the city in 597 and Nebuchadnezzar carted him off, along with his entire household and three thousand Judeans, to Babylon.

*Originally his name was Jeconiah



Before leaving Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah*, Jehoiachin's uncle, to rule Judah as his vassal.

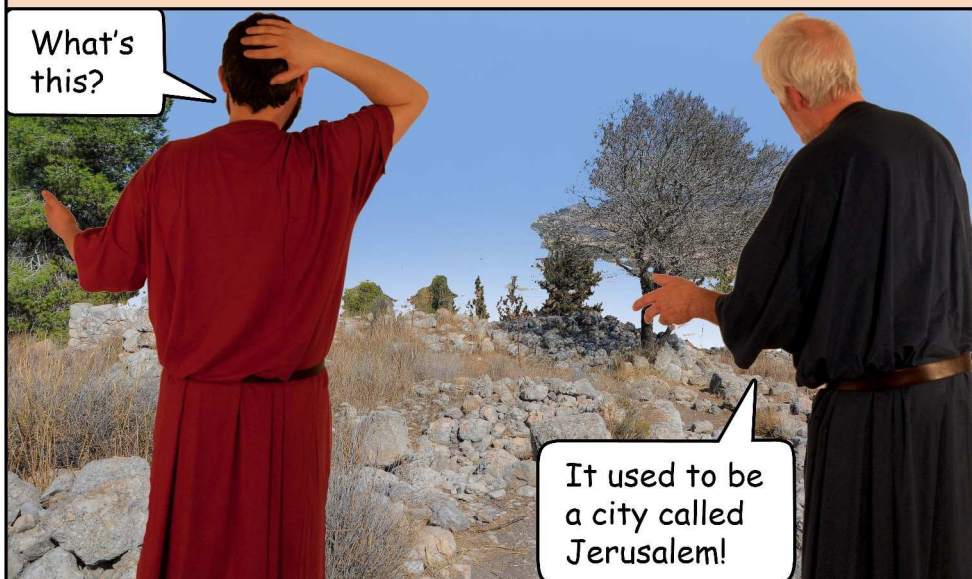
*Originally his name was Mattaniah



Then in 587, in what can only be described as a fit of complete madness, Zedehiah revolted against Babylon, entering into an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt.



Nebuchadnezzar responded by invading Judah and laying siege to Jerusalem which finally fell some 18 months later. This time the city was ransacked and raised to the ground.



In an attempt to render the community leaderless all the higher classes in the population were removed leaving just the peasants.

At least I won't
now have to feed
all of their horses!

No and you
won't get paid
for it either!



For his part Zedekiah was carted off to Riblah where all his sons and the leading officials of the city were executed before his eyes. He himself was blinded and taken on to Babylon, where he died in prison.



This time Nebuchadnezzar chose Gedaliah, who was from one of the moderate families in Jerusalem which had not supported the rebellion, to be governor of the people who remained.



Jeremiah himself was amongst the captives bound for Babylon when he was recognised by the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard and allowed to stay under Gedaliah's protection.



Gedaliah urged a peaceful acceptance of the Babylonian victory, however, two months later he was assassinated along with the Babylonian officials who had been left to supervise.

There he is.
Kill the traitor!



Thoroughly scared, the remaining community turned to Jeremiah for advice. He urged everyone to stay put and accept their fate under Babylonian rule... but his arguments were rejected.



So, Jeremiah was finally forced against his will to flee to Egypt with the rest of the community in an attempt to find sanctuary.



In Egypt everything seems to have gone to pieces, as Jeremiah had predicted, and nothing more is heard of him or them.



Fine. So given this historical situation what did Jeremiah have to say?

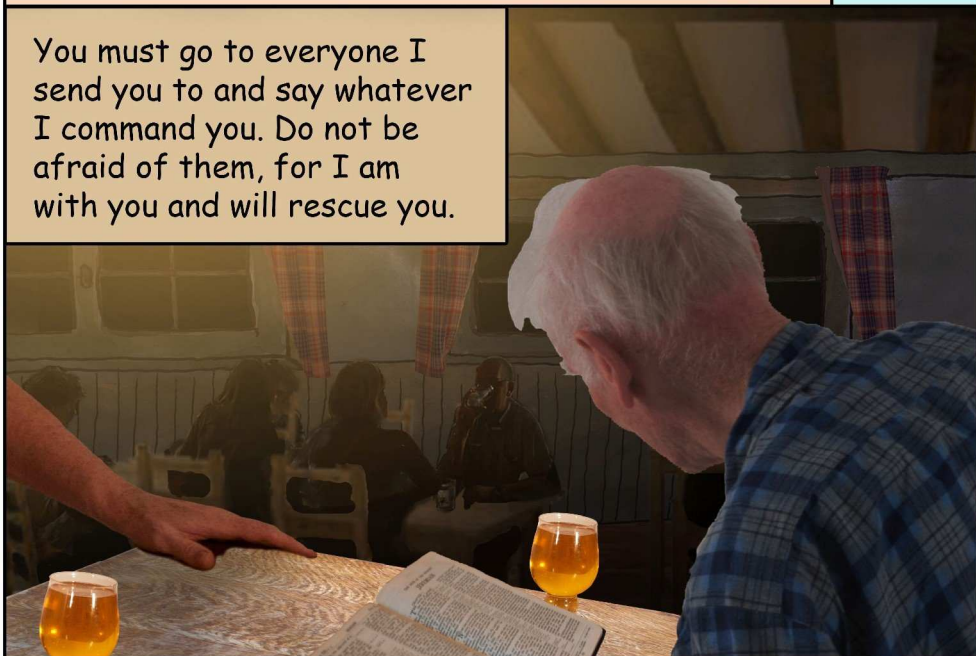


We'll read us the first Chapter and we'll see.

As you wish. The book opens with Jeremiah's call:

Jer.1. 7-8

You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.



Today I have made you
a fortified city, an iron pillar and
a bronze wall to stand against the
whole land—against the kings of
Judah, its officials, its priests
and the people of the land.
They will fight against you but
will not overcome you, for I am
with you and will rescue you,

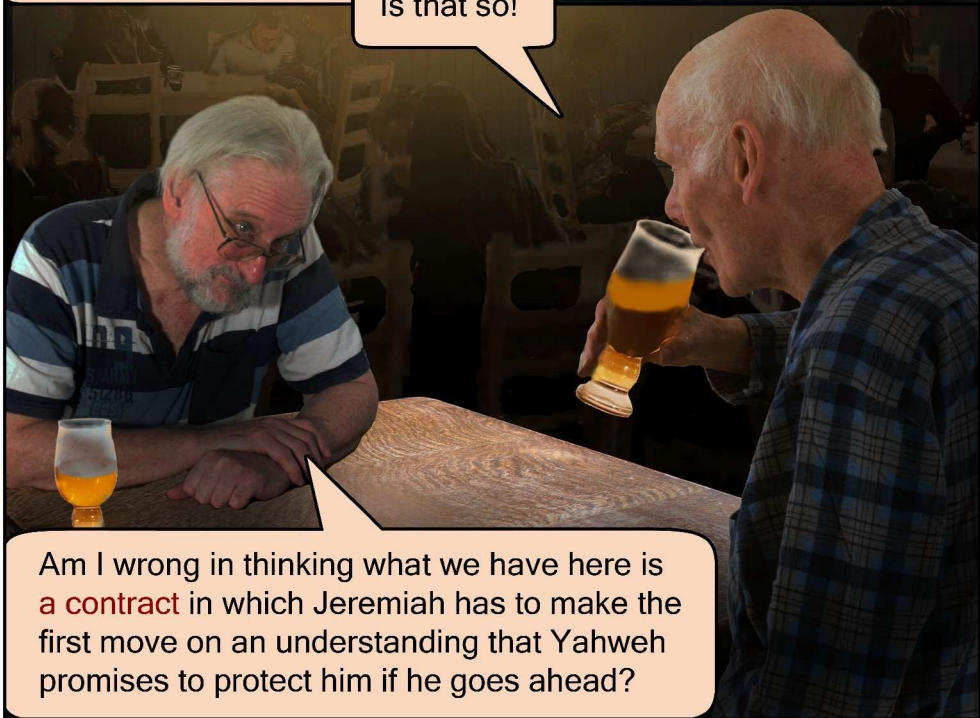


A photograph of two elderly men sitting at a wooden table in a dimly lit room. The man on the left, with white hair and glasses, wears a blue and white striped polo shirt. The man on the right, balding, wears a blue plaid shirt. Both have glasses of beer on the table. An open book lies on the table between them. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other people and furniture.

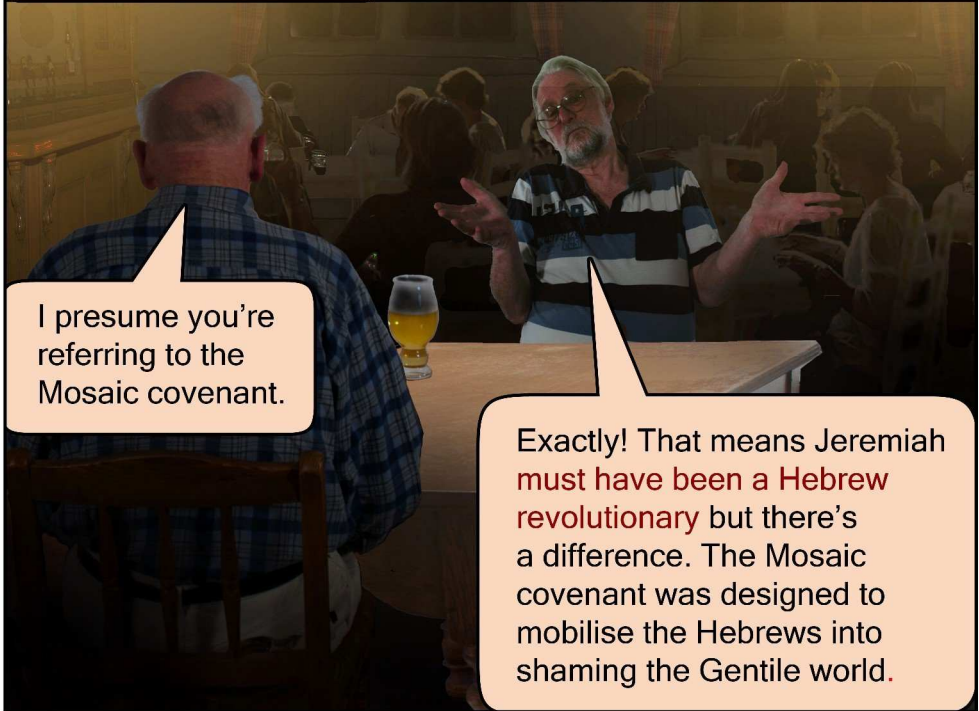
This divine command strikes me as very hierarchical.

It's certainly ideological instruction but it's **not authoritarian**.

Is that so!

A closer photograph of the same two men. The man on the left is looking down at his glass of beer. The man on the right is holding his glass up to his lips and drinking. The background is dark and blurry.

Am I wrong in thinking what we have here is **a contract** in which Jeremiah has to make the first move on an understanding that Yahweh promises to protect him if he goes ahead?



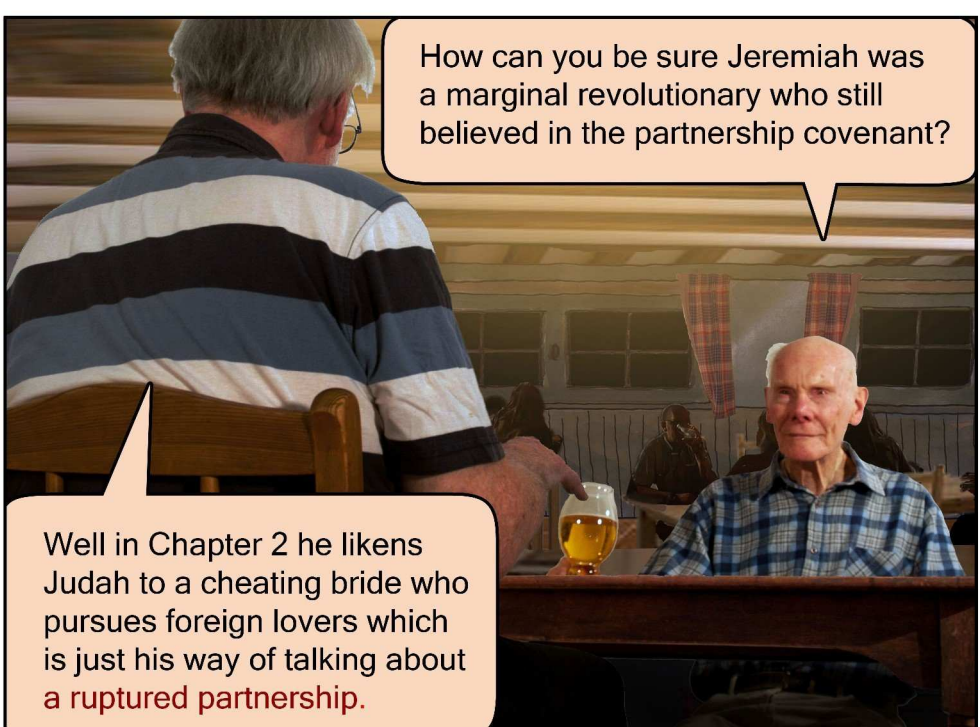
Whereas here Jeremiah is personally given the task of **shaming his own community**.



So are you saying this is a **new** covenant?



No, it's still the Mosaic covenant. It's just that Judah is failing to perform and needs to be shamed into doing her job properly.

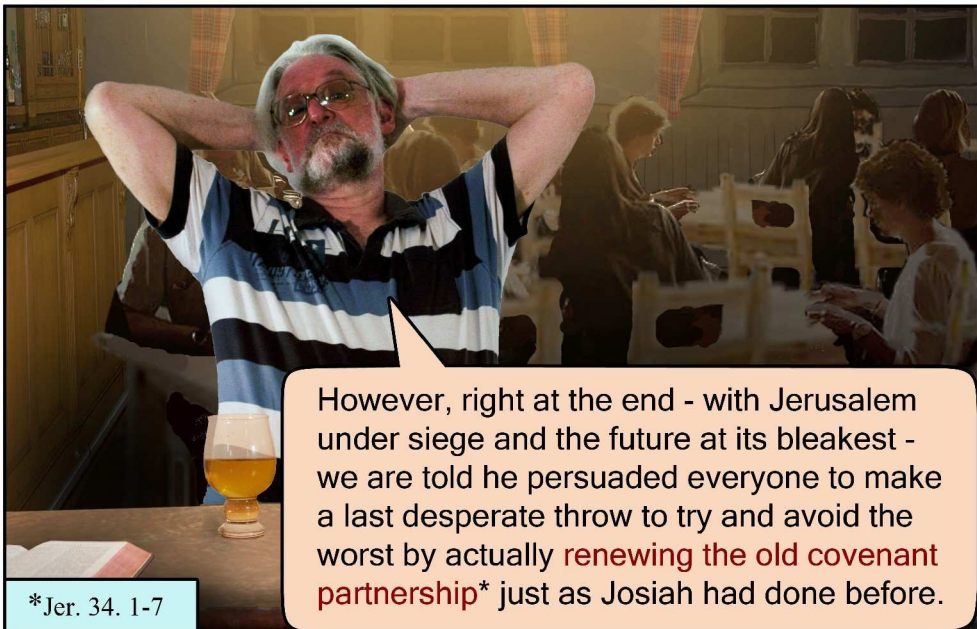


How can you be sure Jeremiah was a marginal revolutionary who still believed in the partnership covenant?

Well in Chapter 2 he likens Judah to a cheating bride who pursues foreign lovers which is just his way of talking about a ruptured partnership.

Later* he talks openly about Judah breaking the old covenant but even the revisionist writers did that!

*See Jer. 11. 1-17



*Jer. 34. 1-7

However, right at the end - with Jerusalem under siege and the future at its bleakest - we are told he persuaded everyone to make a last desperate throw to try and avoid the worst by actually **renewing the old covenant partnership*** just as Josiah had done before.

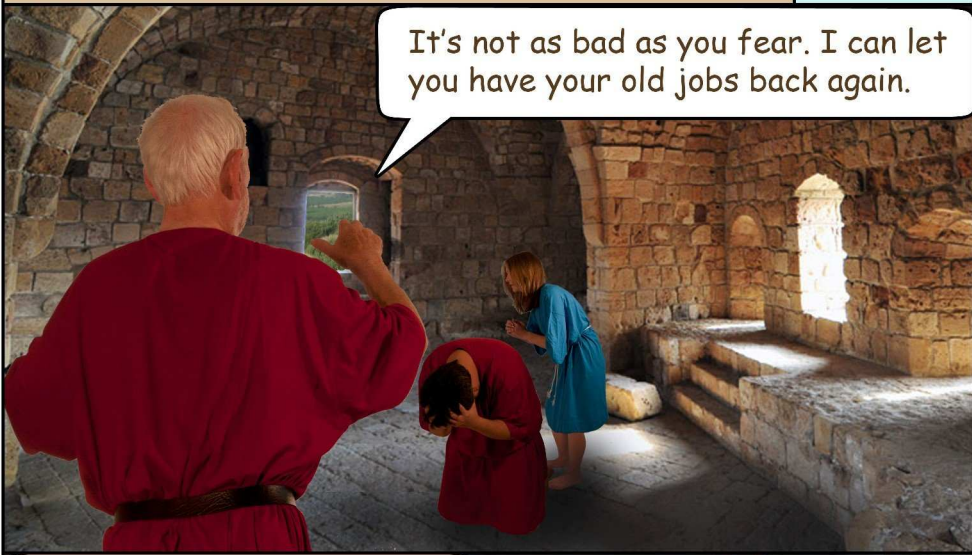
Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty that all should set free their Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no-one should hold another Judean in slavery.

Jer. 34. 8-9



But afterwards they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them again into subjection as slaves.

Jer 34.11



It's not as bad as you fear. I can let you have your old jobs back again.

For Jeremiah this hypocritical betrayal was the last straw.



OK. Given that Jeremiah's strategy, as a marginal revolutionary, was to get his fellow Judeans to abide by the old covenant, how do you explain his tactics in dealing with the authorities?

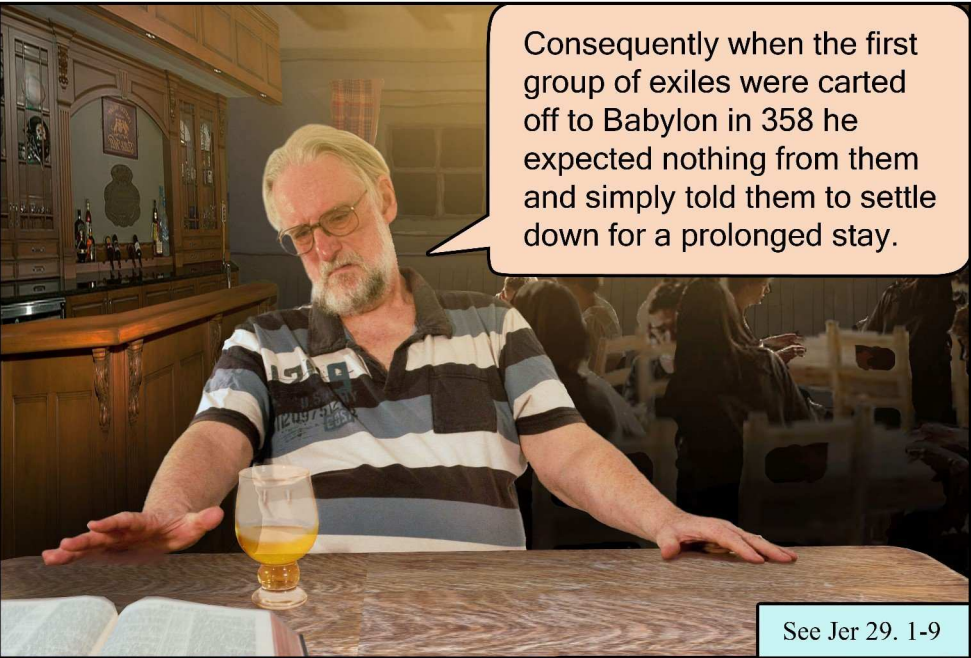
Since he was convinced Yahweh was determined to teach the community a lesson for breaking the covenant he told the Judean leaders to submit to the Babylonians.

Jer 32. 1-5
Jer 37. 8-10



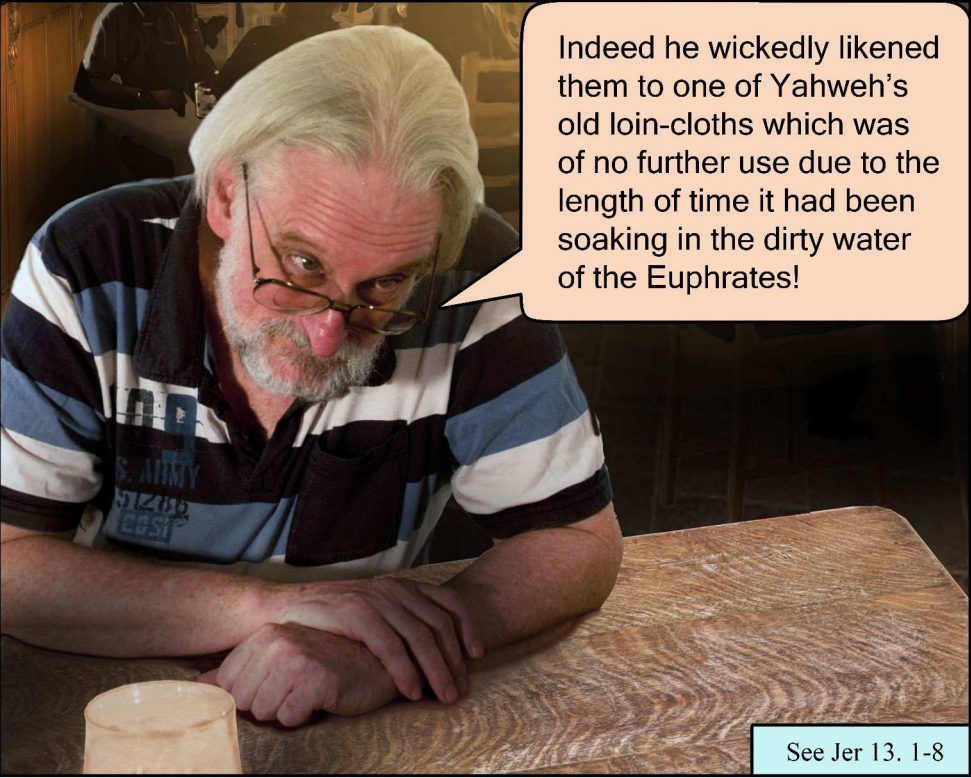
He seems to have been working on the premise that after the punishment had been administered a remnant would be able to start out afresh.

Jer 3. 12-13
Jer 32. 6-15



Consequently when the first group of exiles were carted off to Babylon in 358 he expected nothing from them and simply told them to settle down for a prolonged stay.

See Jer 29. 1-9



Indeed he wickedly likened them to one of Yahweh's old loin-cloths which was of no further use due to the length of time it had been soaking in the dirty water of the Euphrates!

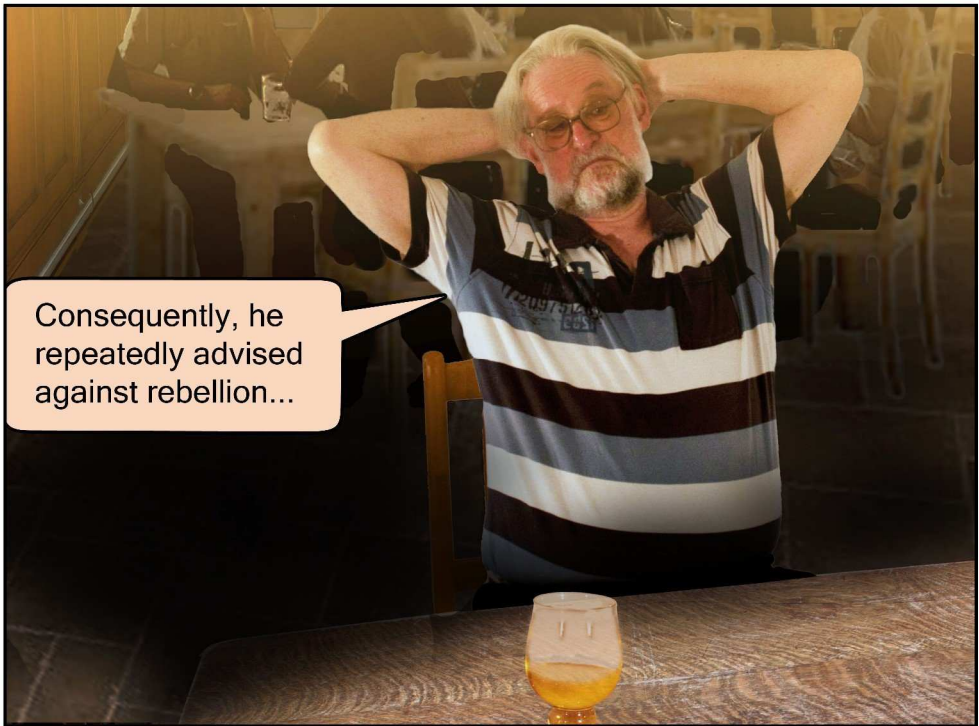
See Jer 13. 1-8



For the authorities Jeremiah's tactics smacked of defeatism. They realised they were not in the same league as the Babylonians but their gut reaction was to try and finesse by playing the Egyptians off against them.

Jeremiah, however, told the authorities they were kidding themselves because, as he saw it, Yahweh had already sealed their fate.

Jer 27. 12
Jer 32. 1-5




Consequently, he repeatedly advised against rebellion...



...and when Jerusalem was sacked and the population carted off - because his advice was ignored - he continued to recommend the few who were left to stay put and resist the temptation to seek refuge in Egypt.

Jer 42-44 notably 44. 11-14

A photograph of two elderly men sitting at a wooden dining table in a home setting. The man on the left, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt, is leaning forward and gesturing with his hands while speaking. The man on the right, wearing a blue plaid shirt, is listening. There are glasses of beer on the table. In the background, there are windows with plaid curtains and a wooden chair.

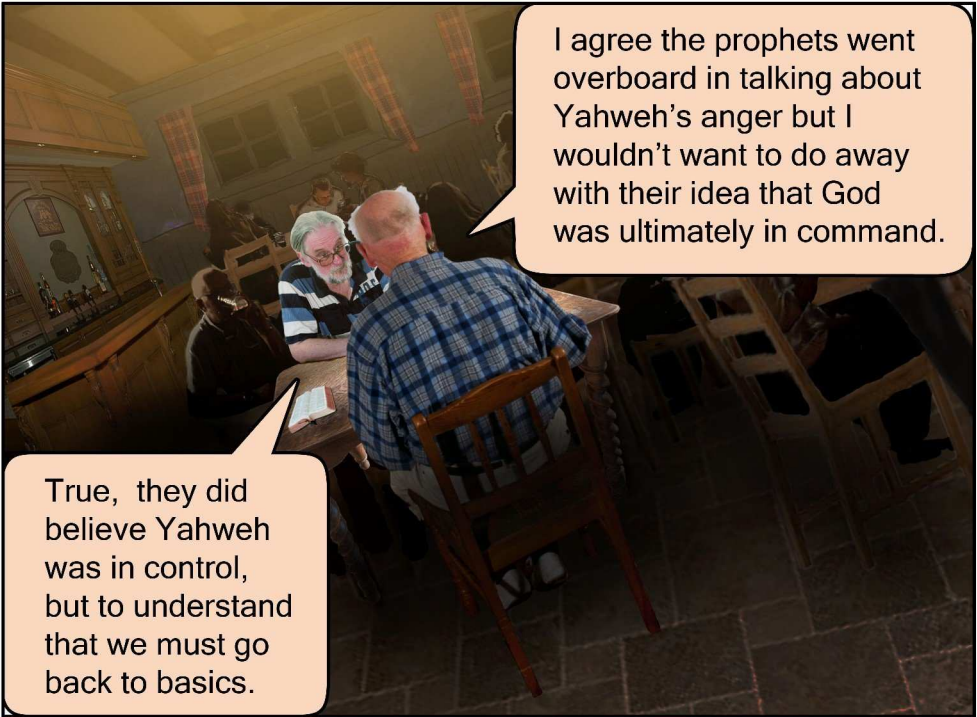
Yes but all of these tactics were based on an understanding that Yahweh was **punishing** Judah yet, you say, this was a mistaken belief!

True, it was a clear case of falling into the superstition trap!

Then everything Jeremiah said was fundamentally flawed?

Well, he happend to be right in saying there was no way to avoid the might of Babylon but it had nothing to do with Yahweh being angry, which was pure religious make-believe.

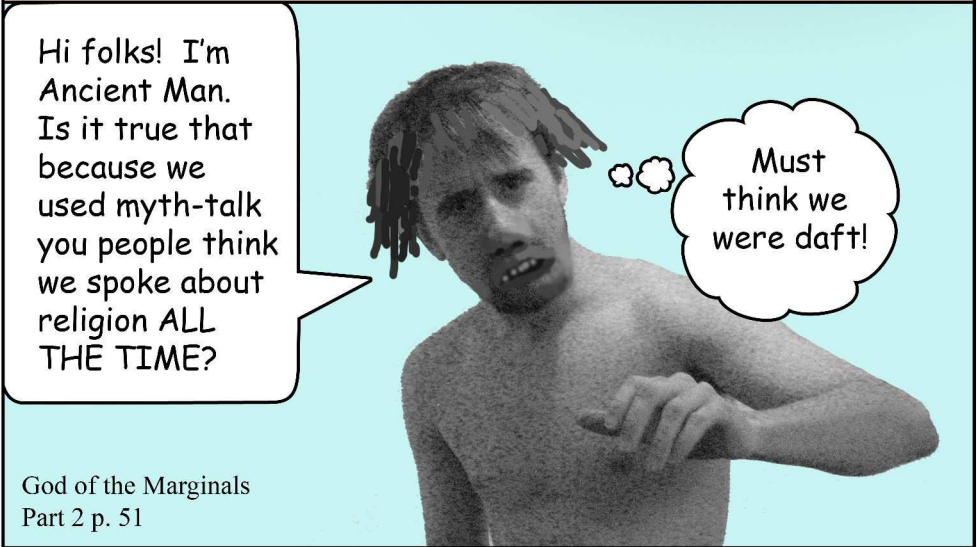




I agree the prophets went overboard in talking about Yahweh's anger but I wouldn't want to do away with their idea that God was ultimately in command.

True, they did believe Yahweh was in control, but to understand that we must go back to basics.

We have to remind ourselves that the ancients didn't invent mythological language because they were spiritual folk who naturally wanted to talk about religious matters.



Hi folks! I'm Ancient Man. Is it true that because we used myth-talk you people think we spoke about religion ALL THE TIME?

Must think we were daft!

God of the Marginals
Part 2 p. 51

They developed mythological language simply because they needed to talk about the universal powers which affected their lives and they lacked the necessary vocabulary to do this.

*Thinking About
the Bible*
Part 1. p. 144

Don't venture
into deep
water lest
the river
goddess
catches you!



It was a brilliant solution... the only danger being the superstition trap: people misunderstanding the symbolic terms and mindlessly taking them literally.

What's got into him? Why's
he wearing a bowl on his head?



Maybe He thinks
the gods are
angry with him!

Given all of this it would have been quite reasonable for a Judean to speak of the holocaust that had arrived as **Marduk's punishment**, for the god Marduk represented the Babylonians' power.



But to speak about it in terms of **Yahweh's anger**, as Jeremiah did, was to make out things were happening to Judah because of her lack of marginal zeal which was quite untrue...



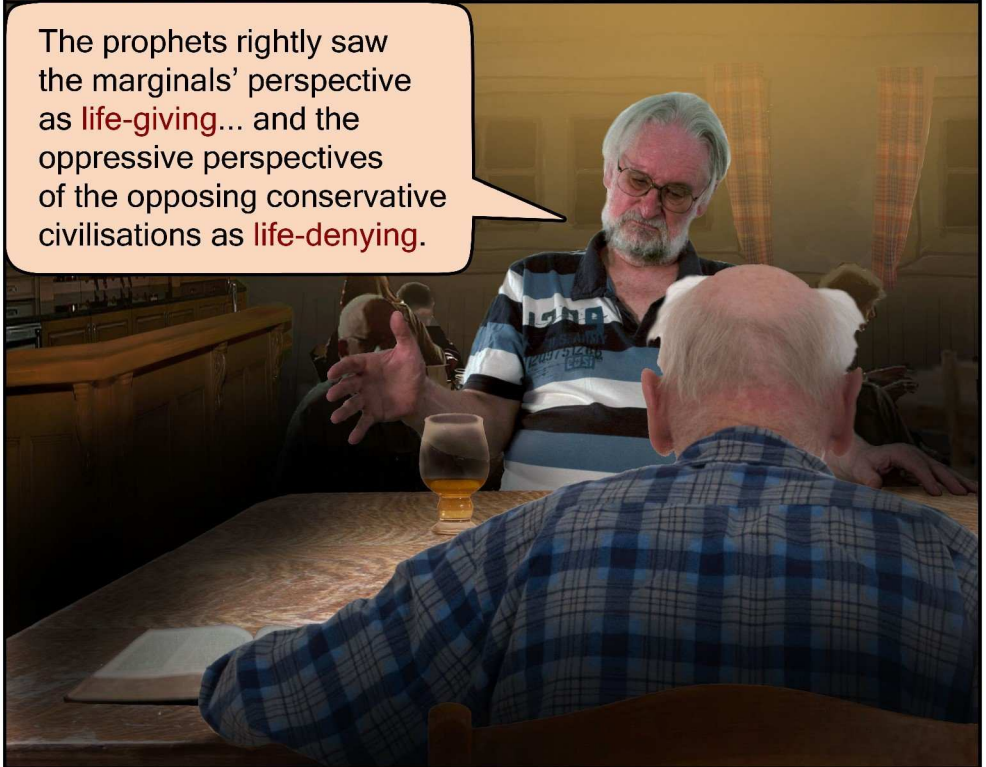
For ideologies themselves don't punish. It's the people they represent who punish and no-one would have seen Judah as punishing **herself**!

Yes but, as I said, the prophets believed Yahweh was in control, not Marduk!

So they did but only because they refused to accept that Yahweh was insignificant because he represented the marginals' vision of the world.



The prophets rightly saw the marginals' perspective as **life-giving**... and the oppressive perspectives of the opposing conservative civilisations as **life-denying**.

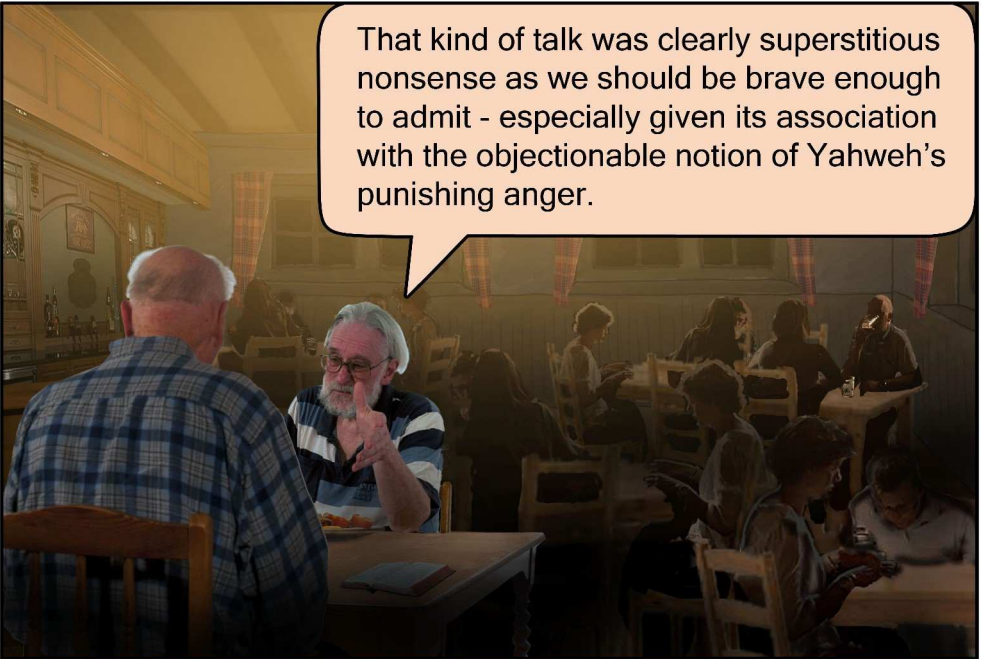


But it was one thing for them to hope
-against-hope that this life-giving
Hebrew revolution, which had proved
so costly, would finally triumph...



... and quite another for
them to pretend Yahweh
was ultimately responsible
for the way in which
everything turned out.





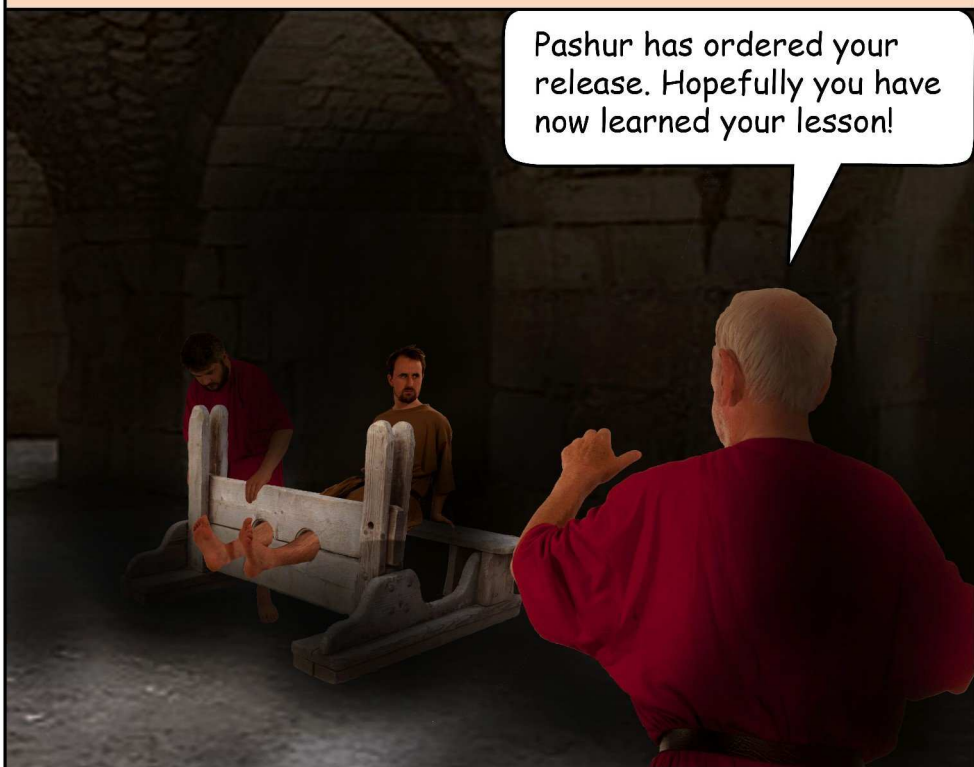
There is no denying that **anger** and **punishment** are constant themes in the book of Jeremiah. Yahweh is angry with Judah because she herself has been angry and destructive.

This is what Yahweh says:
'Cut down the trees and build
siege ramps against Jerusalem.
This city must be punished; it
is filled with oppression...
Violence and destruction resound
in her; her sickness and wounds
are ever before me.'

Jer 6. 6-7

Then again he is angry at the way in which Judean officials treat his messenger Jeremiah...

Pashur has ordered your release. Hopefully you have now learned your lesson!

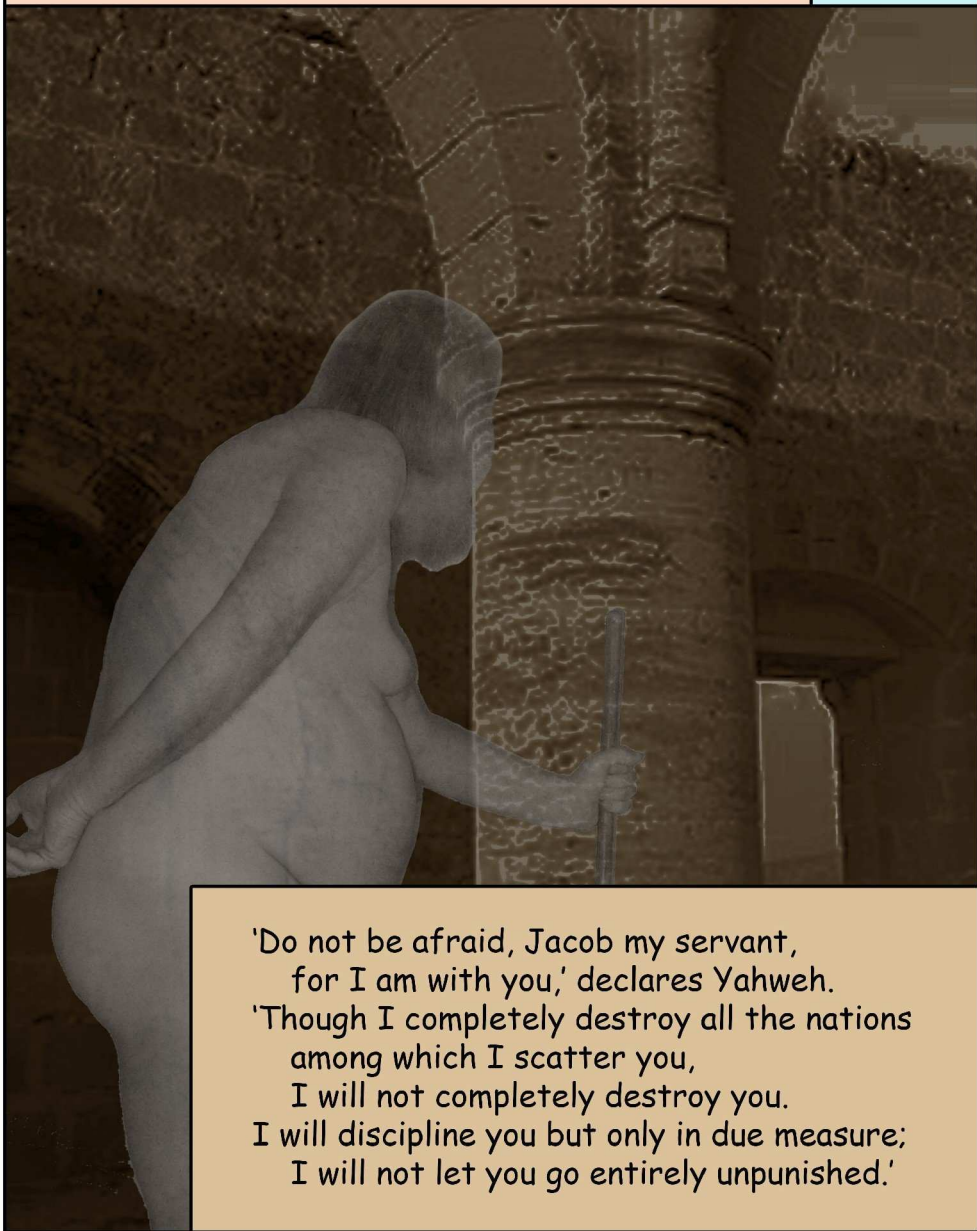


This is what Yahweh says: 'I will make you Pashur a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. And you, Pashur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.'

Jer 20. 3-6

Finally Yahweh is angry with the Gentile nations he has used to punish Judah. As a consequence, he is now intent on punishing them... without letting Judah herself entirely off the hook!

Jer 46 - 51



'Do not be afraid, Jacob my servant,
for I am with you,' declares Yahweh.
'Though I completely destroy all the nations
among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you.
I will discipline you but only in due measure;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'

It has to be accepted, of course, that some of this anger and negativity just reflects the crisis of the time.



For the earlier prophets it had been bad enough trying to guide the revolutionary Hebrew community as it battled for survival amongst the competing communities in Syria-Palestine.

Give us a king then we will be able to defend ourselves!



If you insist but you know this king will exploit you!

But now with the rise of Babylon there was simply no way in which the community could hope to defend itself by relying on its own means. So Jeremiah found himself in a 'no-win' situation.



However, though he arrived at the worst possible moment, and was only following the example set by his predecessors, this doesn't excuse him for wallowing in the superstition trap...



Especially since the price was so high - for it flung wide-open the door to revisionism - as we are just about to see.



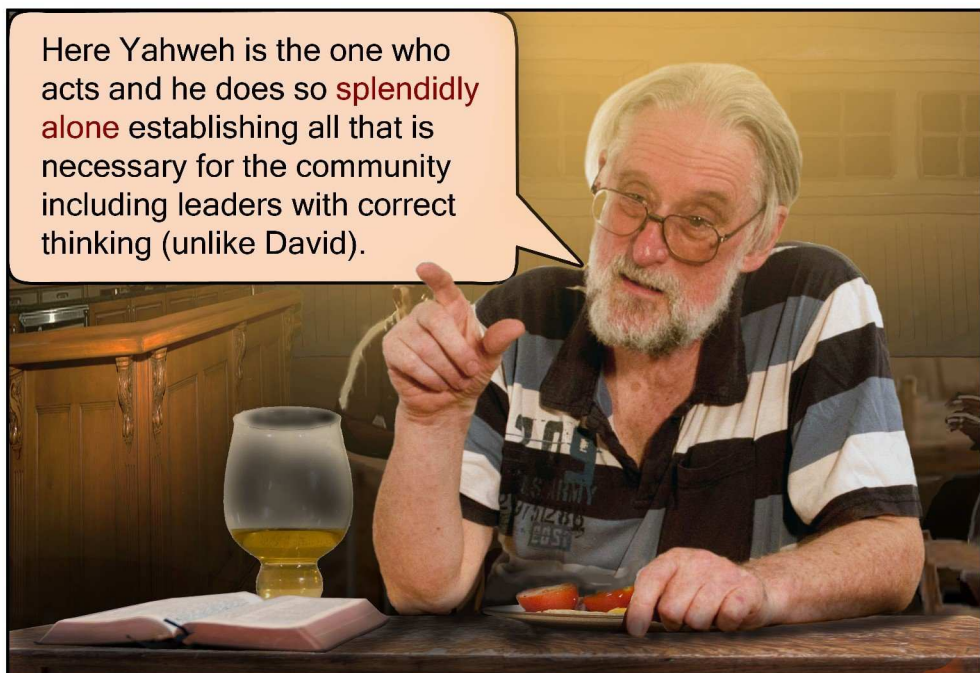
Go on! I'm listening.

In all the books studied up till now we have encountered revolutionary Hebrew writers talking about the covenant as a partnership **in which Israel has to act first believing Yahweh will vindicate her** but see what we have here in this clearly 'post-exilic' text.

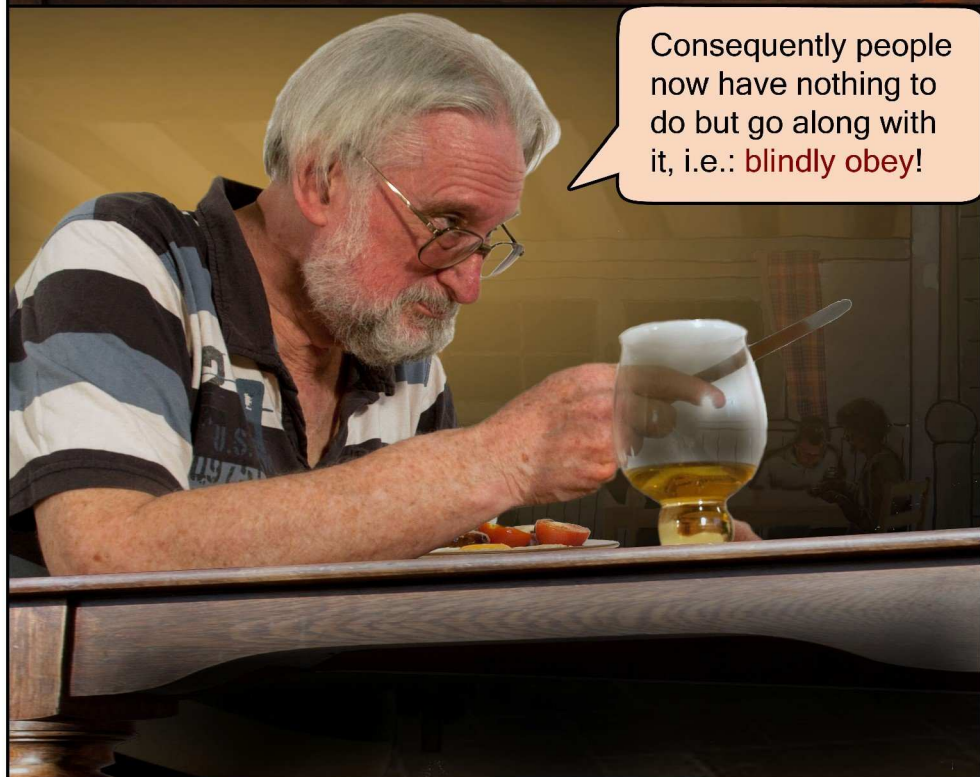
'Return, faithless people,' declares the Lord, 'for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,' declares the Lord, 'people will no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.'

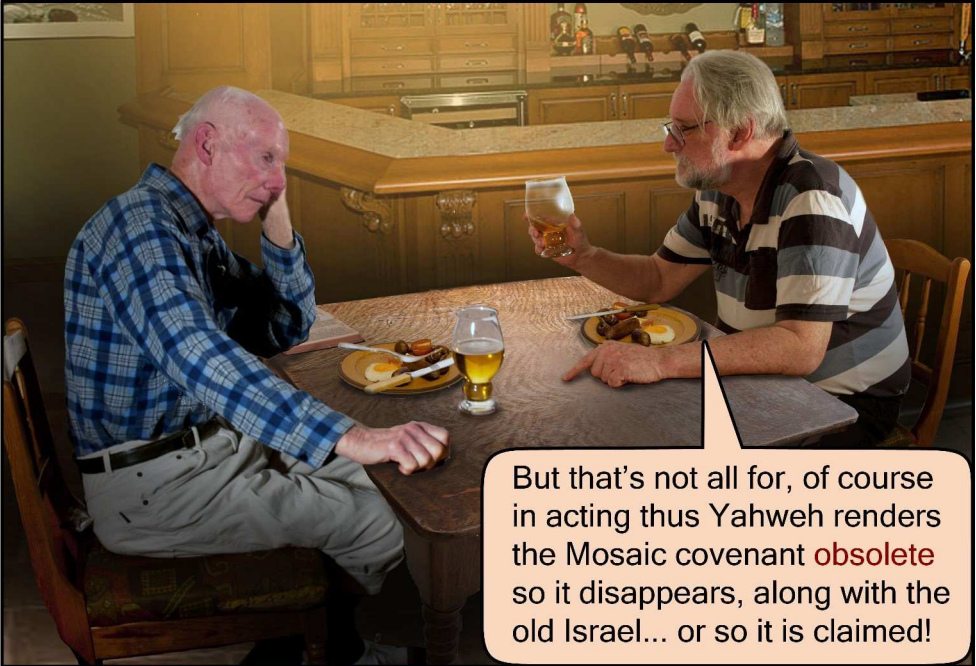
Jer 3. 15-16

Here Yahweh is the one who acts and he does so **splendidly alone** establishing all that is necessary for the community including leaders with correct thinking (unlike David).



Consequently people now have nothing to do but go along with it, i.e.: **blindly obey!**





Later on we find these **revisionist** ideas further expanded:

Jer 31. 31-34

'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, ...' 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law in them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.'


See also Jer 32.36 - 33.26

The question is does this idea that Yahweh intended in the near future **to impose** his thinking on the community indicate the author believed the post-exilic community had effectively veered politically to the right?

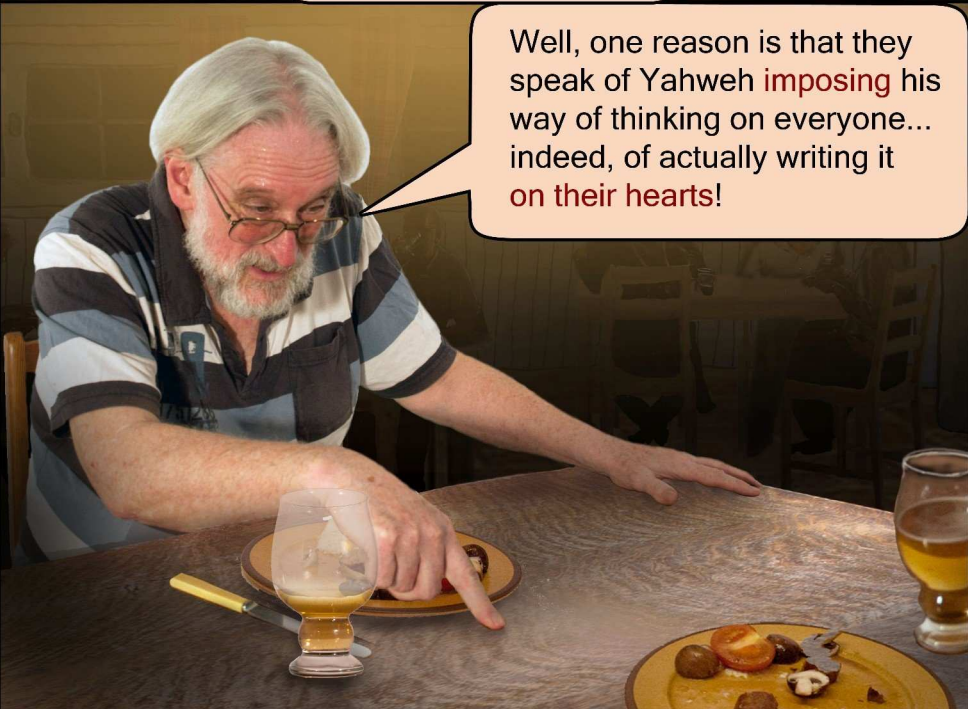
Or was it simply his way of giving 'carte blanche' to the post-exilic priests' new **conservative authoritarianism**?

But in imposing political perspectives aren't all ideologies authoritarian?


People impose not ideologies. What's more, generally speaking, ideologies, as political perspectives, are **adopted** not **imposed** which makes it significant where an observer happens to stand in society.

A photograph of two elderly men sitting at a wooden table in a dimly lit room. The man on the left, wearing a striped polo shirt and glasses, is drinking from a glass. The man on the right, wearing a blue plaid shirt, is eating. Both have plates of food and glasses of beer on the table.

So why do you accuse the post-exilic leaders of being authoritarian?

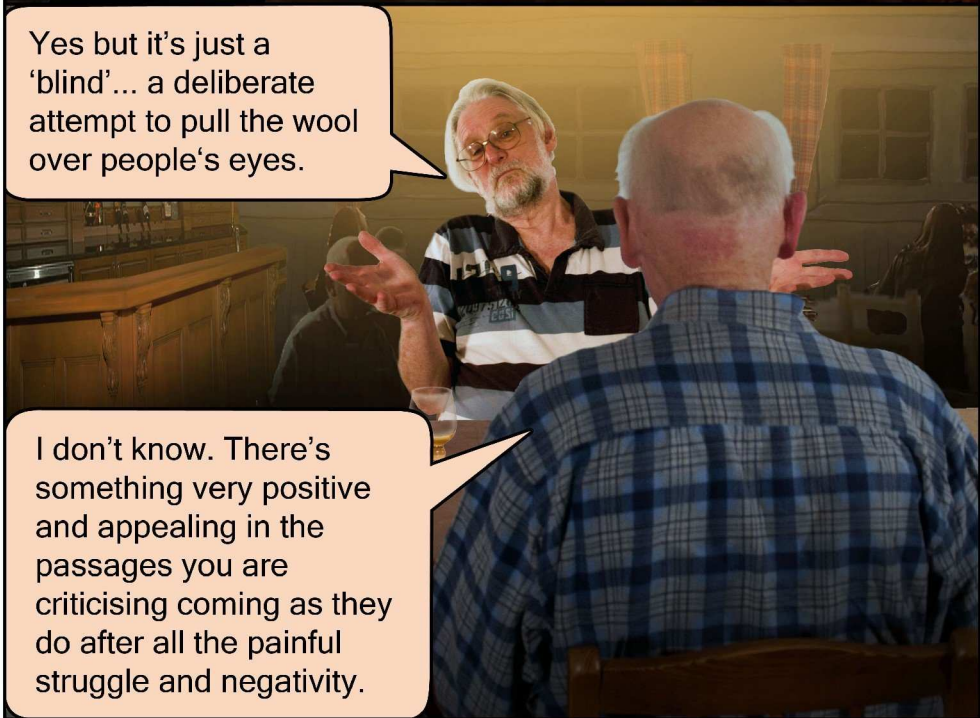
A close-up photograph of the man in the striped shirt from the previous image. He is sitting at the table, looking down at his plate of food. A glass of beer is in front of him.

Well, one reason is that they speak of Yahweh **imposing** his way of thinking on everyone... indeed, of actually writing it **on their hearts!**

A photograph of two elderly men sitting at a dark wooden table in a pub. The man on the left has white hair, a beard, and glasses, wearing a blue and white striped polo shirt. The man on the right is balding with some white hair, wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. They are both looking at each other. On the table are two glasses of beer, a plate of food, and an open book. In the background, other patrons and a bar are visible.

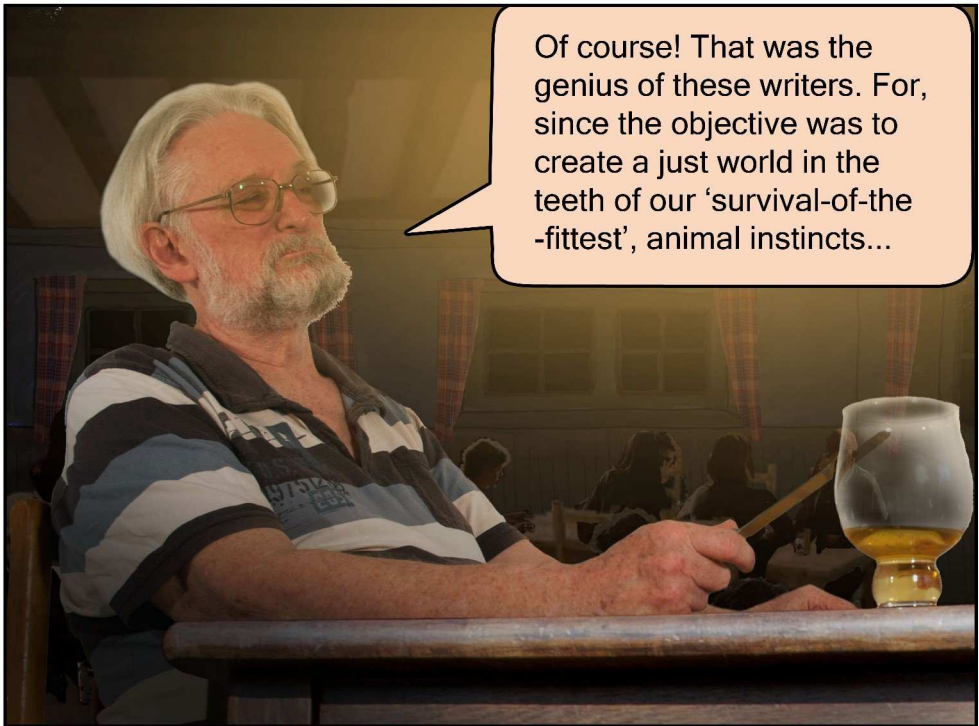
Another is the fact that they carefully **exclude** the idea of a partnership signed and sealed in a covenant.

But they still talk of a covenant: **a new covenant** in fact!

A photograph showing the man in the striped shirt from the previous panel, now seen from the side and slightly behind. He is gesturing with both hands while speaking to the man in the plaid shirt, whose back is to the camera. The setting is the same pub table.

Yes but it's just a 'blind'... a deliberate attempt to pull the wool over people's eyes.

I don't know. There's something very positive and appealing in the passages you are criticising coming as they do after all the painful struggle and negativity.



Of course! That was the genius of these writers. For, since the objective was to create a just world in the teeth of our 'survival-of-the-fittest', animal instincts...



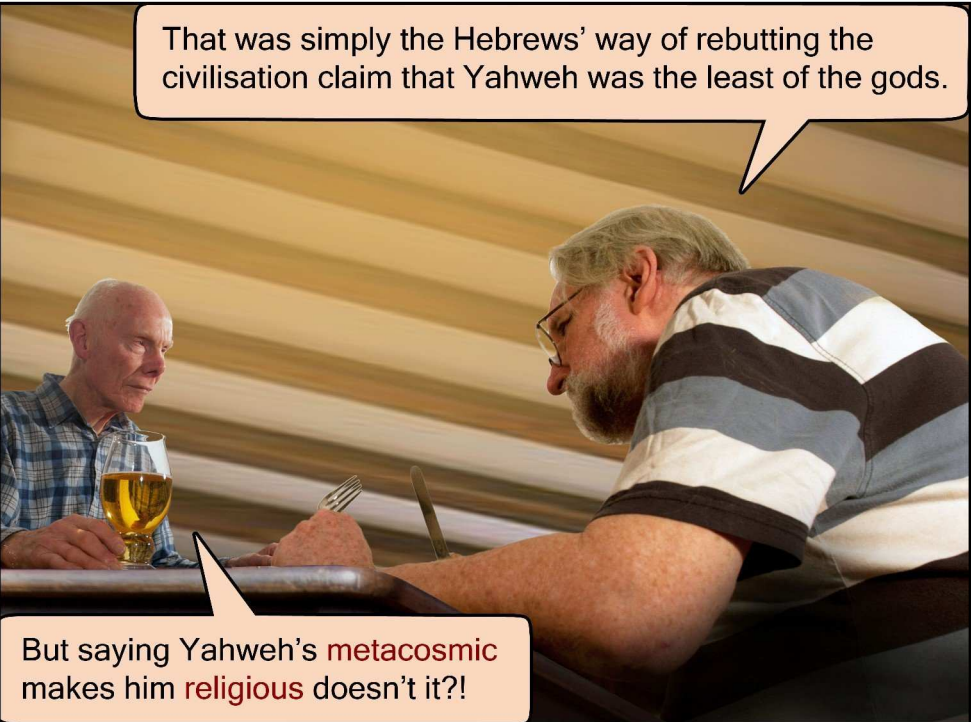
...who would choose to continue the unequal struggle given the conservatives', oh so comforting, 'blind obedience' proposal?

The only trouble was **no intervening God existed** to tell people how to build a just society! So the post-exilic leaders had to invent one... by resorting to religious make-believe.

What makes blind obedience more superstitious than other political commitments?

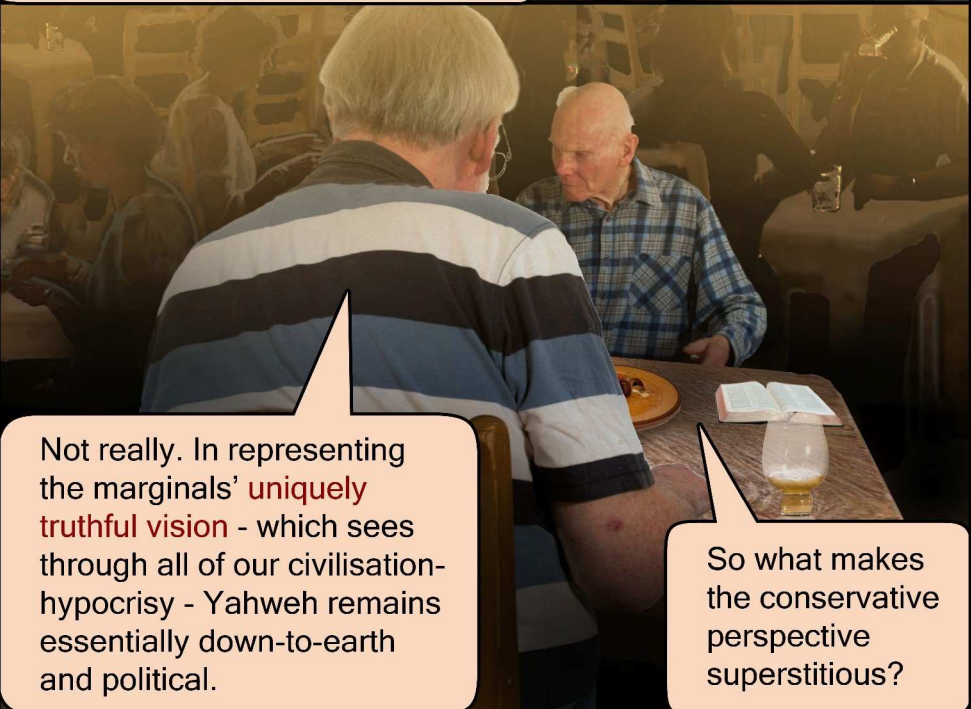
Well, let's think about it. The Hebrew vision was openly ideological, wouldn't you say, in that Yahweh was presented simply as the marginals' way of looking at the world?

That's true except Yahweh was also presented as the metacosmic God who, you say, had no needs.



That was simply the Hebrews' way of rebutting the civilisation claim that Yahweh was the least of the gods.

But saying Yahweh's **metacosmic** makes him **religious** doesn't it?!



Not really. In representing the marginals' **uniquely truthful vision** - which sees through all of our civilisation-hypocrisy - Yahweh remains essentially down-to-earth and political.

So what makes the conservative perspective superstitious?

Effectively the post-exilic conservatives got rid of the marginal ideology and its partnership covenant replacing it with their own conservative 'blind-obedience' contract.

I see nothing religious there!

Of course not! Religion was just the cover they used to get rid of the marginal ideology by presenting Yahweh as the great monotheistic God. **That** was pure superstition expressly designed to blind.

Politics artfully presented as unarguable religion. Yes I begin to see your point.



Are you suggesting that in some ways Jeremiah was responsible for this ideological back-tracking?

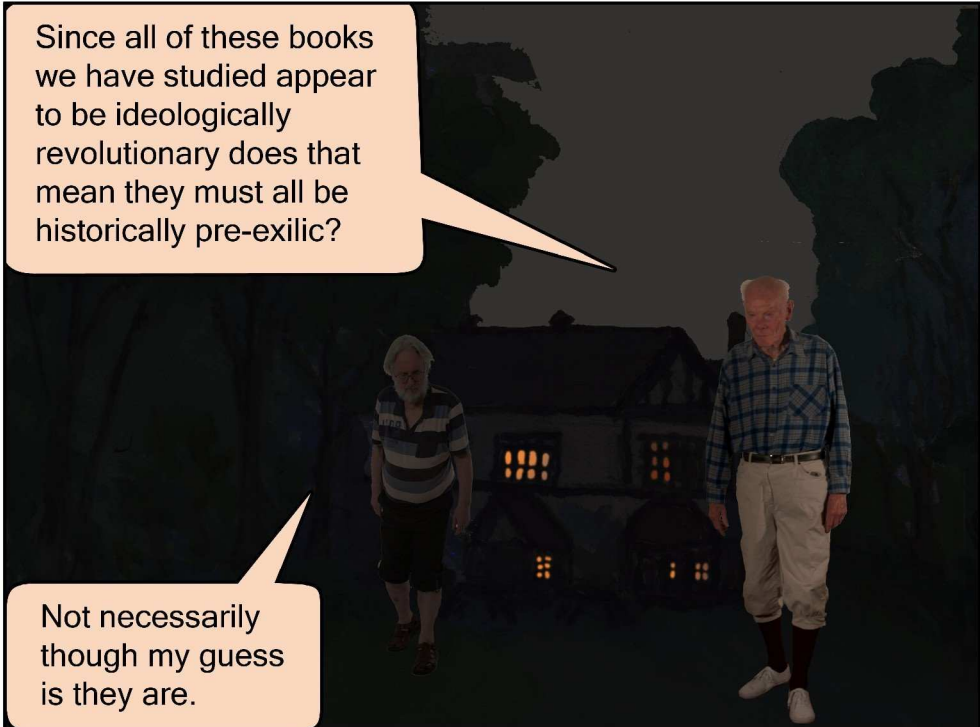
To a certain extent though, of course, he was no revisionist himself. However, he certainly showed the revisionists how they could use the superstition trap and a blanket of religion to get rid of the dreaded marginal ideology they so disliked.





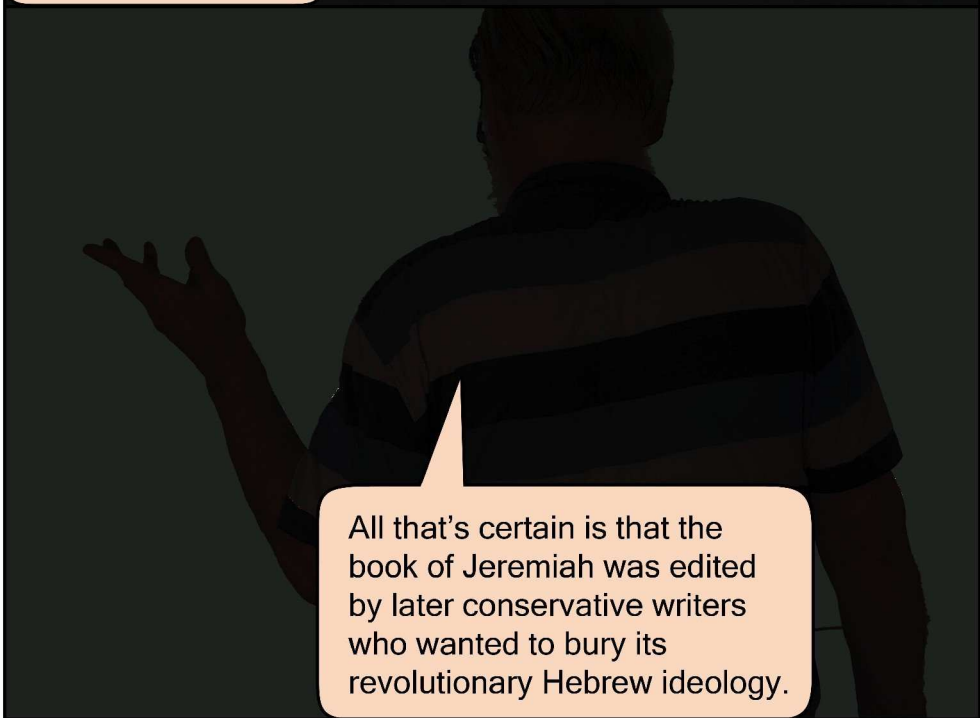


However, perhaps we should postpone further discussion of all of that until tomorrow when we will be dealing with the post-exilic texts.

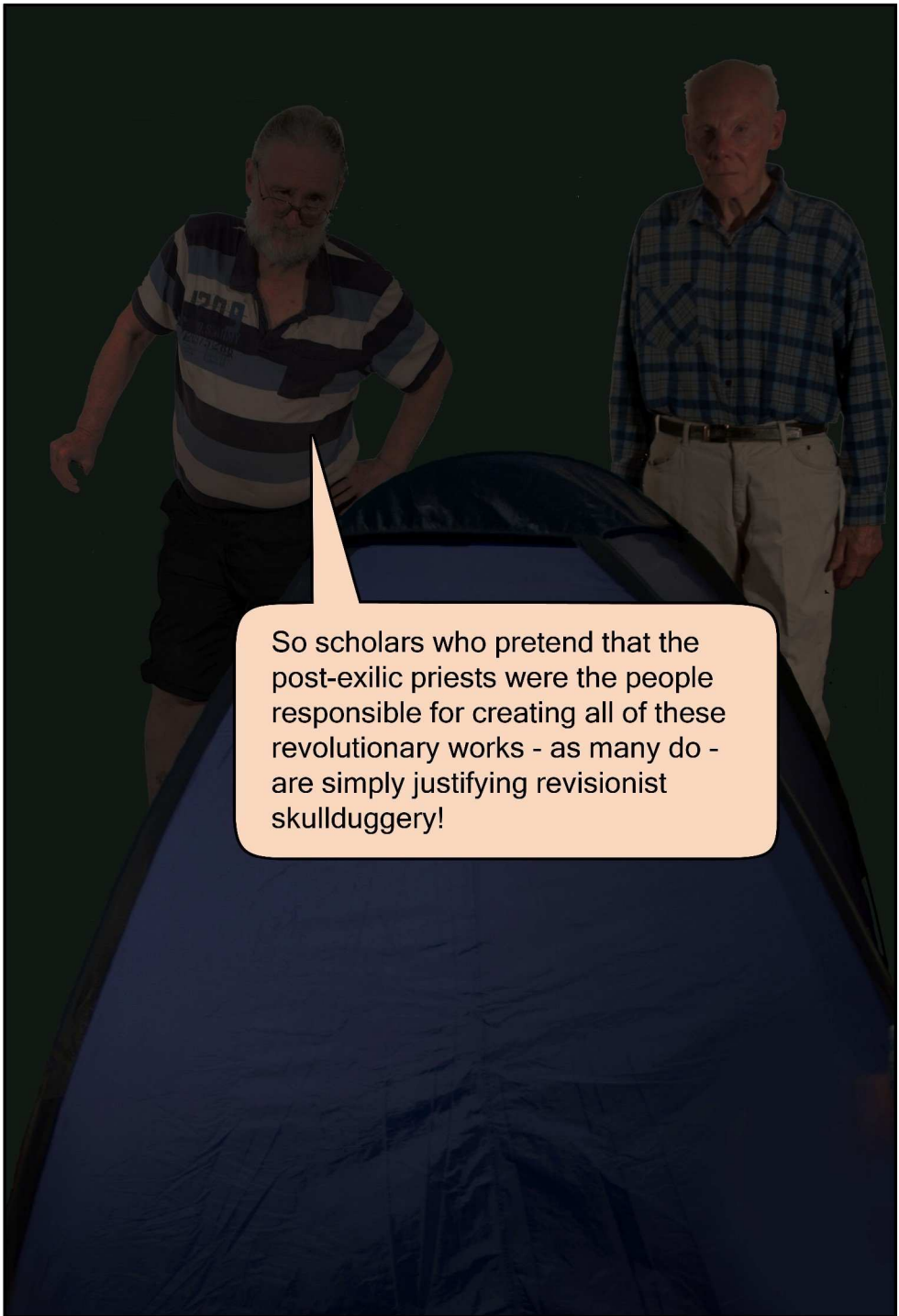


Since all of these books we have studied appear to be ideologically revolutionary does that mean they must all be historically pre-exilic?

Not necessarily though my guess is they are.



All that's certain is that the book of Jeremiah was edited by later conservative writers who wanted to bury its revolutionary Hebrew ideology.



So scholars who pretend that the post-exilic priests were the people responsible for creating all of these revolutionary works - as many do - are simply justifying revisionist skullduggery!

That is the end of Part 1.

In Part 2 John and I will be discussing politics in the Bible's post-exilic works as we journey home on our bicycles.

So we hope to see you there!

John, Andrew and Adrian

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