

Wrestling with the Canaanite Conquest

Exploring the hardest moral
dilemma in the biblical text.

The Unvarnished Truth

Deuteronomy
20

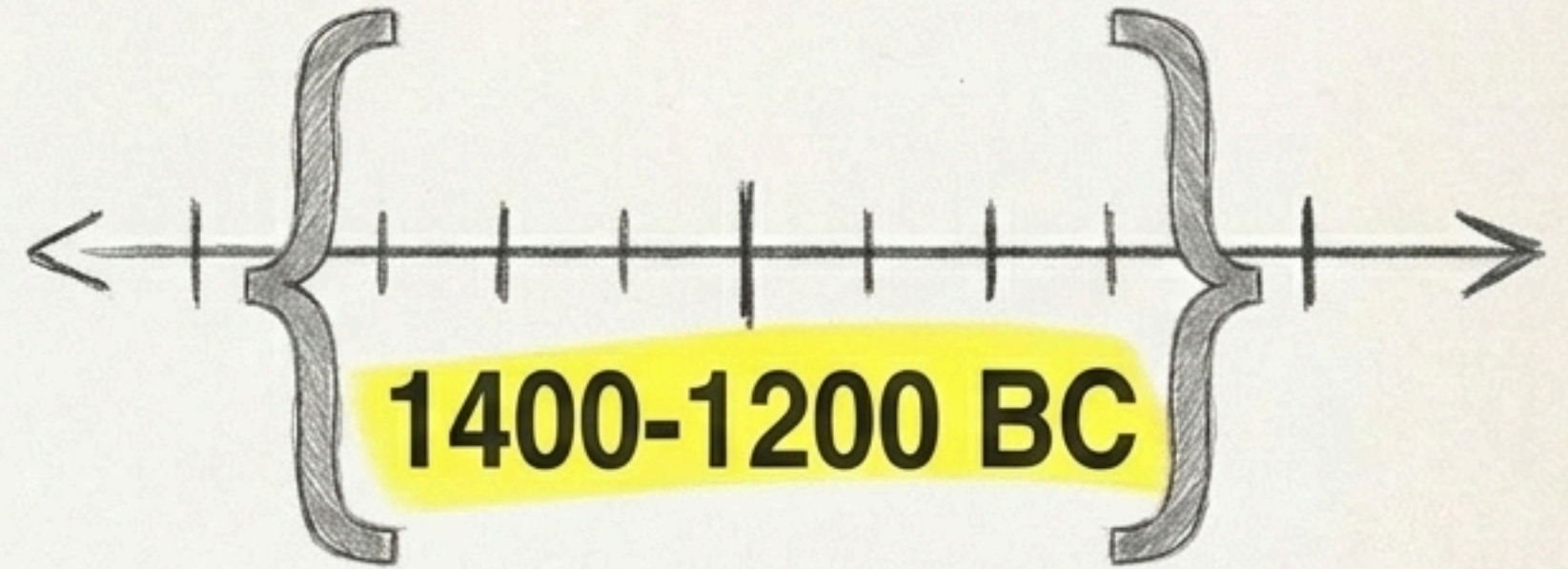
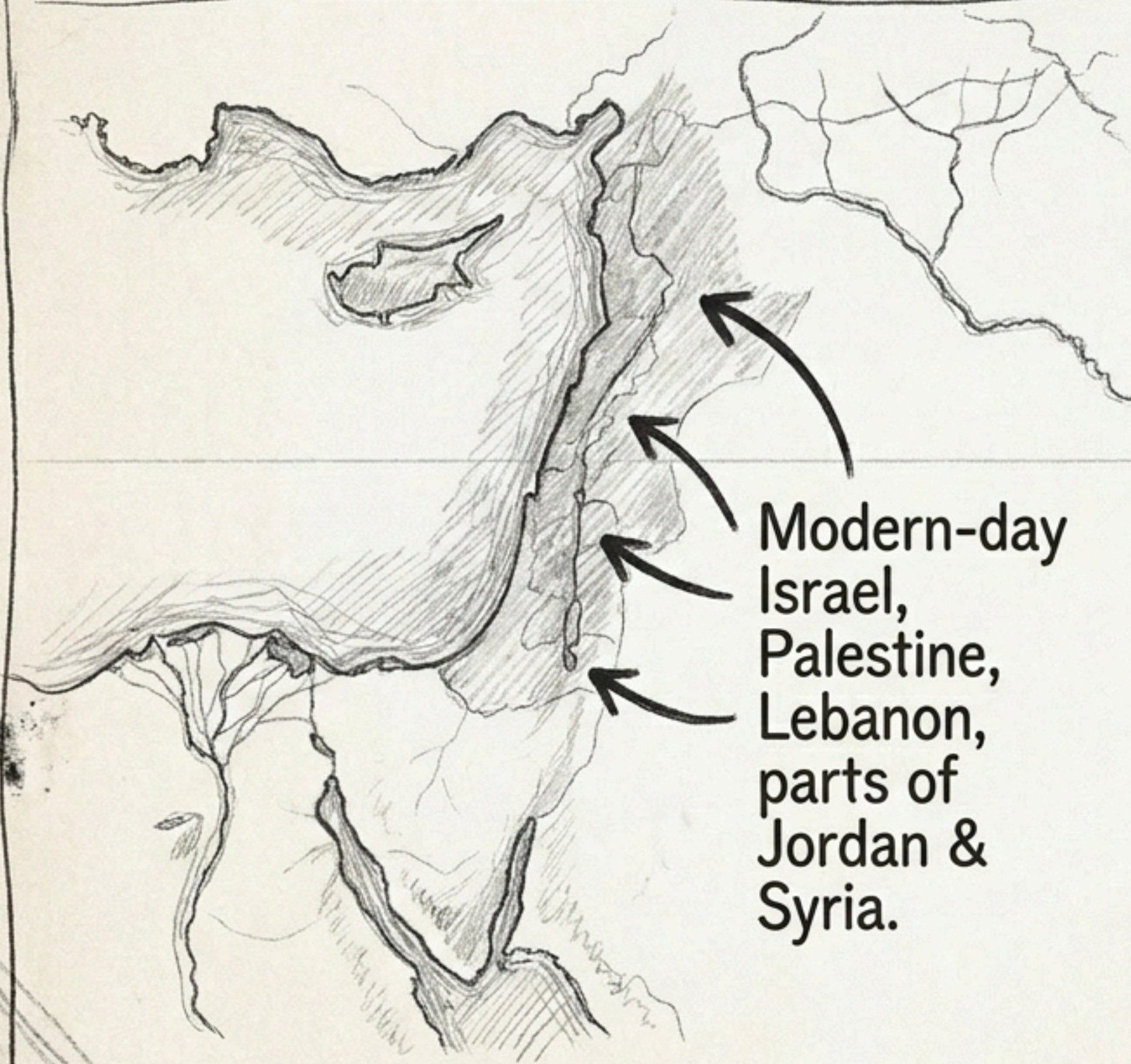
Joshua
6

1 Samuel
15

**The Bible says God
told his people to kill
every Canaanite.
Men. Women.
Children. Infants.**

This isn't a misquote or taken out of context.
It's in the text, multiple times, in plain language.

The World of the Canaanites



- Not an empty promised land.
- A collection of tribes:
The Hittites,
The Amorites,
The Perizzites.

The land was “vomiting out” its inhabitants



Child sacrifice to the god **Molech**—burning infants alive as offerings.

A Moral Cancer:
The biblical text
frames Canaanite
culture not as
“different,” but as
completely
corrupted.

1.

Worship centered on gods like Baal and Asherah (believed to control rain/harvests).

2.

Detestable rituals including ritualized sexual violence and incest.

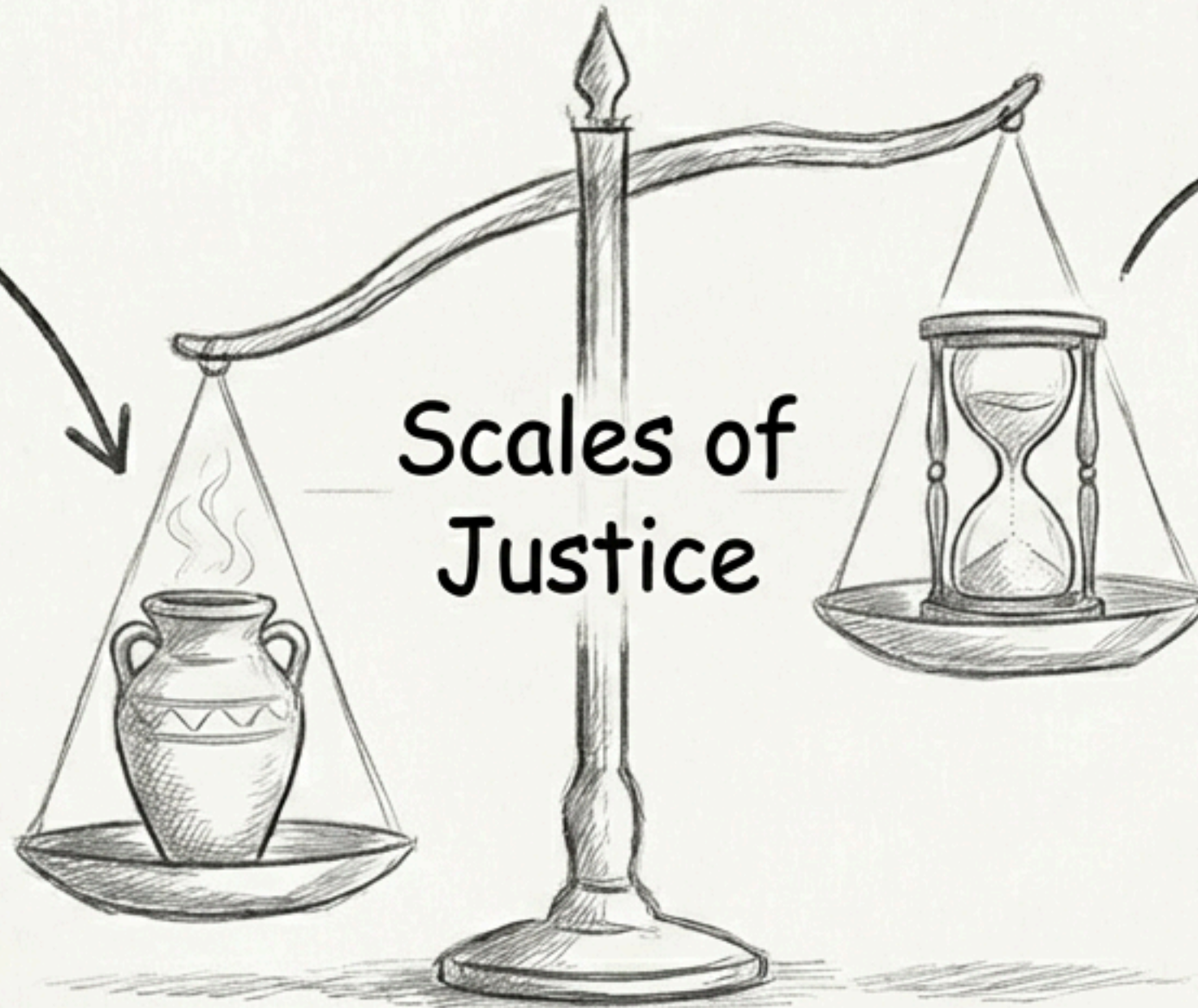
3.

Weighing the Evidence

Archaeology proves the Bible right.

Excavations of "Tophets" in Carthage (founded by Canaanites) contain the cremated remains of ~20,000 infants.

Confirmed by Roman and Greek historians.



God waited 400 years.

Genesis 15:16:
The "iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

Four centuries of warnings before the first sword was drawn.

The Israelites were not commanded to kill based on race, but because a culture had passed the point of no return.

The Theologian's Diagnostic Matrix

There is no single agreed answer inside Christianity.
Three frameworks attempt to make sense of the text.

Core Logic:

Biblical Proof:

Vulnerability:

The Divine Command

Judgment for Corruption

Progressive Revelation

God is the source of morality	A divine judicial act (like the Flood)	An unfolding education of humanity
Abraham & Isaac	Genesis 15:16, Rahab spared	Movement from warrior God to Jesus
Closes the question entirely.	Why use human swords?	Questions biblical inerrancy.

Response #1: The Divine Command

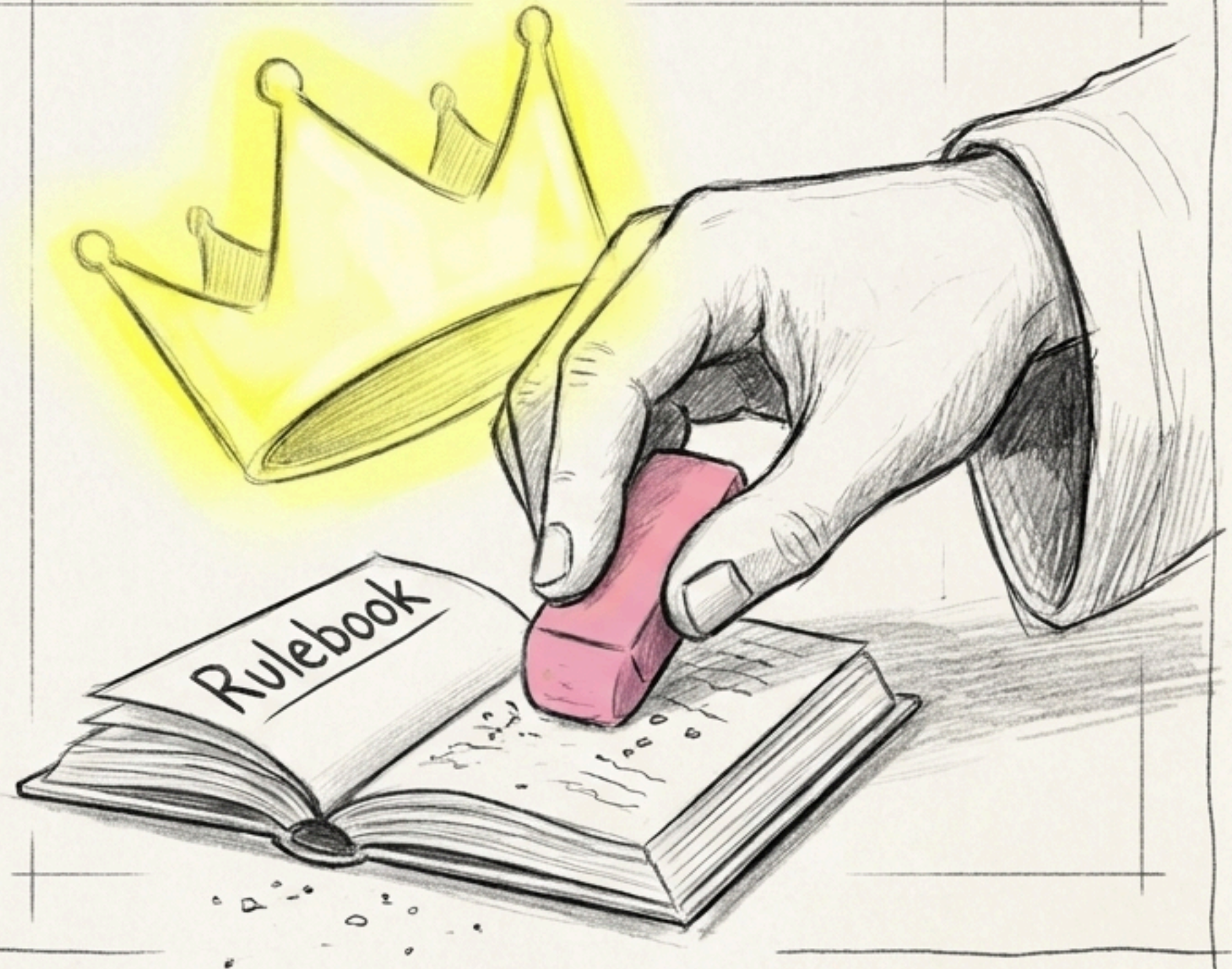
“The teleological suspension of the ethical.” (Søren Kierkegaard)

God doesn't answer to a moral law above himself; He is its source.

Because God creates and sustains all life, he holds an authority over life and death that no general or government has.

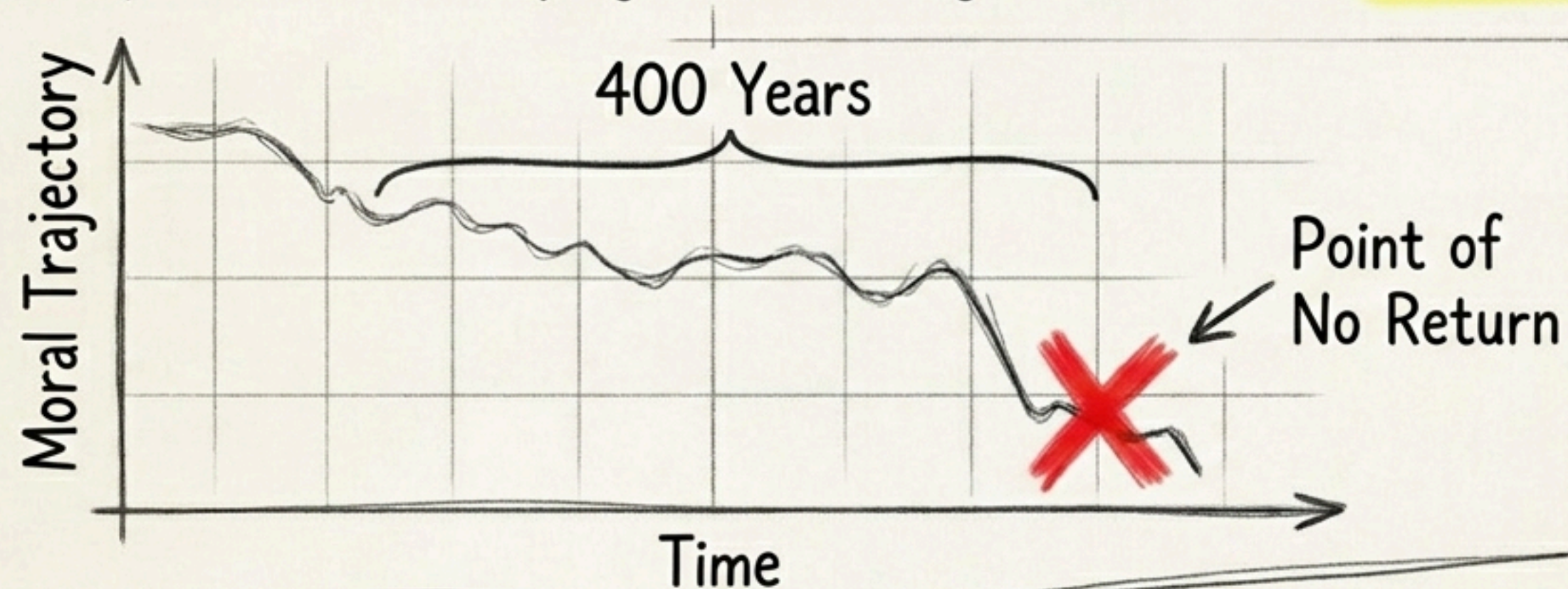
He gives life. He can take it.

Risk Assessment: Once you say “it was right because God said so,” you close the question entirely. Would we have to call any atrocity good if God commanded it?



Response #2: Judgment for Moral Corruption

"This targets specific practices destroying human beings, not a race. (Christopher Wright)"



Body Notes: The destruction is framed as a divine judicial act, in the same category as the flood or Sodom and Gomorrah.

Evidence: The text isn't about ethnicity. The Gibeonites made peace and were absorbed. Rahab (a Canaanite) sided with Israel, was spared, and entered the genealogy of Jesus.

Response #3: Progressive Revelation

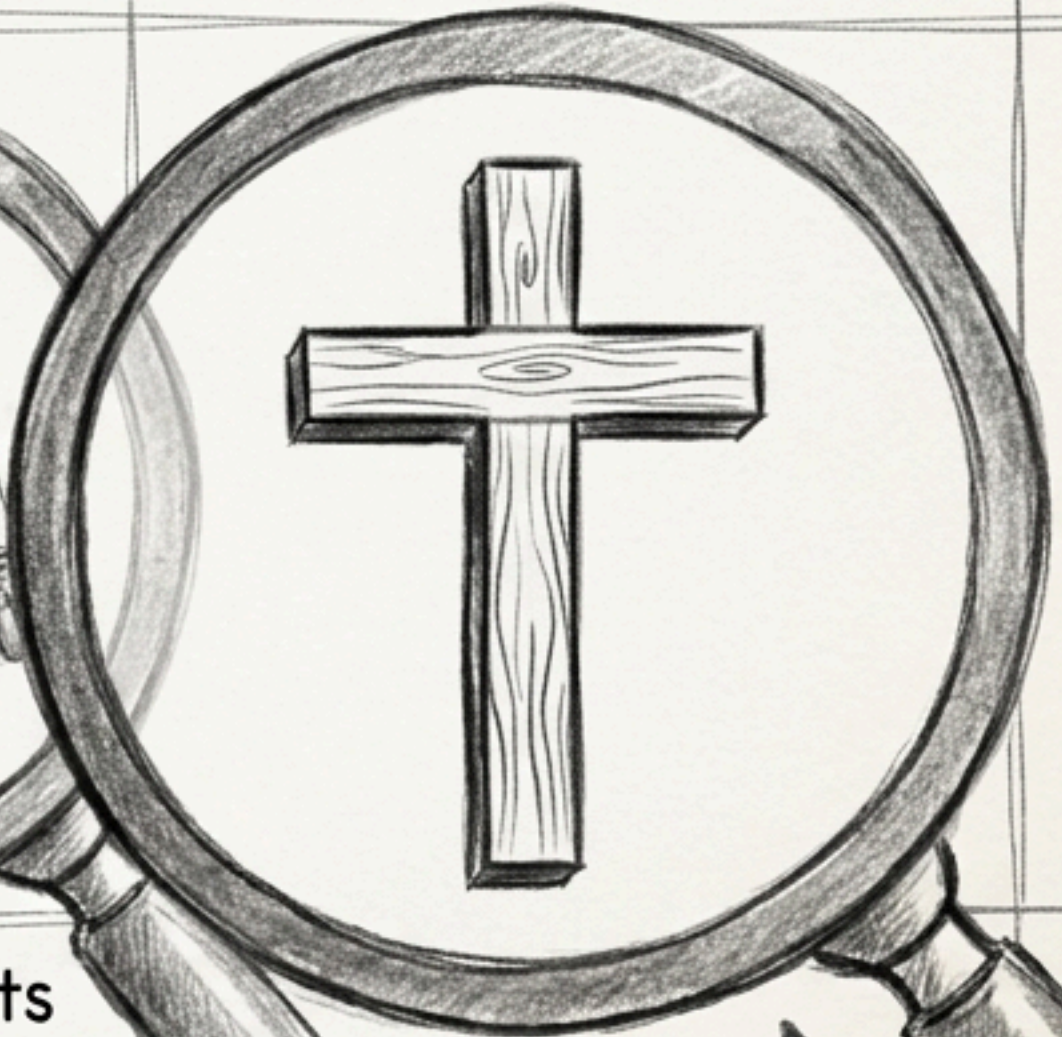
The Bible is a long record of an unfolding story.



Ancient Near East warrior-god



The Prophets



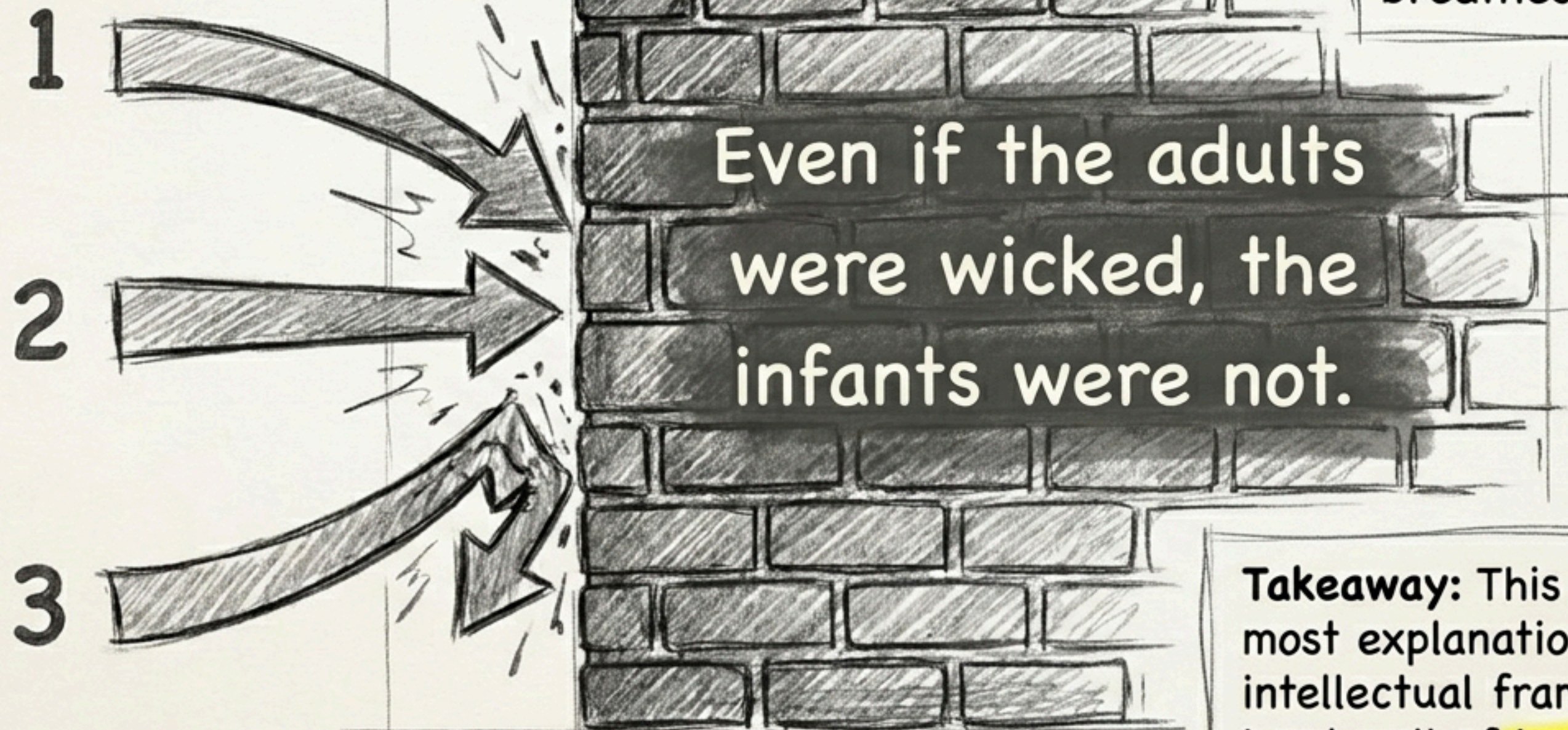
Jesus

Body Notes: In the ancient world, the standard "language" of religion was that gods wanted enemies killed. The writers of Joshua described what they thought God wanted based on their brutal culture.

The Final Word: Jesus tells followers to love their enemies. If Jesus wouldn't order a genocide, earlier commands reflect humanity's limited understanding, not God's character.

The Hardest Knot: What About the Children?

Context Note: The text is specific. It doesn't say "kill the soldiers." It says "kill everything that breathes."



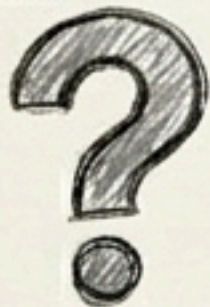
Takeaway: This is the point where most explanations feel empty. The intellectual frameworks hit the hard wall of innocent life.

The "War Talk" Translation

Ancient Near Eastern military reports heavily utilized exaggeration.



Body Notes: Phrases like "left no survivor" were the ancient equivalent of a sports headline saying a team was "slaughtered." It was rhetorical hyperbole, not a literal description of extinction.

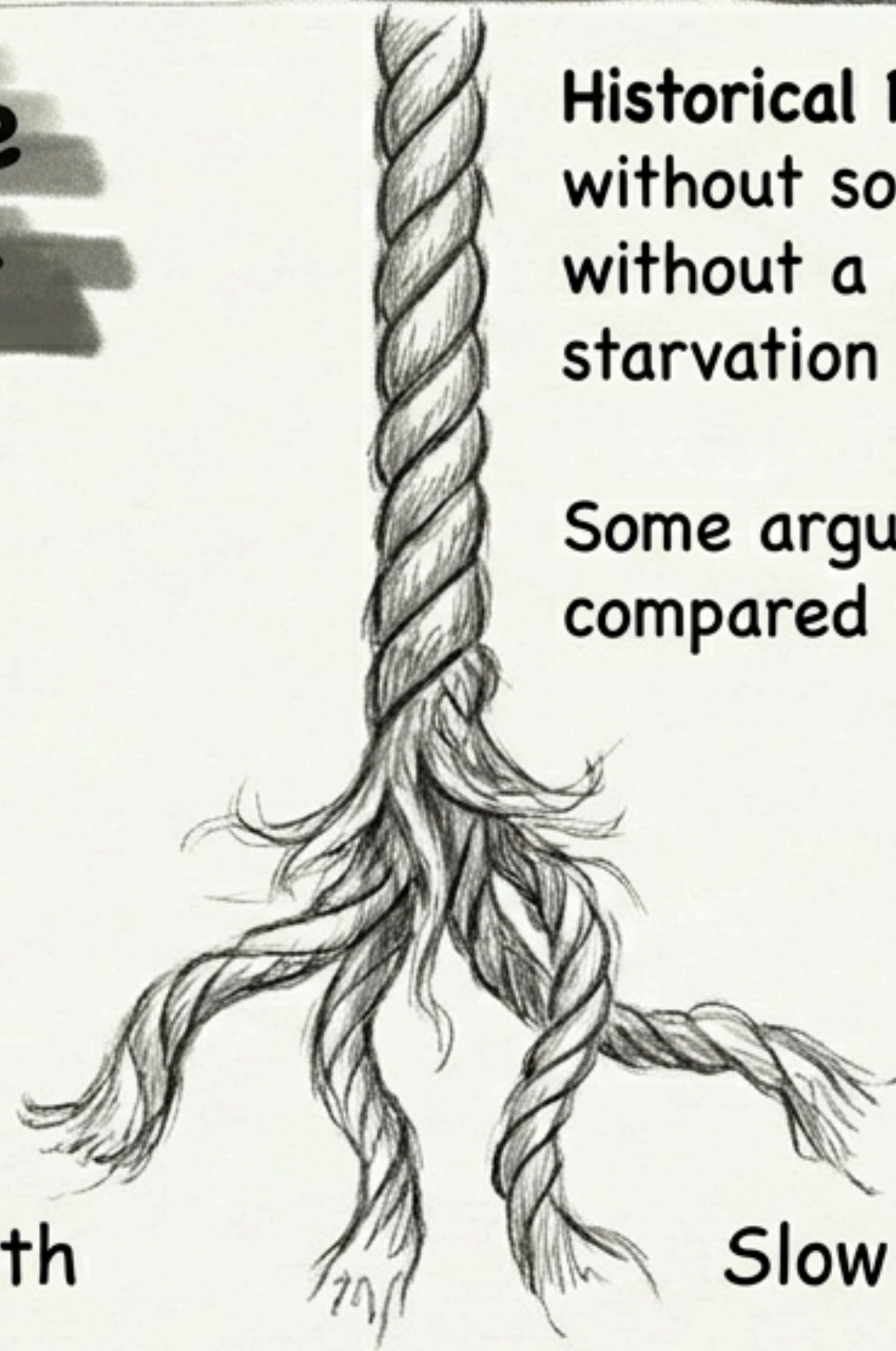


The Lingering Question: Even if true, the imagery remains. Why would God choose to use that kind of language?

The Uncomfortable "Mercy" Argument

Historical Reality: In a brutal ancient world without social safety nets, an infant left without a family or tribe faced agonizing starvation or immediate slavery.

Some argue a quick death was "merciful" compared to the alternative.



A quick death

Slow starvation / Slavery

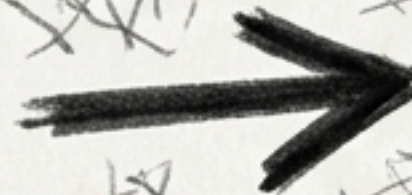
The Honest Assessment: Most people find this deeply unsatisfying. It feels like an attempt to defend the indefensible, forcing us to ask if we can trust a God operating on logic so foreign to our own.

Stepping Back to the Bigger Story

We want the Bible to be a simple book with easy heroes.
But the Old Testament refuses to be tamed.

Body Notes: The story of the Canaanites isn't really about one nation. It is one dark moment in a massive, unfolding narrative. Throughout the Bible, people keep rebelling against God—the Canaanites did, Israel did, and we do too.

Canaan



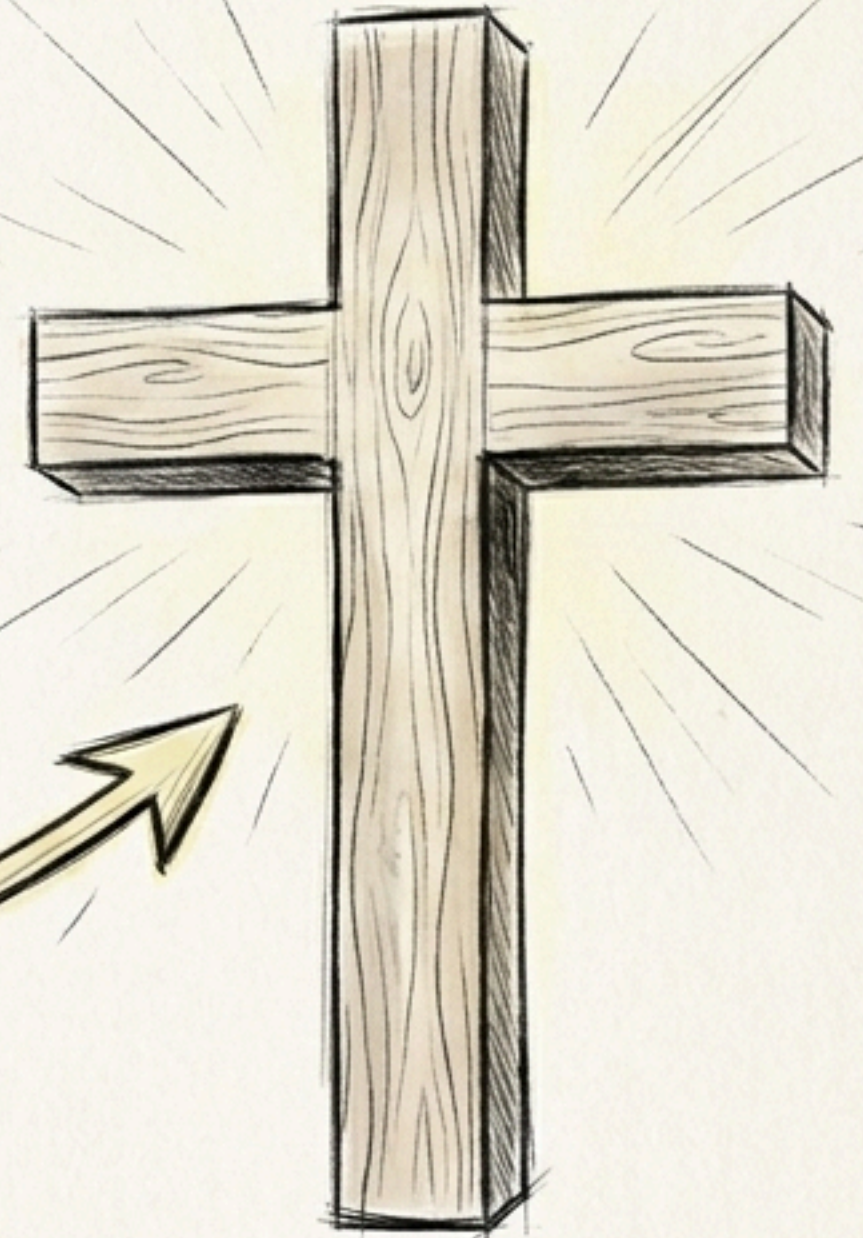
From Judgment to Grace

Yet God remained faithful to His promises. Instead of destroying humanity again as He did in the flood, God sent His Son.

Jesus came to save sinners and offer mercy to those who trust in Him.



JUDGMENT / FLOOD



**Final Takeaway: That is how the Bible's story ends.
Not with judgment, but with grace.**