

God of the Marginals

Part 1 The Myth Cycle



Adam!
Where
are you?

by Andrew Parker

GOD of the MARGINALS



Part 1 The Myth Cycle

God of the Marginals is the second volume in *The Bible in Cartoons* series. The first volume was an introduction to the Bible. Both volumes can be found on the following website:

<http://bibleincartoons.com>

Hard copies of *God of the Marginals* can also be purchased on <http://www.blurb.com/bookstore>



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Introduction

The aim of these cartoon books is not to teach the Bible but rather to open people's eyes to what this fantastic work contains. The famous Greek philosopher, Socrates, developed a technique for helping people to see what he saw going on in the world. It's called 'dialogue' and these cartoon books take the form of a continuous dialogue between my friend John and me about the Bible. I try to get him to see what I see in it and he raises objections until, eventually, we come to some conclusion.

Now, anyone who has read a Socratic dialogue will know that it's not an easy read because hard thinking is hard work. So to make things more agreeable for readers I have decided to do the dialogue in cartoons. This gives me a lot more work but I hope it makes the exercise more enjoyable and rewarding for you. But don't be fooled, for though there are some jokes, these cartoons are not designed to be an entertaining or easy way to read the Bible. They are designed to be read alongside the Bible. So when you see a blue box containing a biblical reference you should read the text cited before continuing.

In Volume 1 John and I discussed what sort of a book the Bible is. Like most people John said he saw it as a religious work but I pointed out that the ancient texts which most resemble the Bible are ideological, not religious. Like newspapers they describe what was going on in the ancient world from a very particular point of view, the object of the exercise being to sell this viewpoint. I suggested to John that if the biblical writers were concerned to sell a particular view of the world then we should do our best to discover what this ideological perspective was. For otherwise we would misread the texts, 'finding' what we want to find rather than what is there.

The reader of this book should be aware that if I portray a figure in black-and-white that means the figure is a representation and not a historical character. For example in Book 1 I introduced a character called Ancient Man whom I drew in black-and-white.



I did this to make it clear that he represents the ancients and wasn't to be mistaken for a historical person. In this book I 'draw' some biblical characters in black-and-white and others in colour. This should not be taken as suggesting that I believe the ones in colour actually existed. They may have, but that is not the point. If they appear in colour it only means the Bible presents them as historical characters. Alternatively, if they appear in black-and-white that means the Bible presents them as representations and not as real live people who actually existed long ago.

1

The Creation Myths

Genesis 1
and
Genesis 2







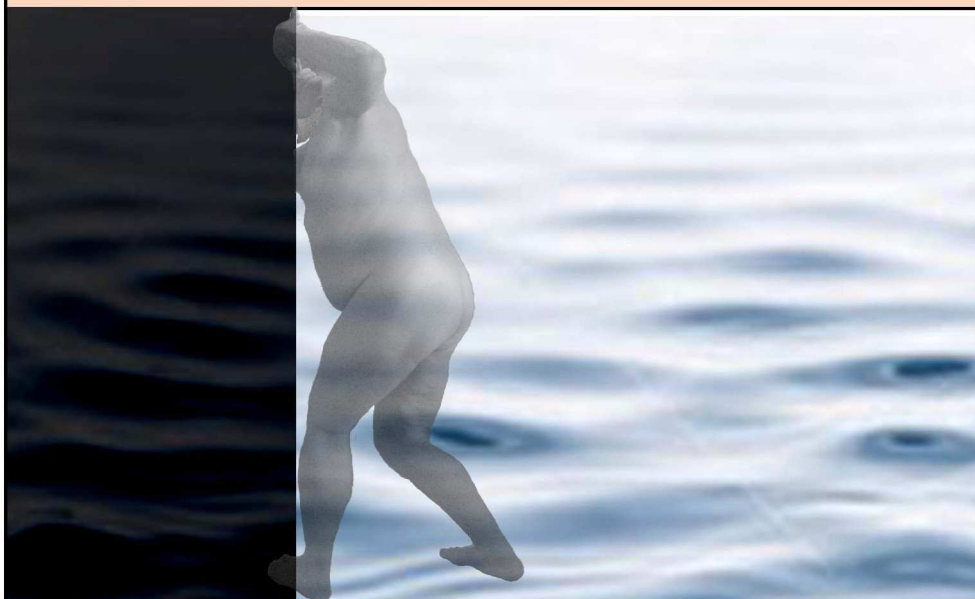
The story begins in complete darkness with God's spirit hovering over the primordial watery abyss.



Then, suddenly, God says 'let there be light' and immediately everything is bathed in sunshine ... only there isn't any sun or creature to see it!

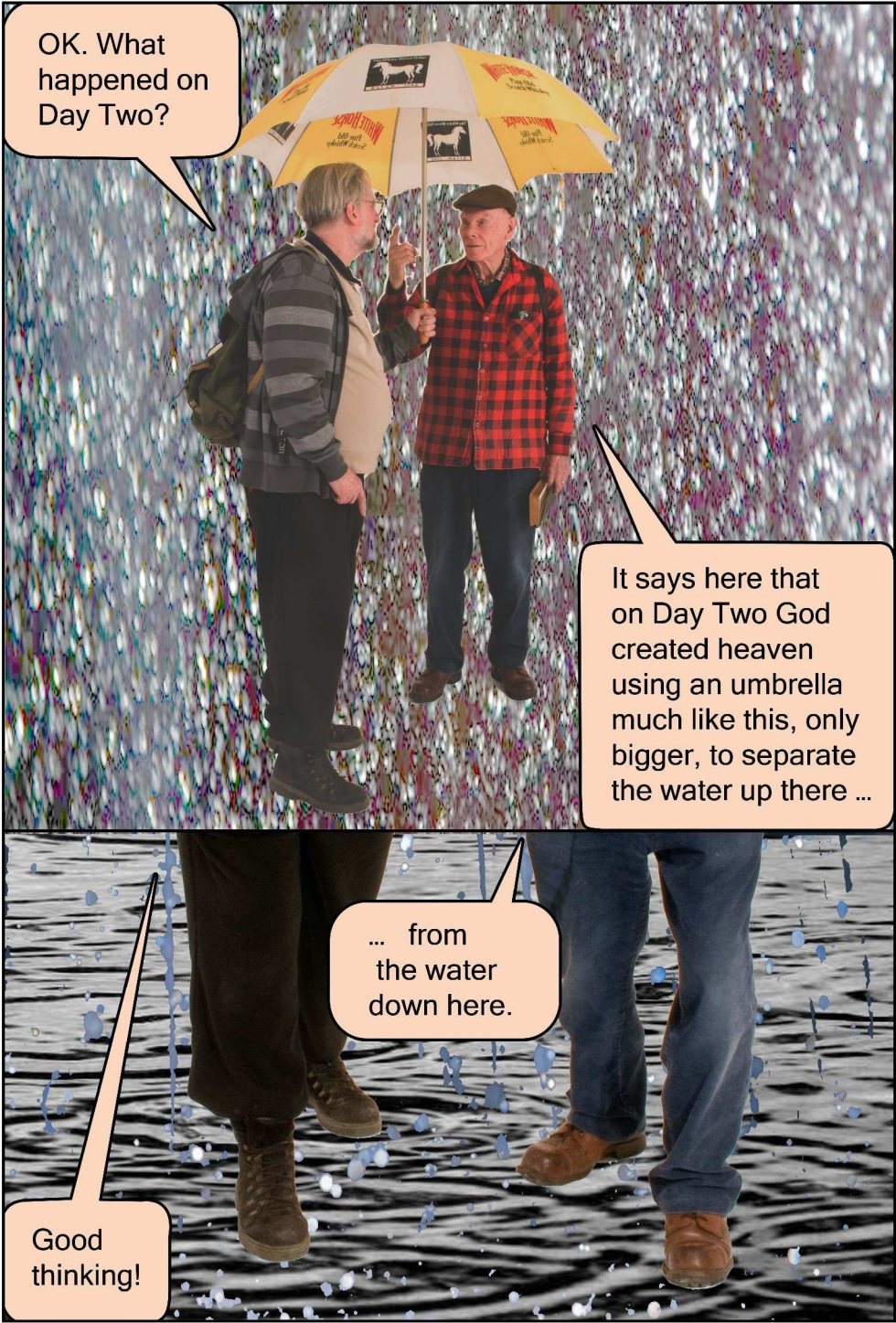


He then imposes order by separating Night from Day.



Satisfied with his work he brings Day One to an end.





OK. What happened on Day Two?

It says here that on Day Two God created heaven using an umbrella much like this, only bigger, to separate the water up there ...

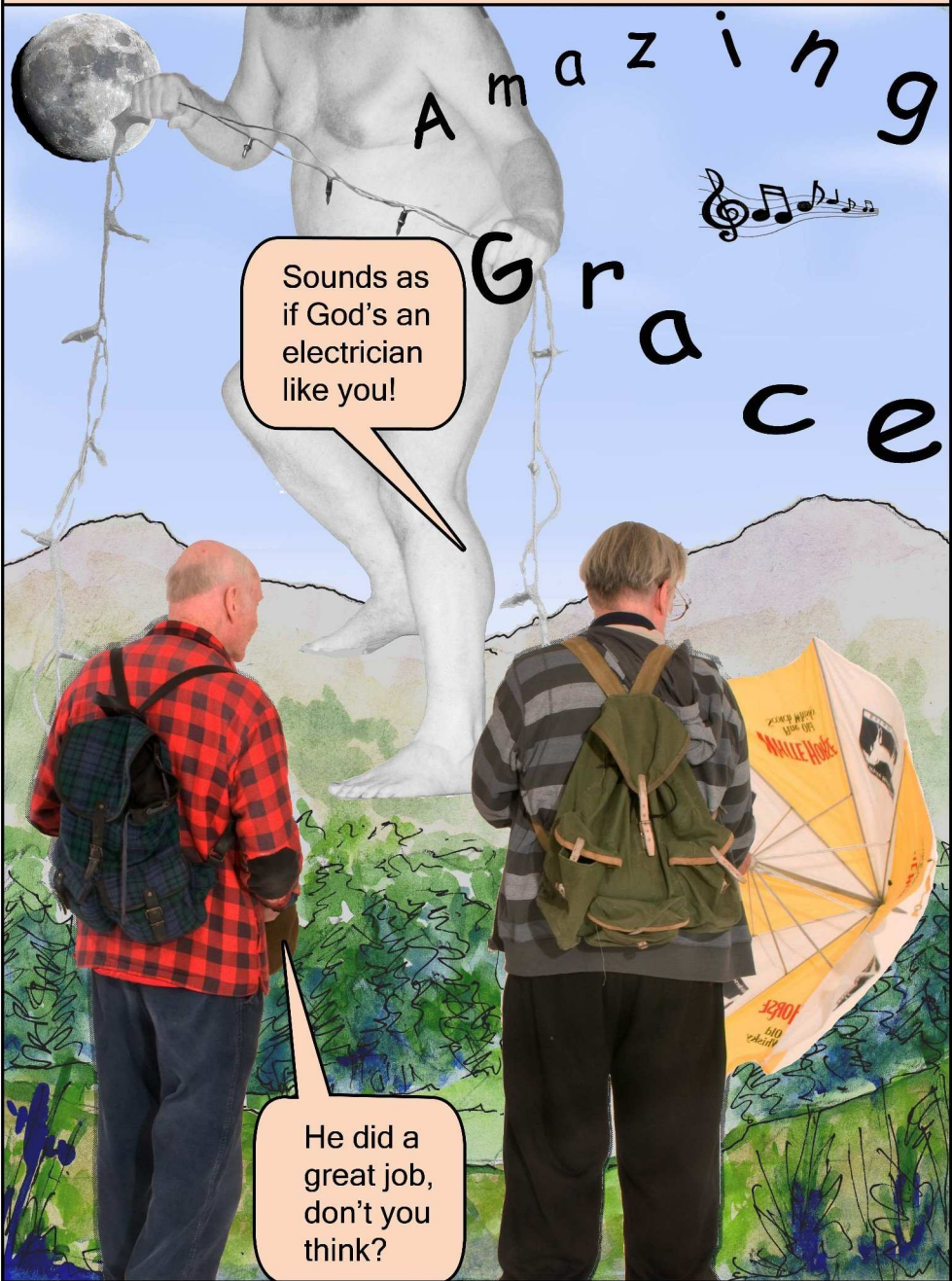
... from the water down here.

Good thinking!

Then Day Three in the morning he separated the sea from the dry land and in the afternoon created all the vegetation.



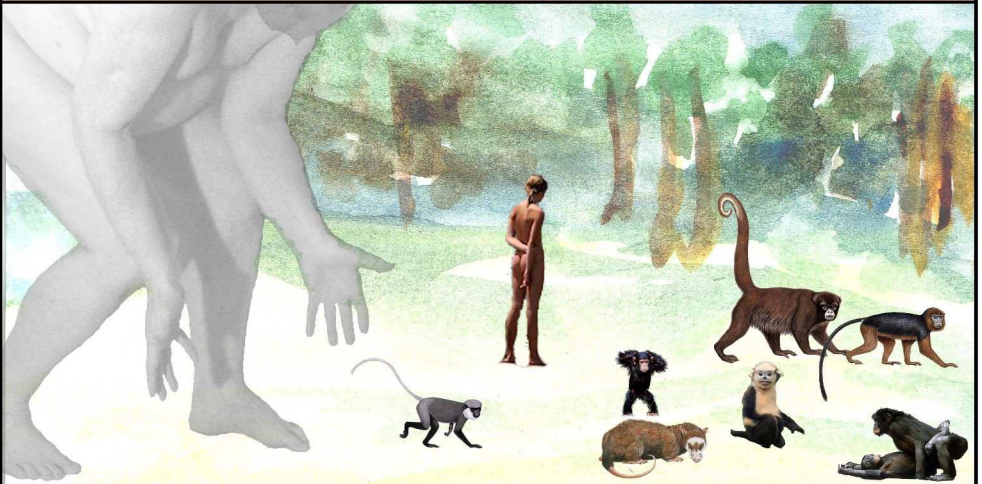
On Day Four God dealt with the lighting arrangements, creating the sun for the daytime and the moon and the stars for the night.



Day Five he populated the oceans with sea creatures,

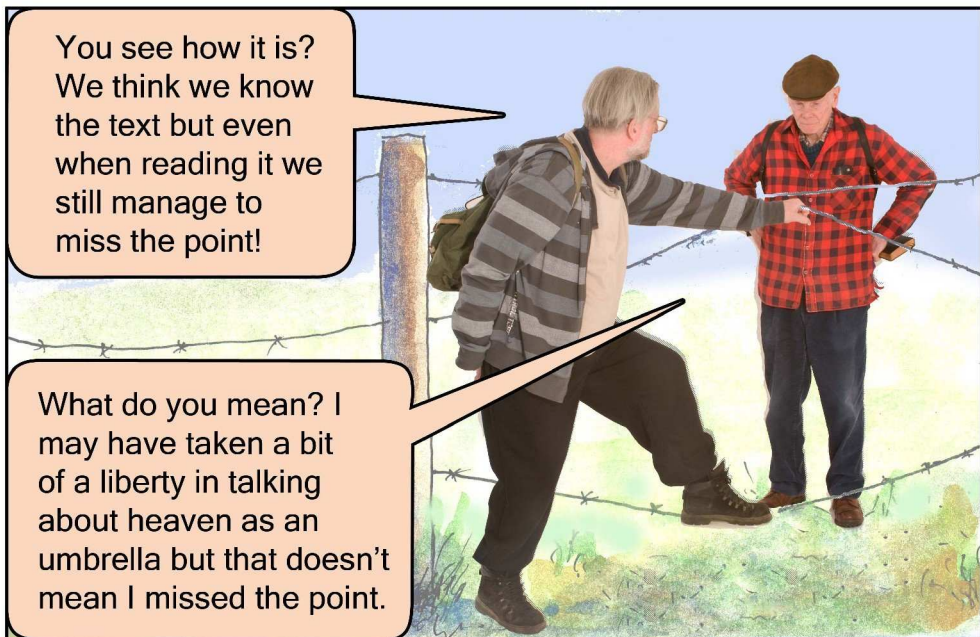


Day Six he did the same for the dry land, including the creation of our own ancestors.



Finally, on Day Seven, he rested, presumably knackered.



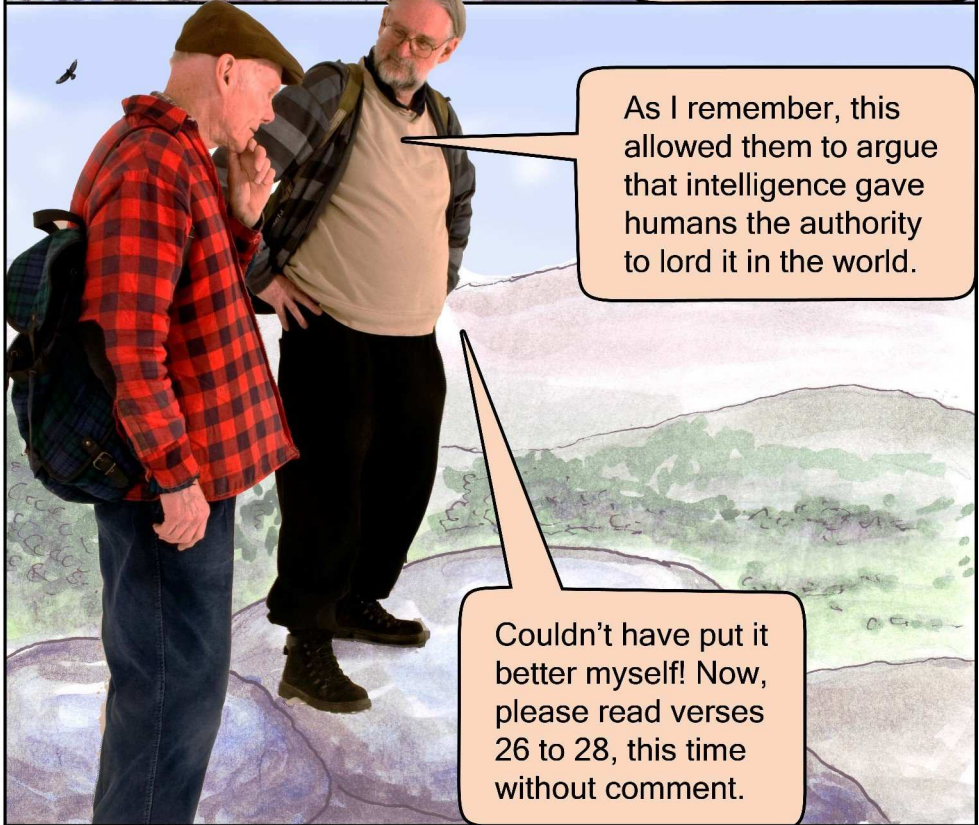
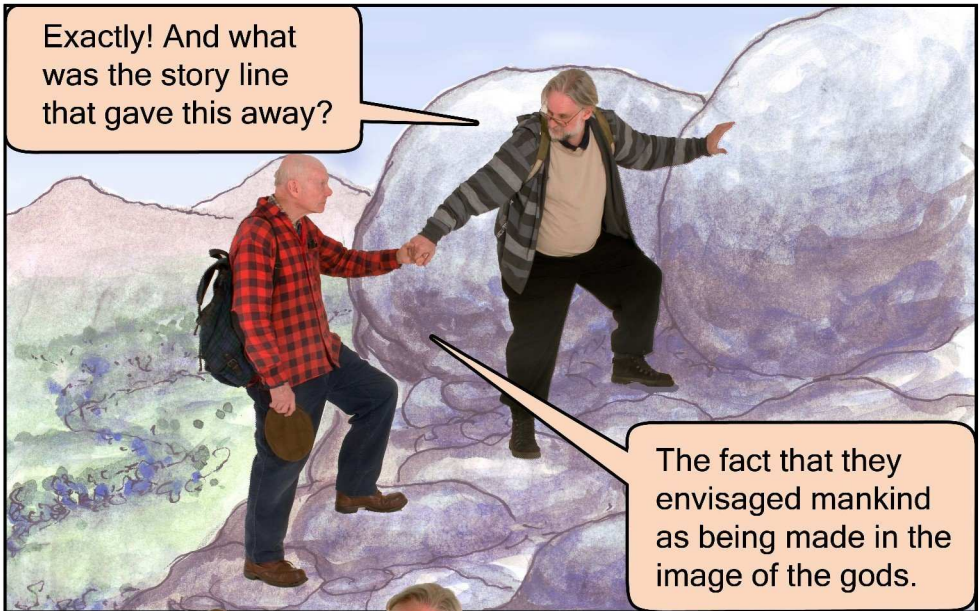


So you've already forgotten the ancients used myth to speak about the world they experienced, not to flag up pseudo-scientific explanations about how it came about!

Well, if you think the story makes an ideological point tell me what it is.

What did we find last time about the perspective of the Mesopotamian writers?

We came to the conclusion they wrote as conservative administrators.





And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

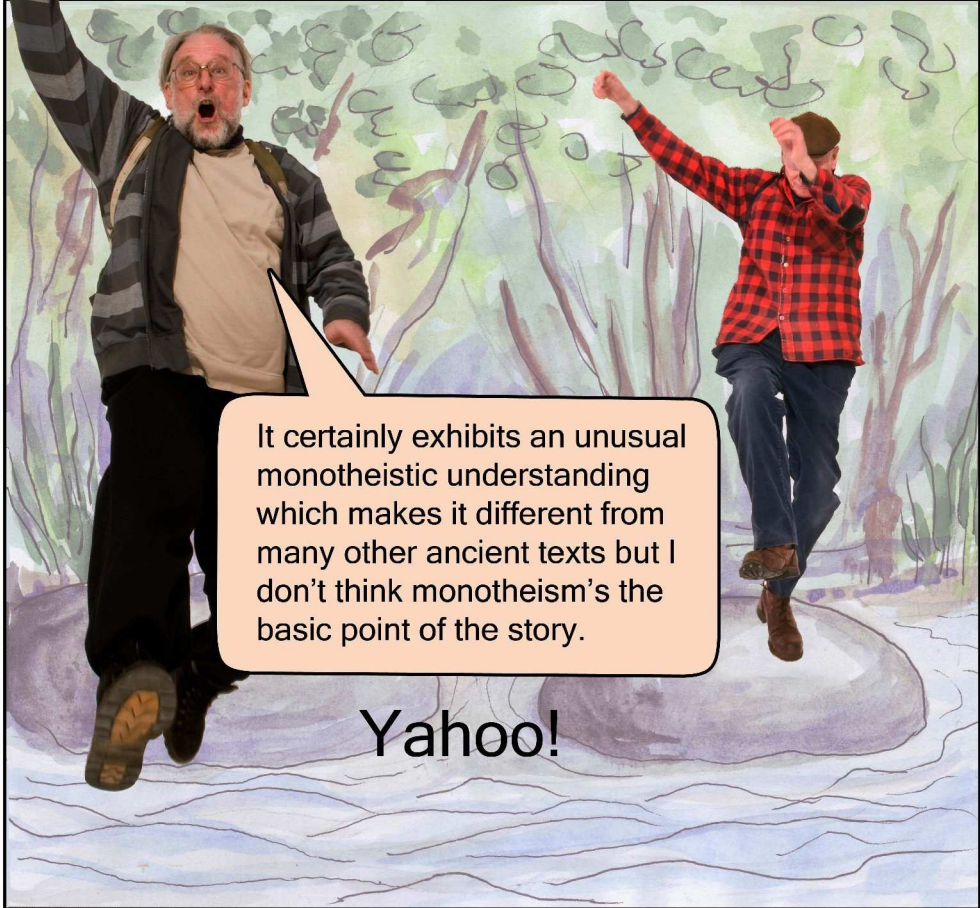
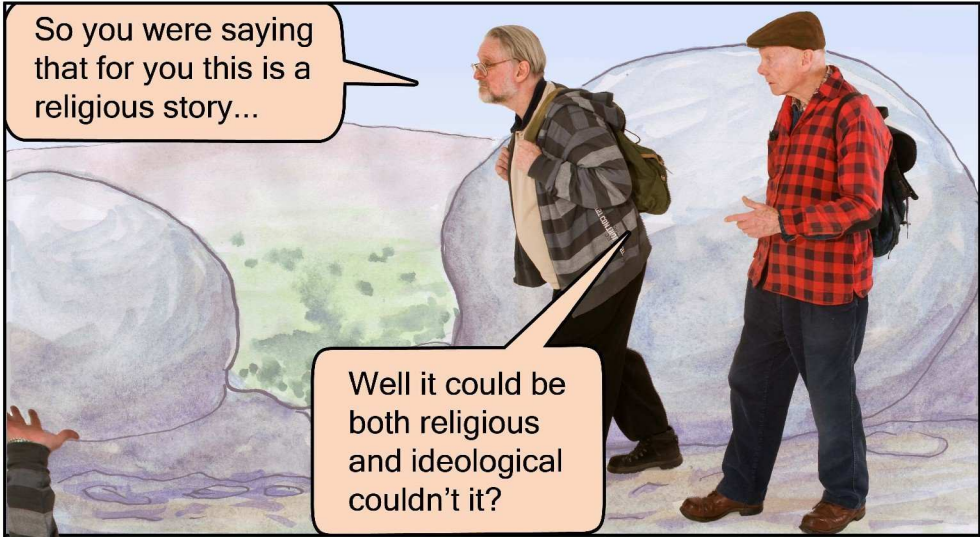
So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

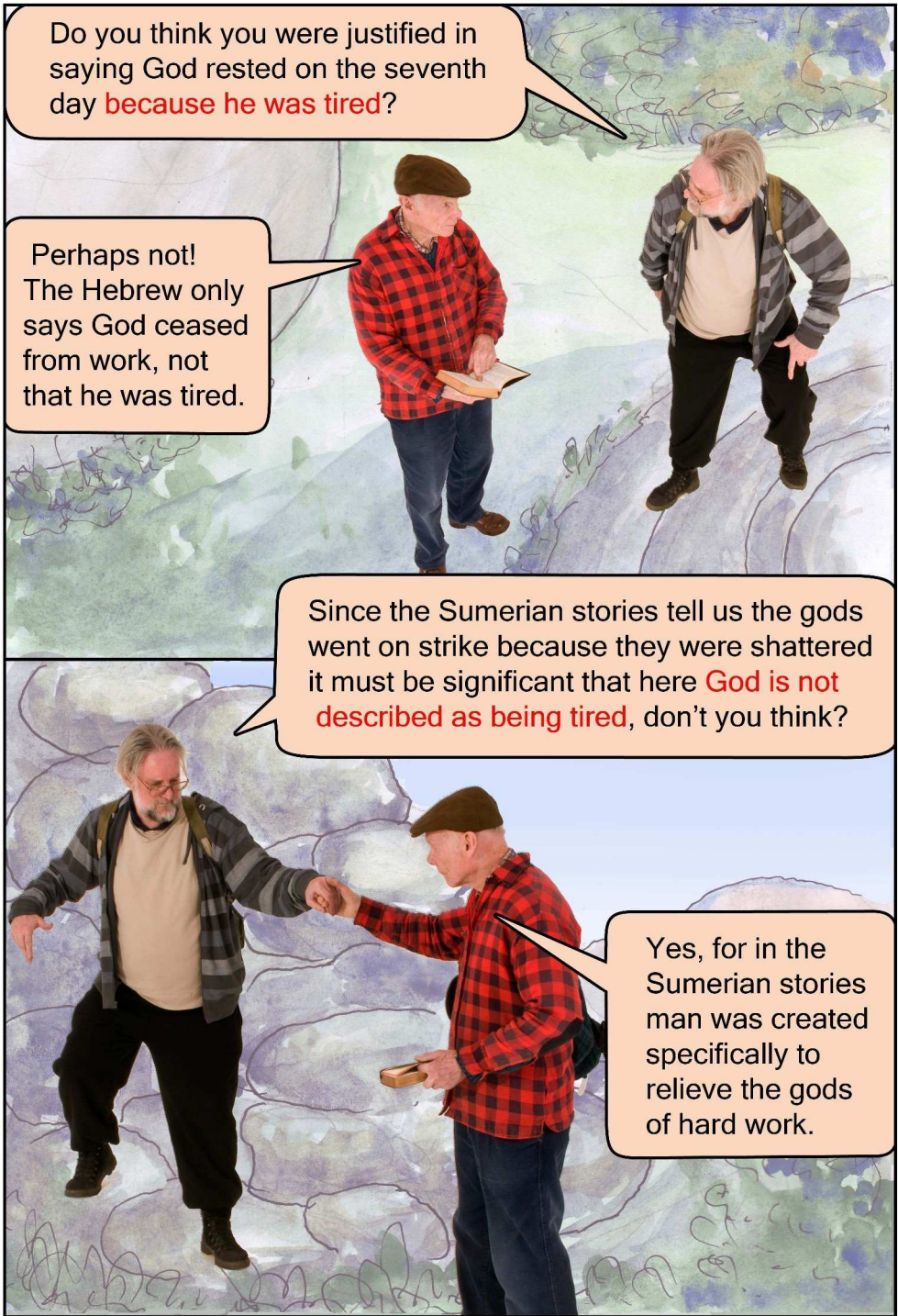
Gen 1. 26-28



It's not just the imago dei. It's also an outright justification of conservative authoritarian rule.







So it can hardly be an accident if this writer fails to tell us that God was tired?

No, there's some important religious point being made. No doubt about it!

I agree! However, for the moment we're not in a position to tell what it is, so we shall carry on and come back to it later.

OK. But I shall hold you to it for I've always fancied we'll discover the Bible's a religious work!

Very well. Let's go on with the story.

Read
Gen 2

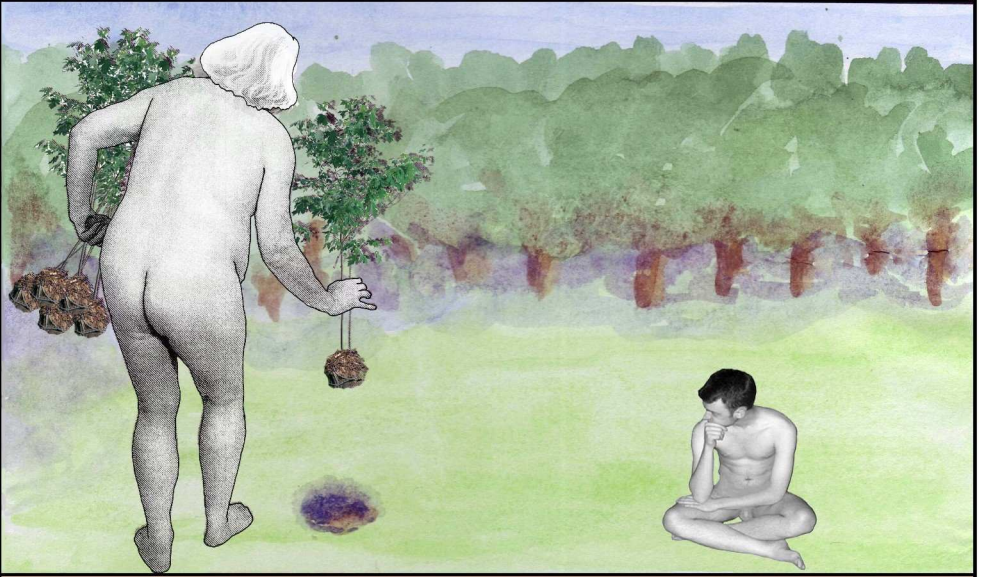
Well, the interesting thing is that in Genesis 2 the creation takes place all over again, only this time in a different order

We begin as usual with a watery flood-plain containing no life.



However, the first thing God does - his name is Yahweh in this story - is to take some dirt and make man - in Hebrew Adam - breathing into him the breath of life.

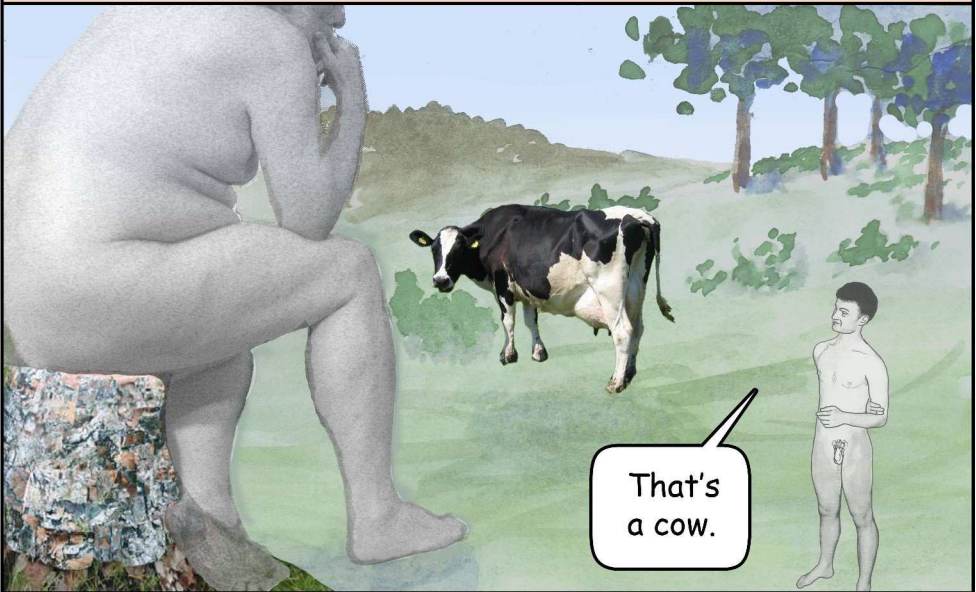
He then creates an environment for Adam, planting a garden and filling it with all sorts of trees.



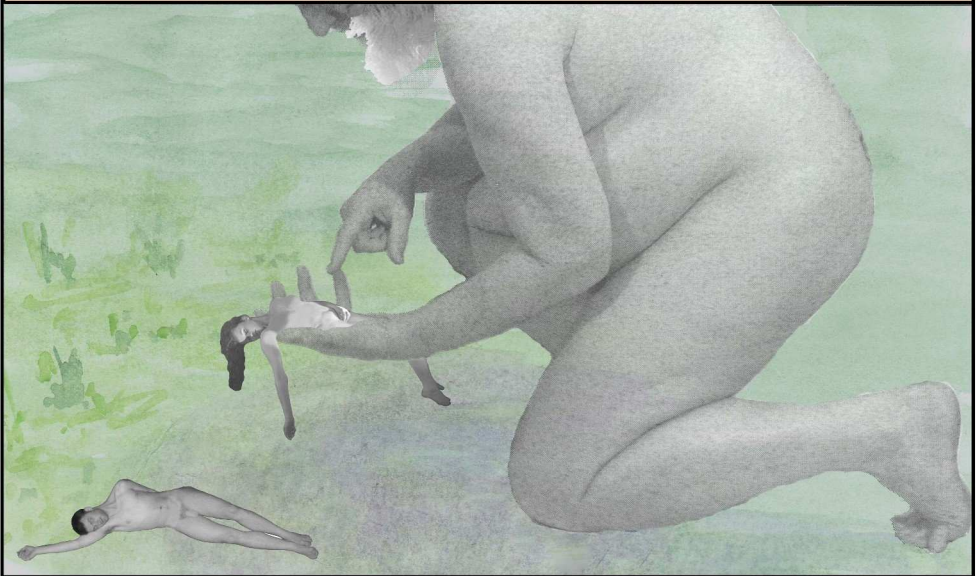
Having done that he puts Adam in it, telling him to either find or grow his own food.

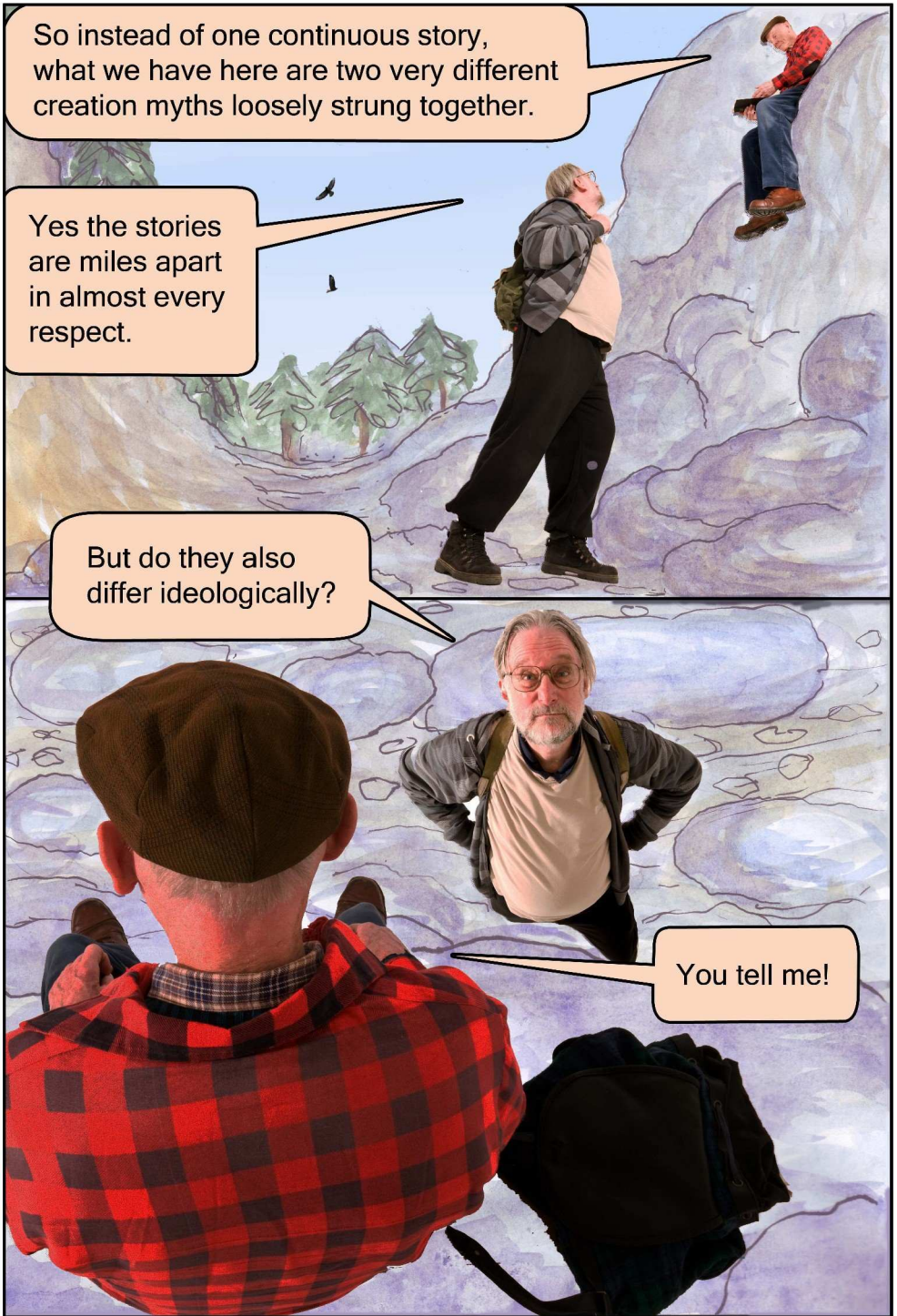


Unfortunately, man is lonely so Yahweh creates the other animals and brings them to him so he can give them their names.



However, realising Adam is still lonely he finally creates woman, making use of one of man's ribs.





So instead of one continuous story, what we have here are two very different creation myths loosely strung together.

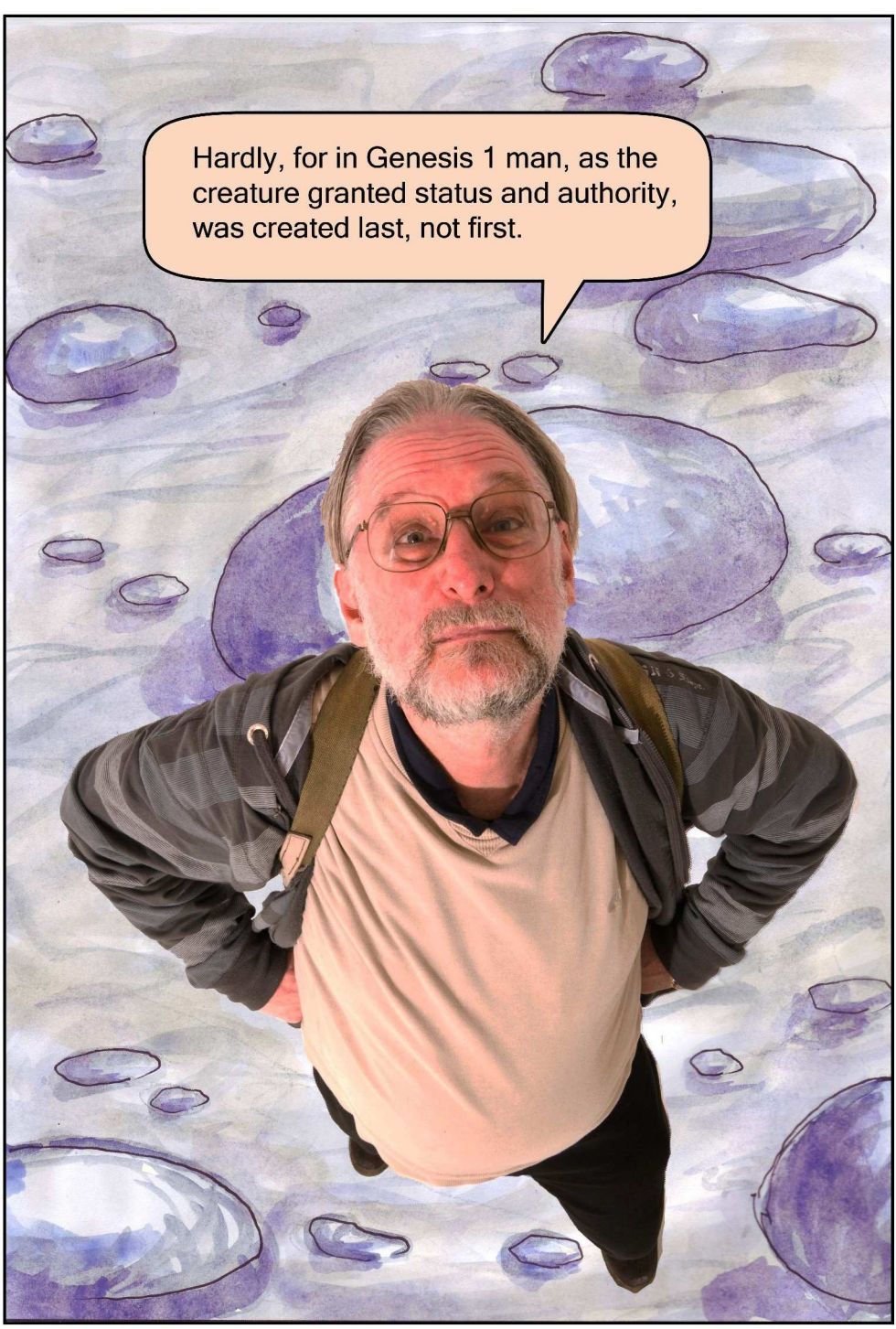
Yes the stories are miles apart in almost every respect.

But do they also differ ideologically?

You tell me!



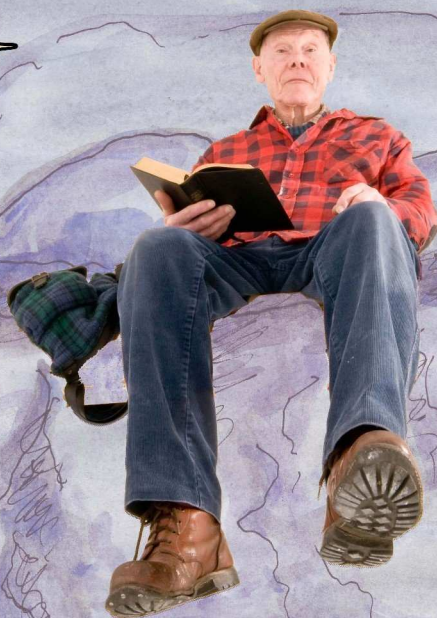




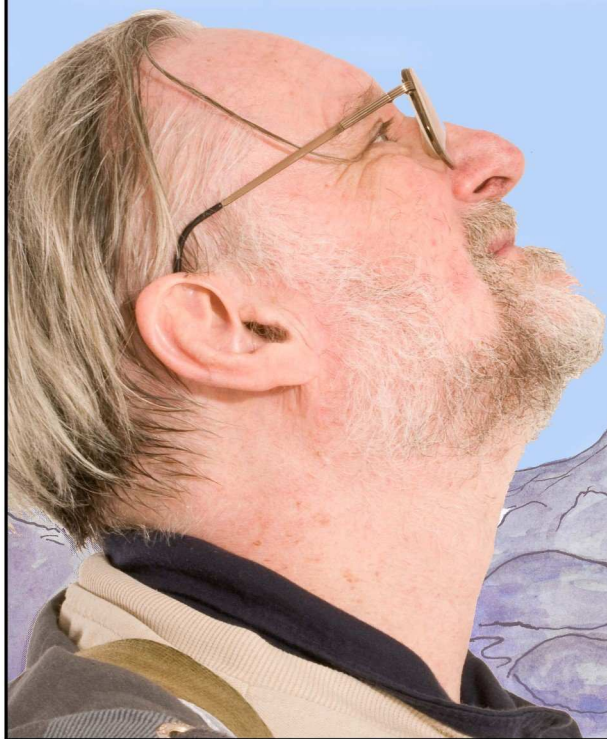
Hardly, for in Genesis 1 man, as the creature granted status and authority, was created last, not first.

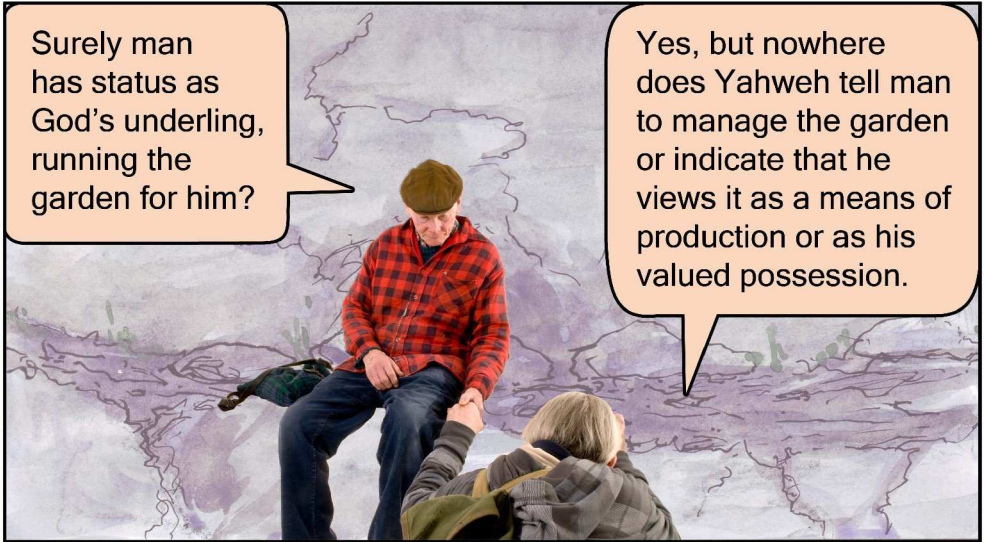


In the garden
doesn't man
have status
simply in
being the
gardener?



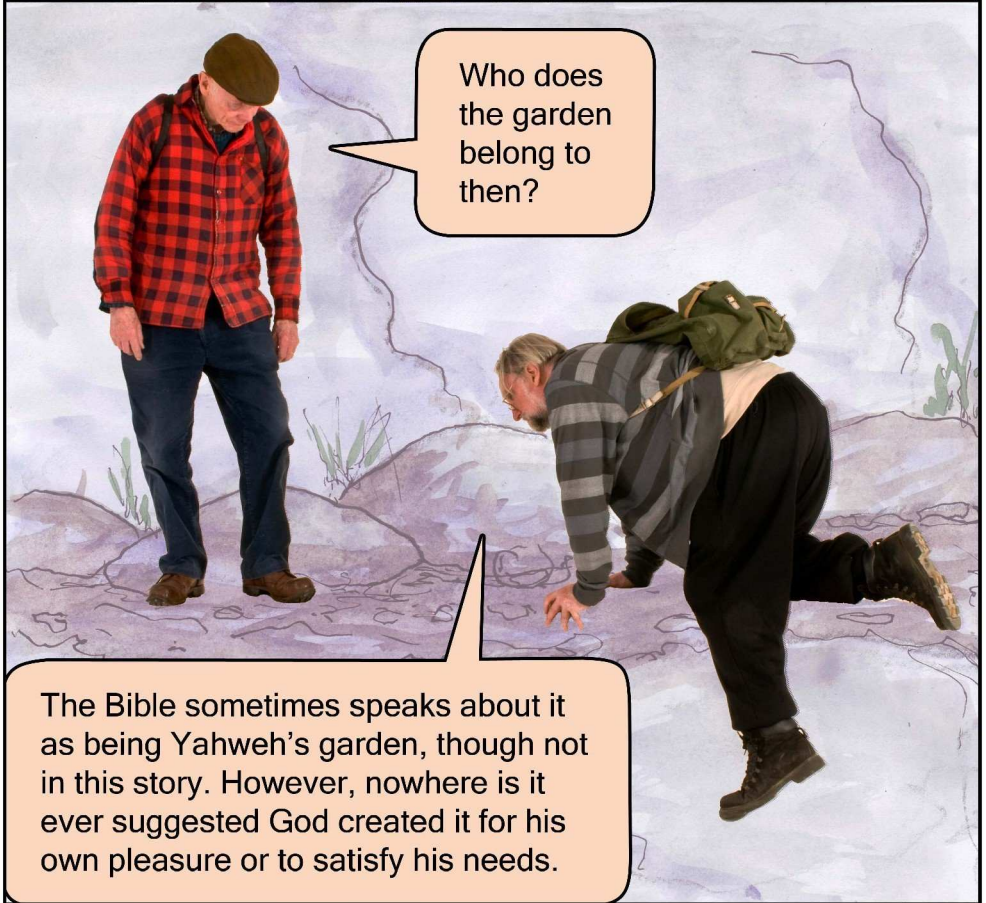
Certainly he
would have,
had he been
given that title,
but nowhere
in the story is
Adam called
the gardener.





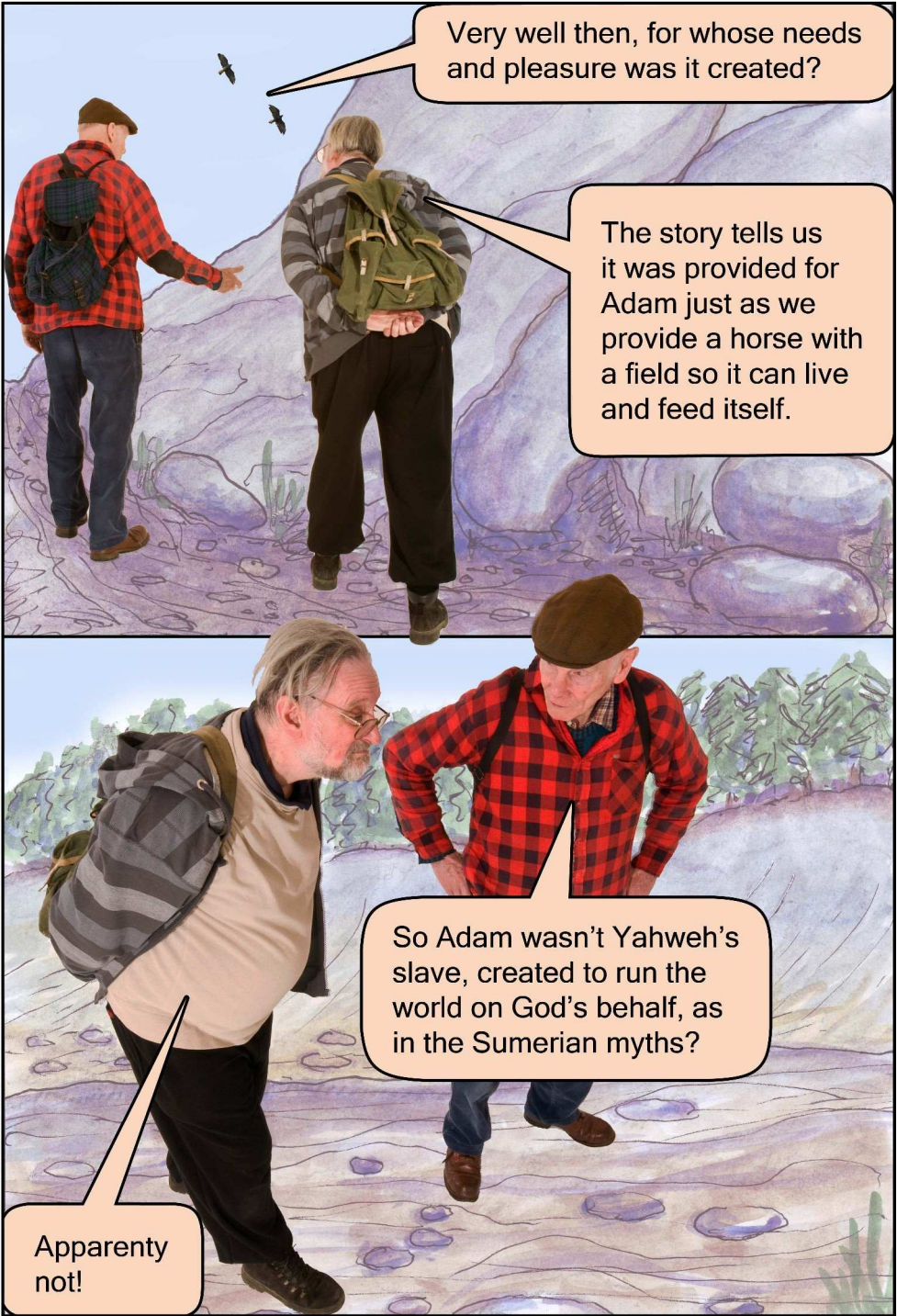
Surely man has status as God's underling, running the garden for him?

Yes, but nowhere does Yahweh tell man to manage the garden or indicate that he views it as a means of production or as his valued possession.



Who does the garden belong to then?

The Bible sometimes speaks about it as being Yahweh's garden, though not in this story. However, nowhere is it ever suggested God created it for his own pleasure or to satisfy his needs.





In this story the garden is simply there so that the animals, including man, can live freely and multiply according to their natures.

So in Genesis 2 man has no status and no authority?

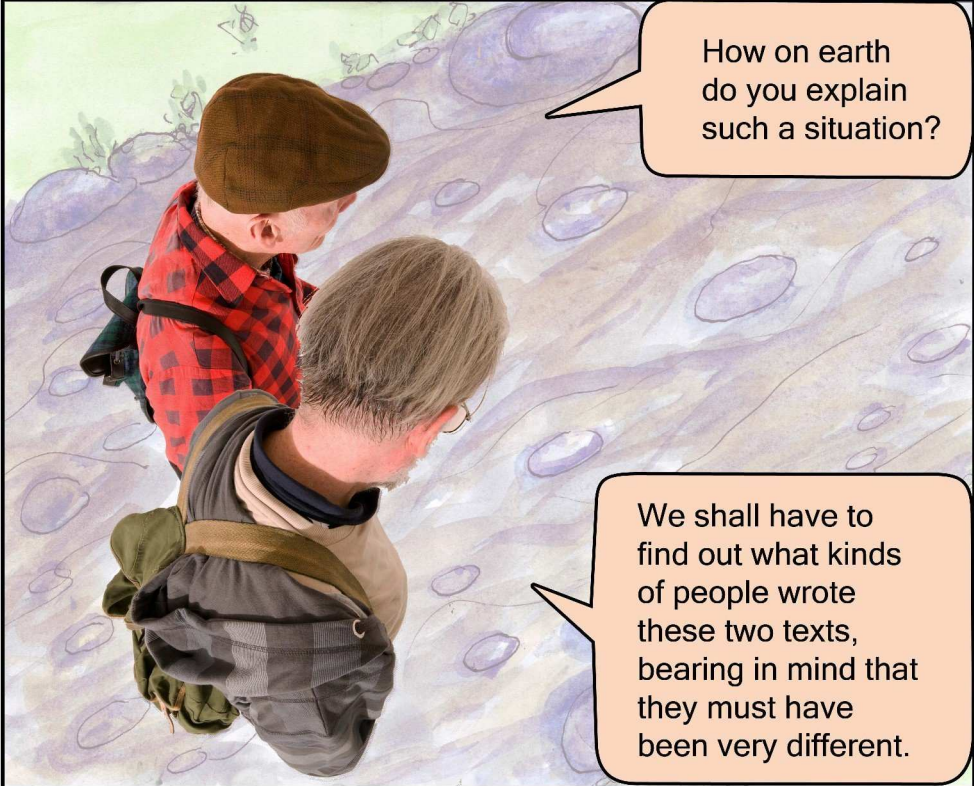
So it would seem!

That's weird!



So you're saying these two creation myths operate with diametrically opposite perspectives?

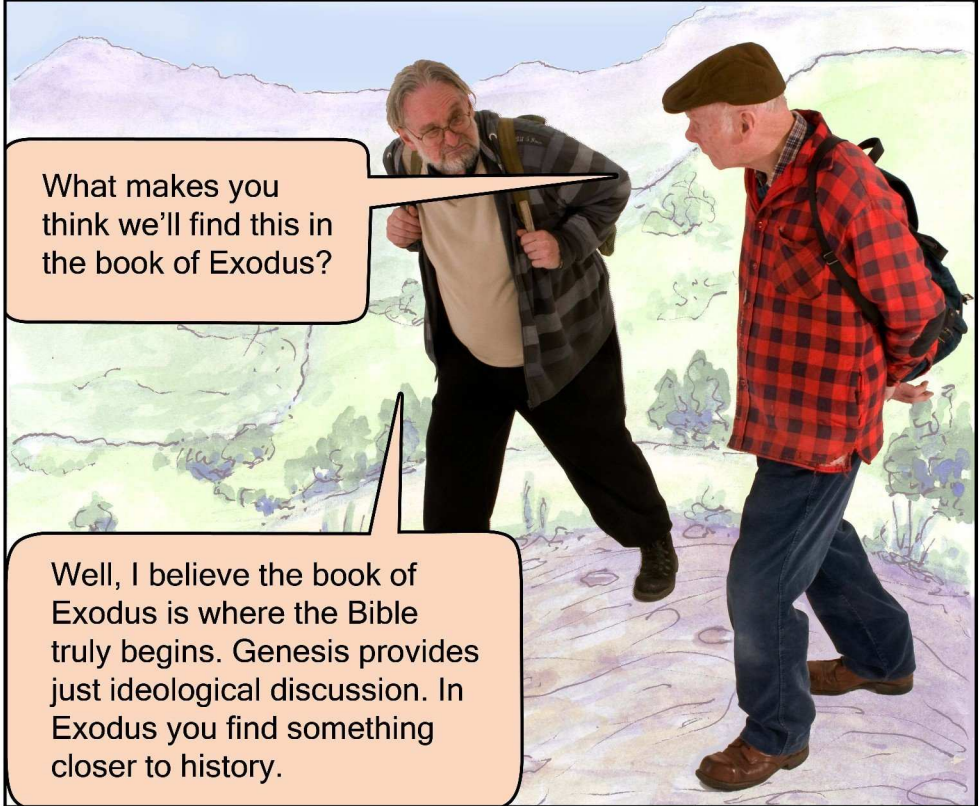
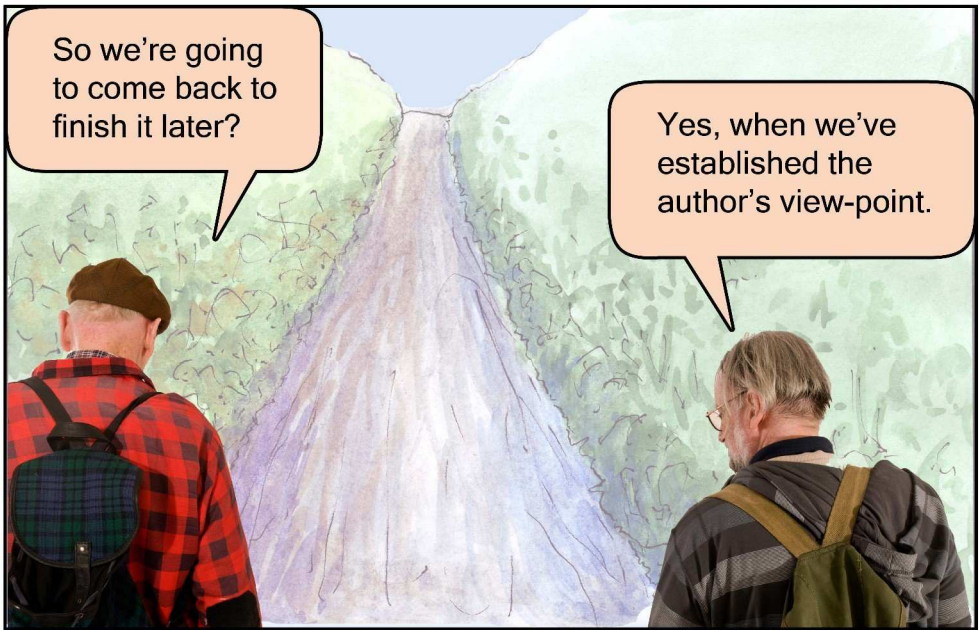
What other conclusion can one draw?

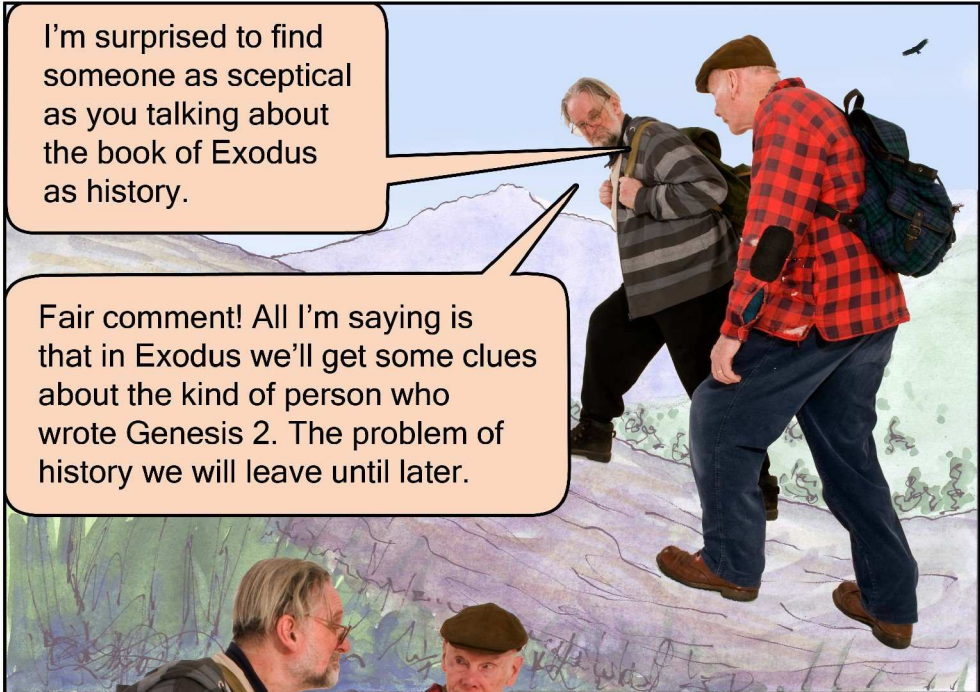


How on earth do you explain such a situation?

We shall have to find out what kinds of people wrote these two texts, bearing in mind that they must have been very different.








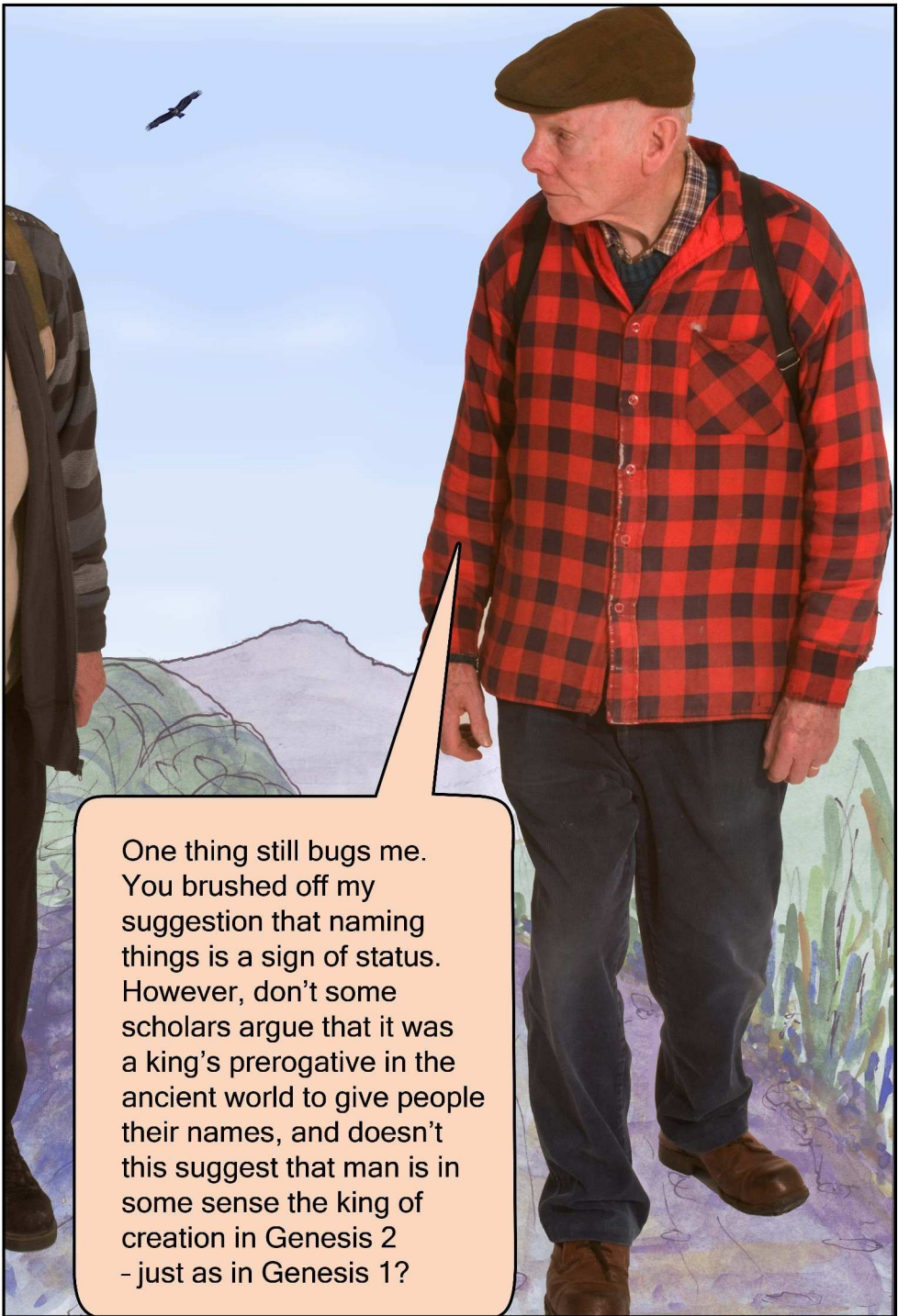
I'm surprised to find someone as sceptical as you talking about the book of Exodus as history.

Fair comment! All I'm saying is that in Exodus we'll get some clues about the kind of person who wrote Genesis 2. The problem of history we will leave until later.

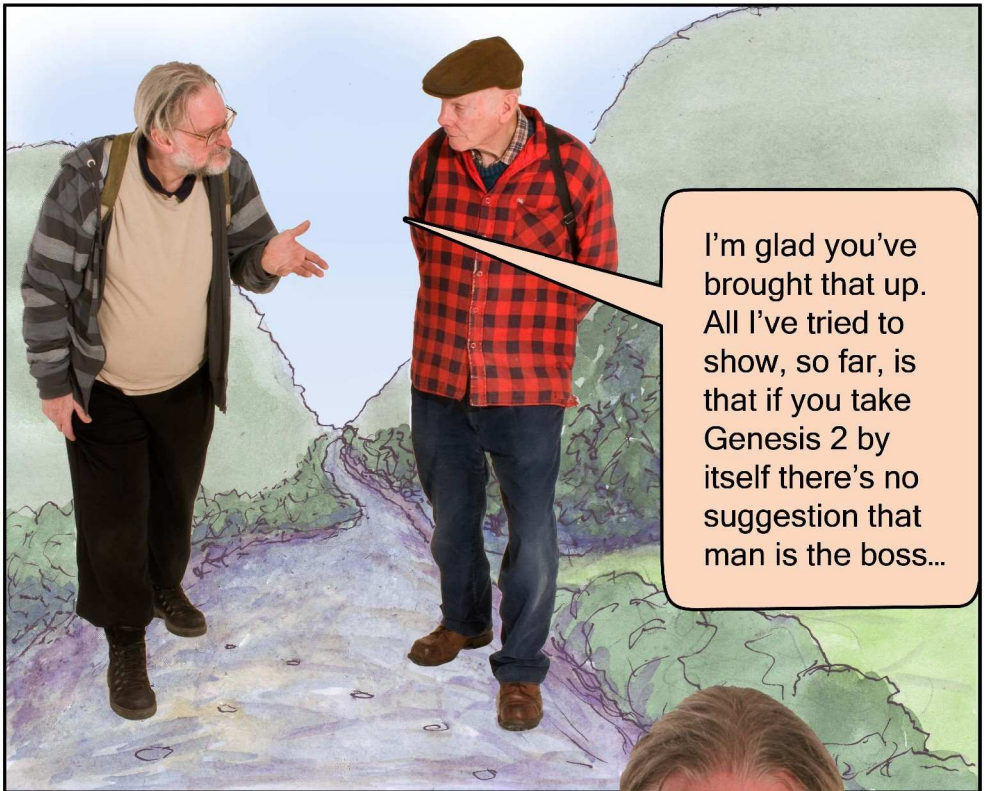


One more problem we're going to have to come back to!

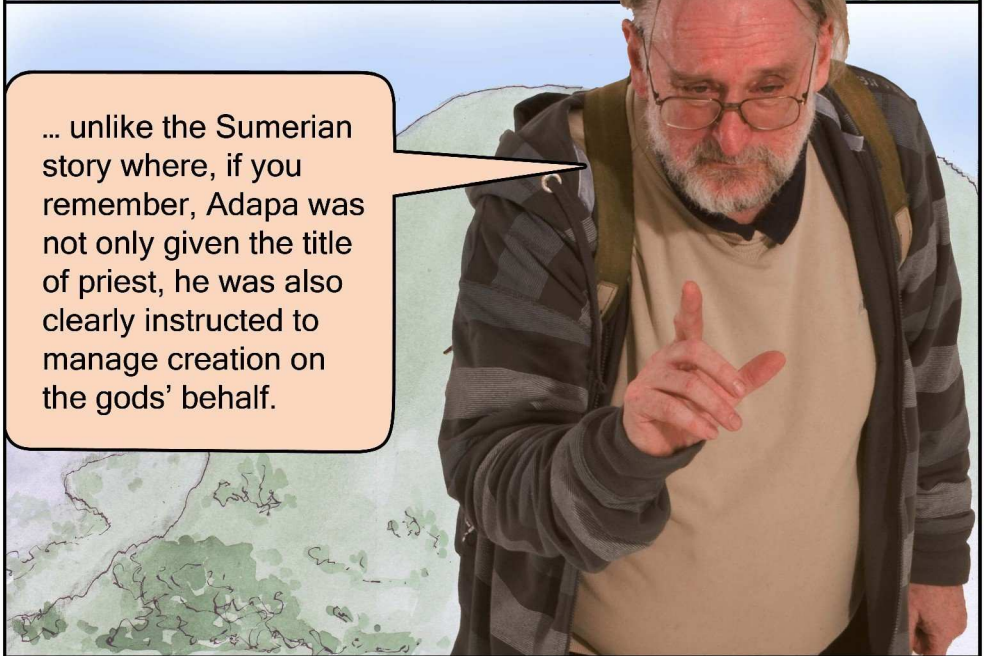
You're going to have to get used to that.



One thing still bugs me. You brushed off my suggestion that naming things is a sign of status. However, don't some scholars argue that it was a king's prerogative in the ancient world to give people their names, and doesn't this suggest that man is in some sense the king of creation in Genesis 2 - just as in Genesis 1?



I'm glad you've brought that up. All I've tried to show, so far, is that if you take Genesis 2 by itself there's no suggestion that man is the boss...



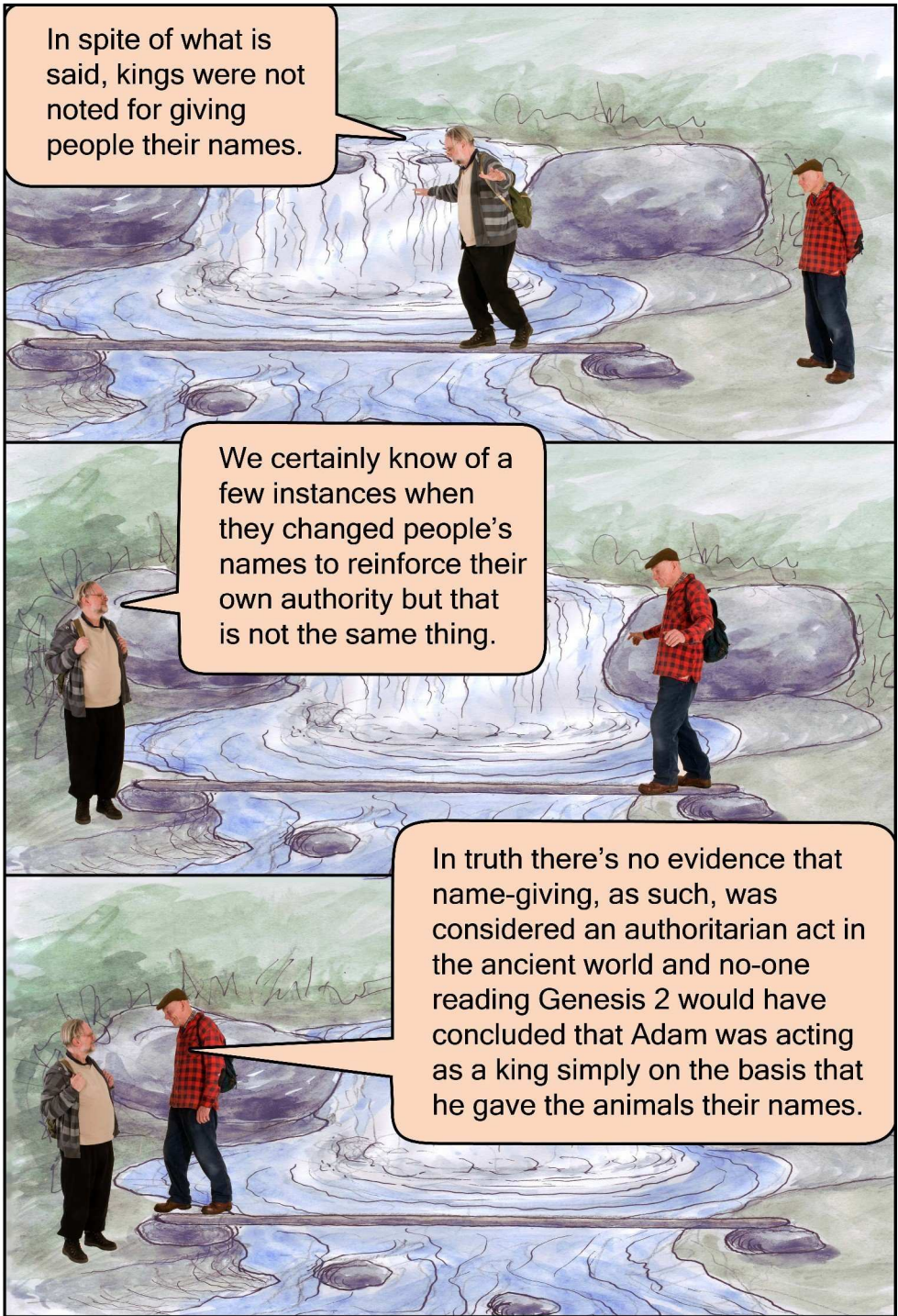
... unlike the Sumerian story where, if you remember, Adapa was not only given the title of priest, he was also clearly instructed to manage creation on the gods' behalf.



It's true, of course, that man's the centre of interest in both stories and that in both stories he's described as being, in important ways, superior to the other animals.

However, the interesting thing is that in Genesis 2 Adam's never given a title of any description and there's never the slightest hint that his job is to manage things, even though, having just read Genesis 1, this is precisely what we all expect the story to say.





Indeed since Adam was the only speaking creature, God was the only other person capable of providing names and the author clearly did not want to make him the name-giver! *



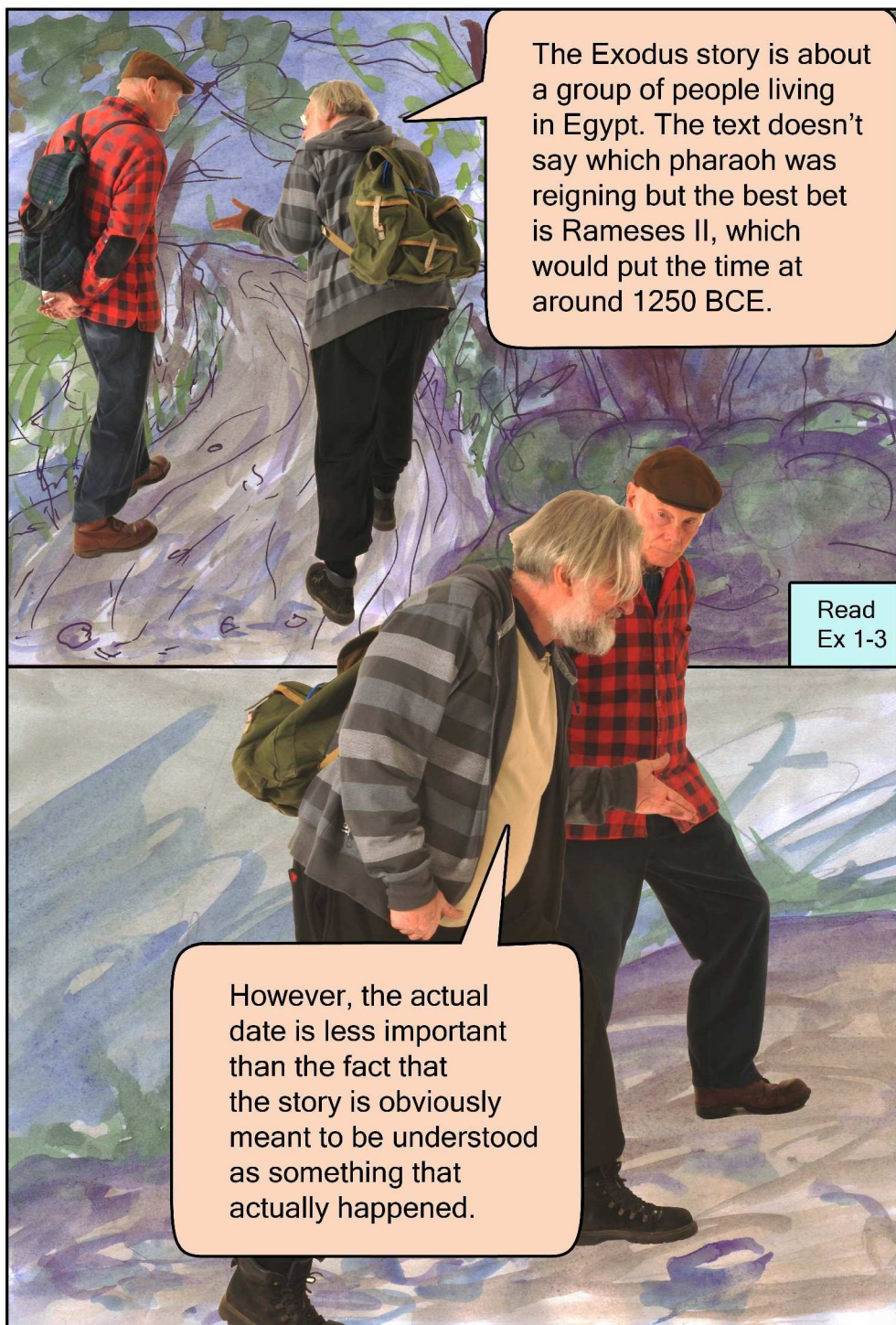
* The author does not tell us who gave Adam his name!

So the notion that Adam in naming the animals was acting like a king is totally without foundation. Indeed if it hadn't been for Genesis 1 and its authoritarian priestly writer, no one would have thought of introducing such a bum idea.



2

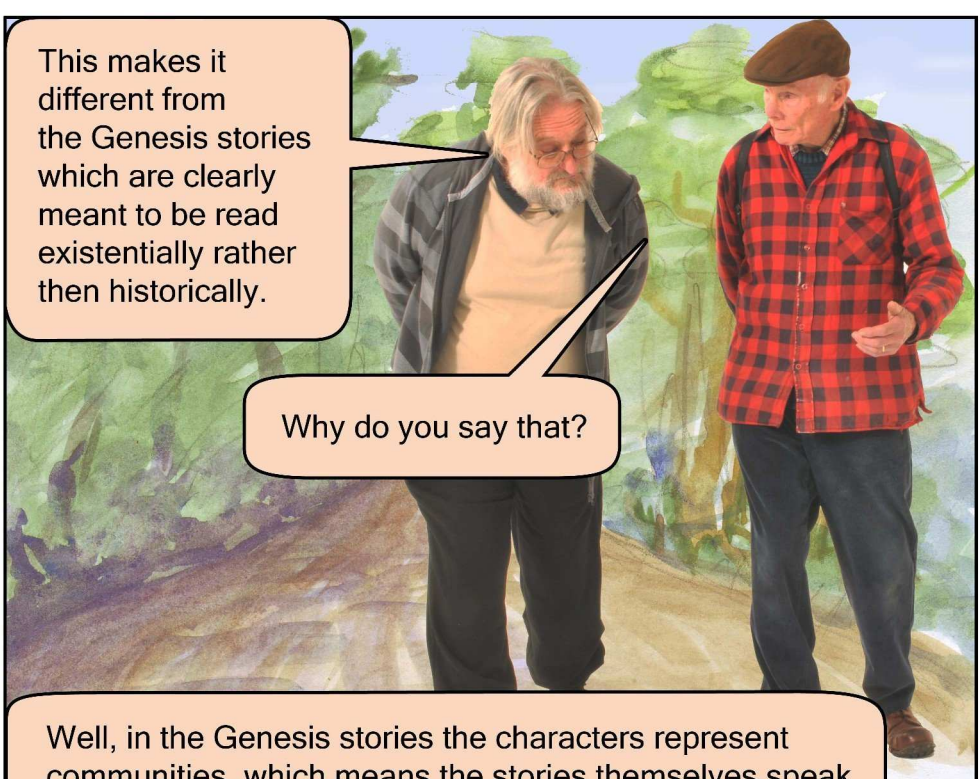
Exodus and The Habiru People



The Exodus story is about a group of people living in Egypt. The text doesn't say which pharaoh was reigning but the best bet is Rameses II, which would put the time at around 1250 BCE.

Read
Ex 1-3


However, the actual date is less important than the fact that the story is obviously meant to be understood as something that actually happened.



This makes it different from the Genesis stories which are clearly meant to be read existentially rather than historically.

Why do you say that?

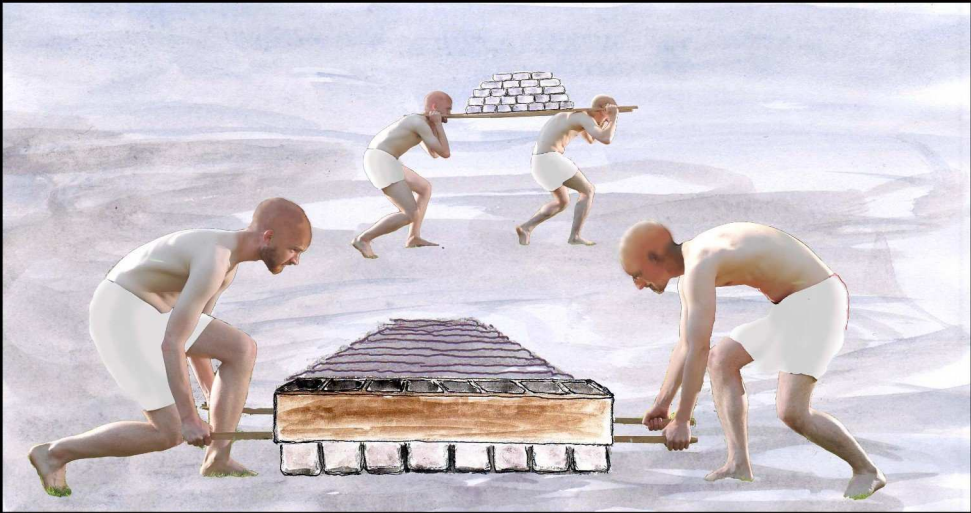
Well, in the Genesis stories the characters represent communities, which means the stories themselves speak of general situations, not of actual people or events.



If you say so!



So, returning to the Exodus, this group living in Egypt was composed of the lowest of the low: slaves working in the building industry, their job being to furnish the basic building material - bricks - for the skilled workers to use.

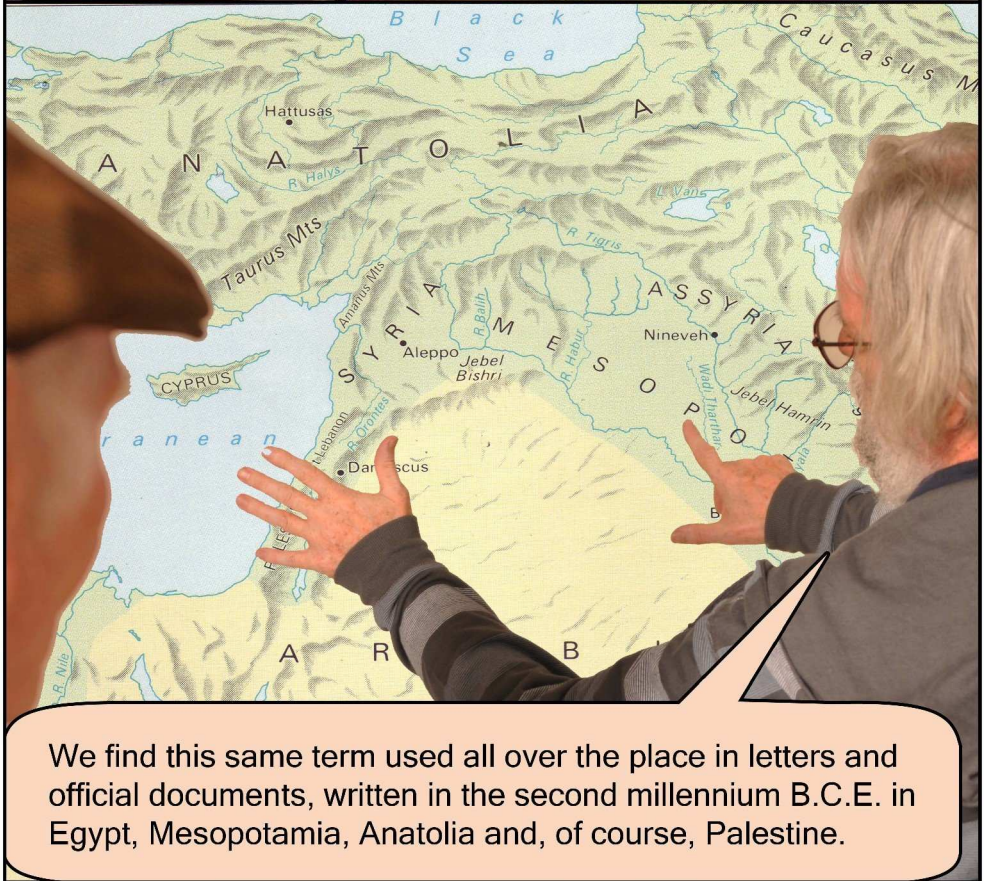


They spoke of themselves as Israelites. However, the Bible also refers to them by another name ...





'Hebrew' is a very interesting word. We tend to think of it as just another name for 'Israelite' but that's to miss the point.



We find this same term used all over the place in letters and official documents, written in the second millennium B.C.E. in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and, of course, Palestine.

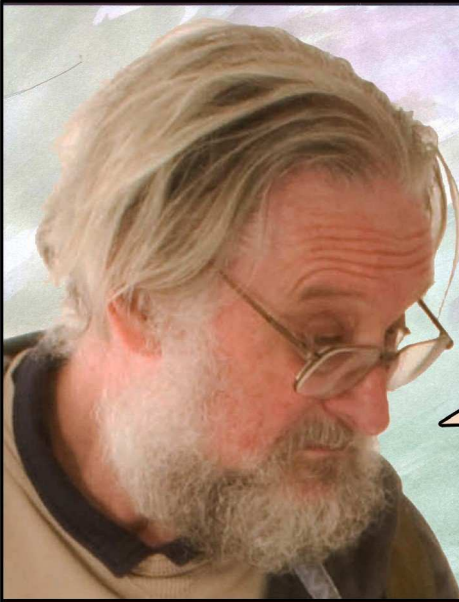
Egyptian texts speak of the 'Apiru people but 'Apiru or Habiru is just another way of writing Hebrew.

ARCHEOLOGY
Department

What does this
'pr' stand for?

It signifies 'Apiru. As you know
the ancient Egyptians only used
consonants.

Clearly, 'Apiru was
an official term
designating foreign
refugees: former
townsfolk who had
become outcasts
and were drifting
about all over the
place in a desperate
bid to find a 'home'.



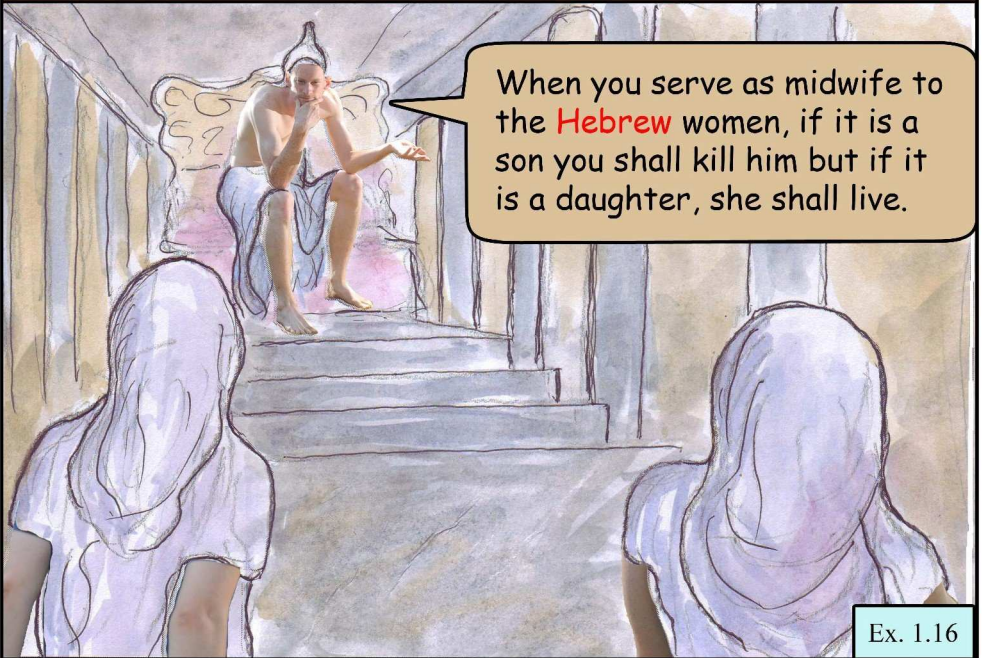
As such, the term 'Apiru or Hebrew carried a definite stigma which can best be appreciated by substituting similar expressions used today such as:

Asylum seeker!

Down and out!

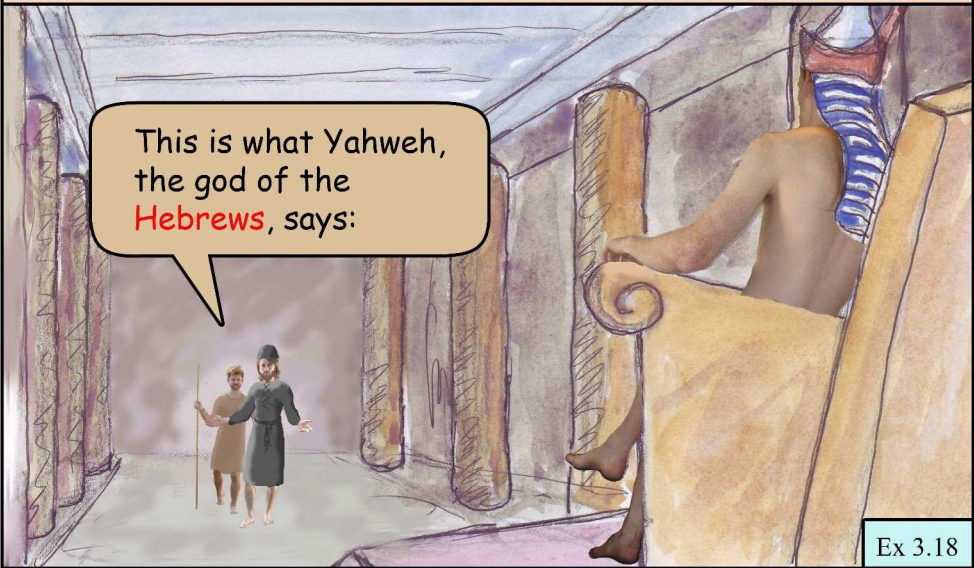
or Marginal.

Understandably, therefore, in the Exodus texts the word Hebrew is normally used by Egyptians when talking about Israelites, as for example in Pharaoh's orders to the Israelite midwives.

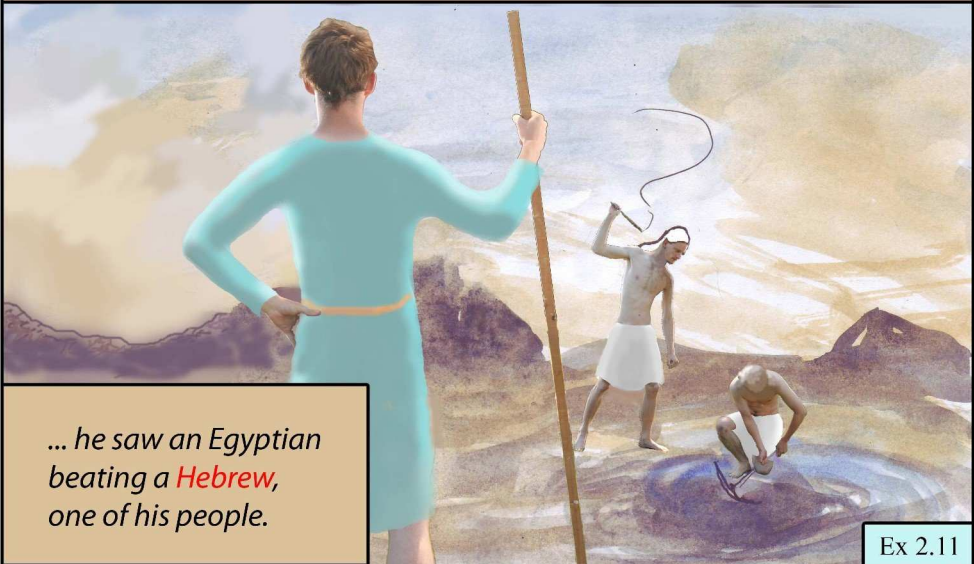


Ex. 1.16

It is, however, occasionally used by Israelites as well but only when speaking of themselves to their overlords, as here where Moses and Aaron deliver the Israelites' request to Pharaoh.



Then again it is also sometimes used when speaking about Moses' relationship with his people as oppressed marginals.

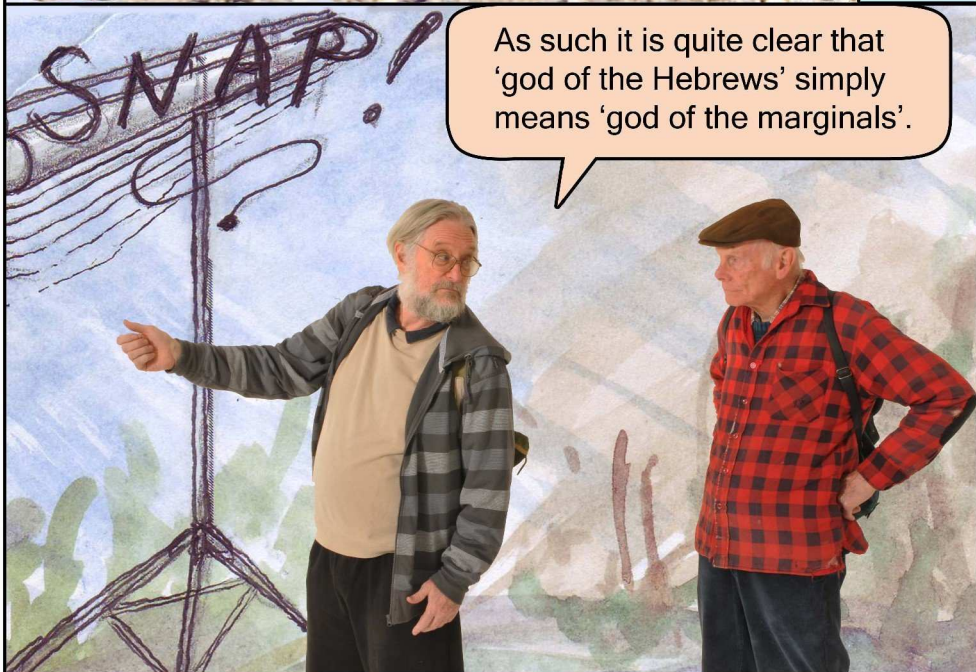


In this regard it is noticeable that the word Hebrew is also consistently used when speaking of Israel's god in this oppressive political context.

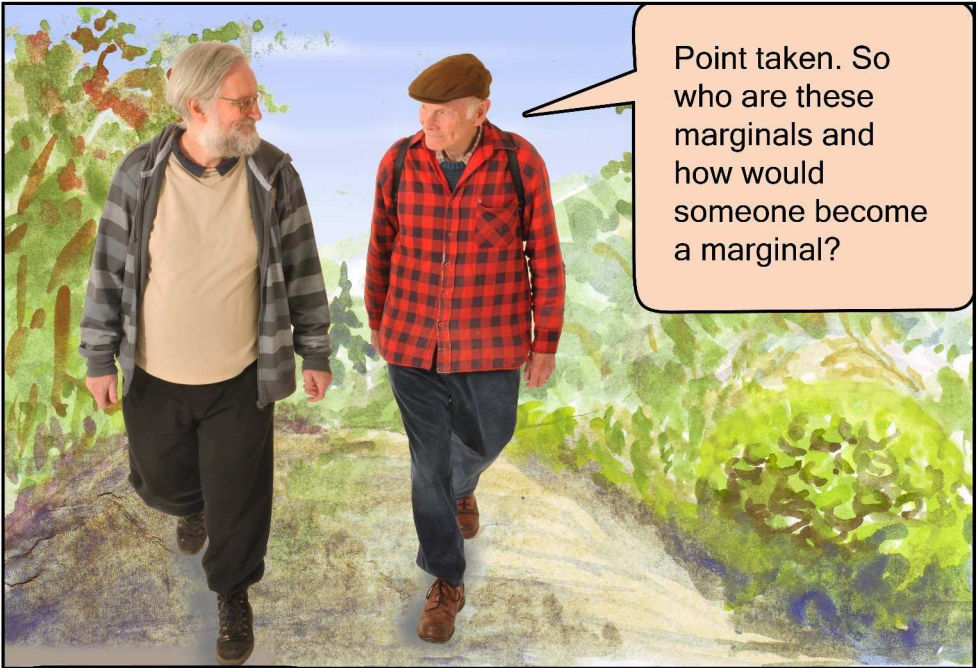
Say to Pharaoh, 'Yahweh, the god of the **Hebrews**, has met with us; and now, please let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Yahweh.



Ex 5.3



As such it is quite clear that 'god of the Hebrews' simply means 'god of the marginals'.



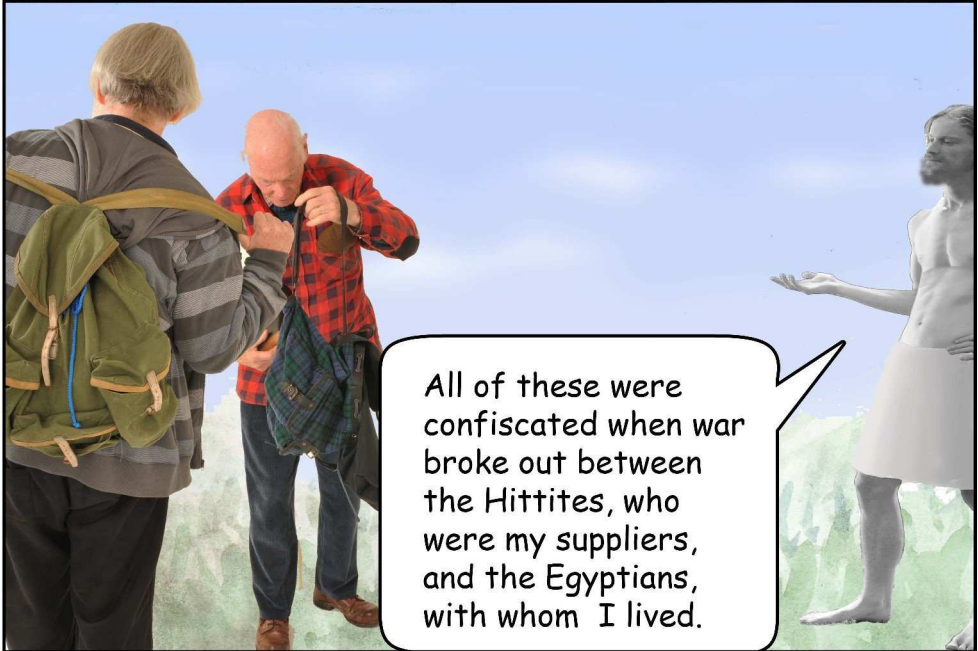
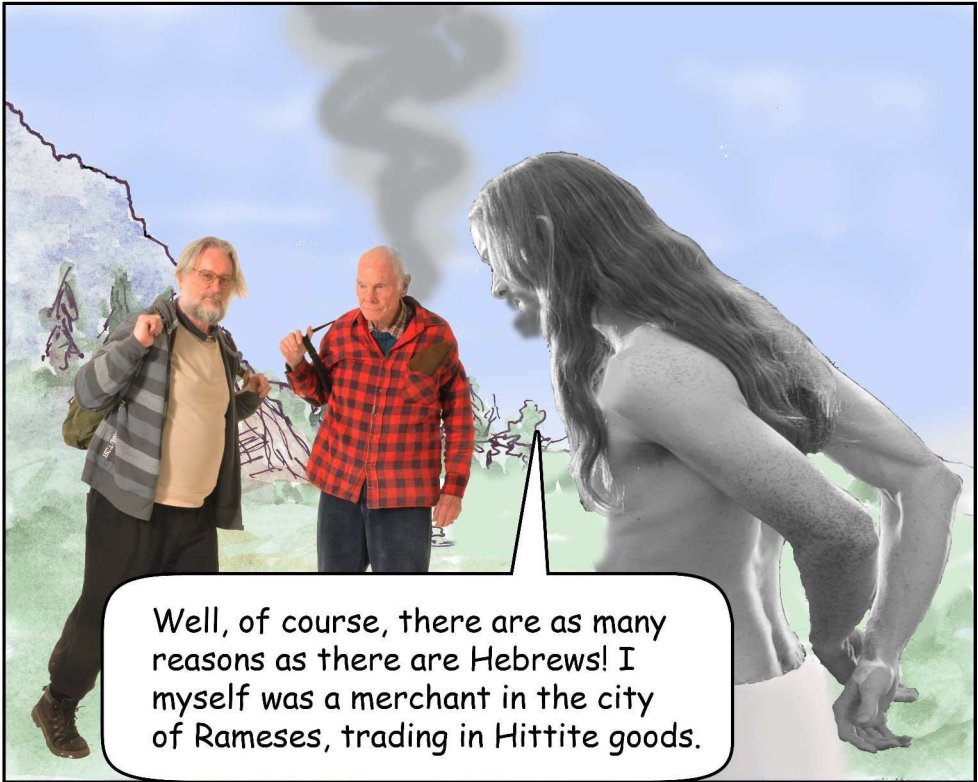
Point taken. So who are these marginals and how would someone become a marginal?



Well, we're in luck for there's some of them encamped near here. Would you like an answer from the horse's mouth?

Sounds a good idea. We can eat our lunch with them.





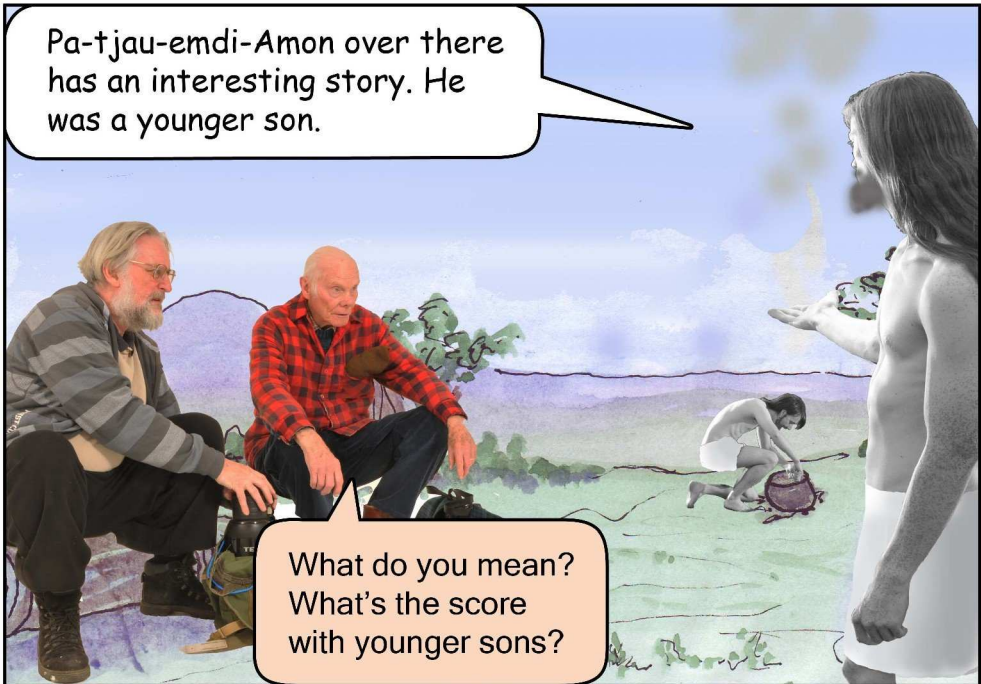
My neighbours accused me of spying, of course, but that was just an excuse to rob me.



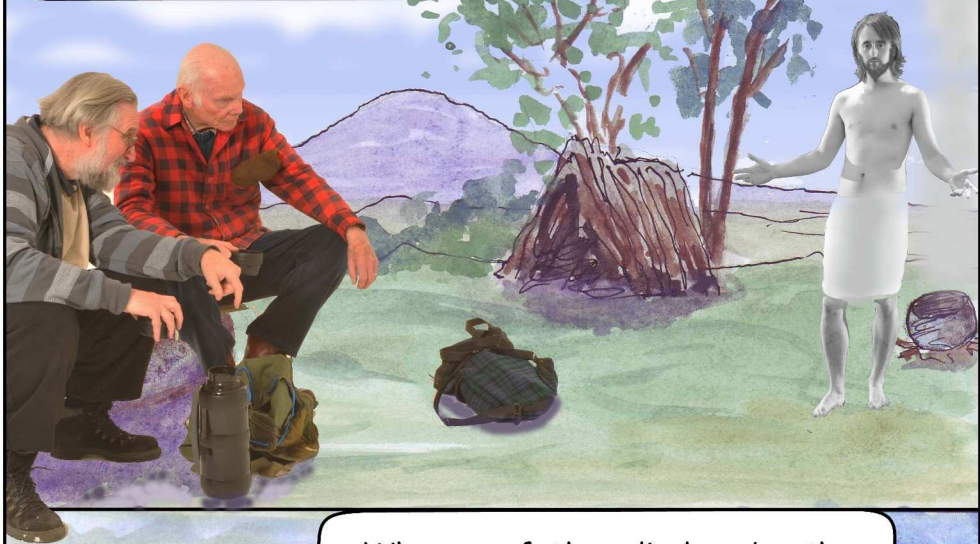
There's good money to be got from trading but the risk is terrible.

That's awful!





But when I grew up everything changed.
My older brother began spreading
rumours that I wanted his place.



When our father died my brother
accused me of treason so I was
forced to flee the country and
I have never been able to return.

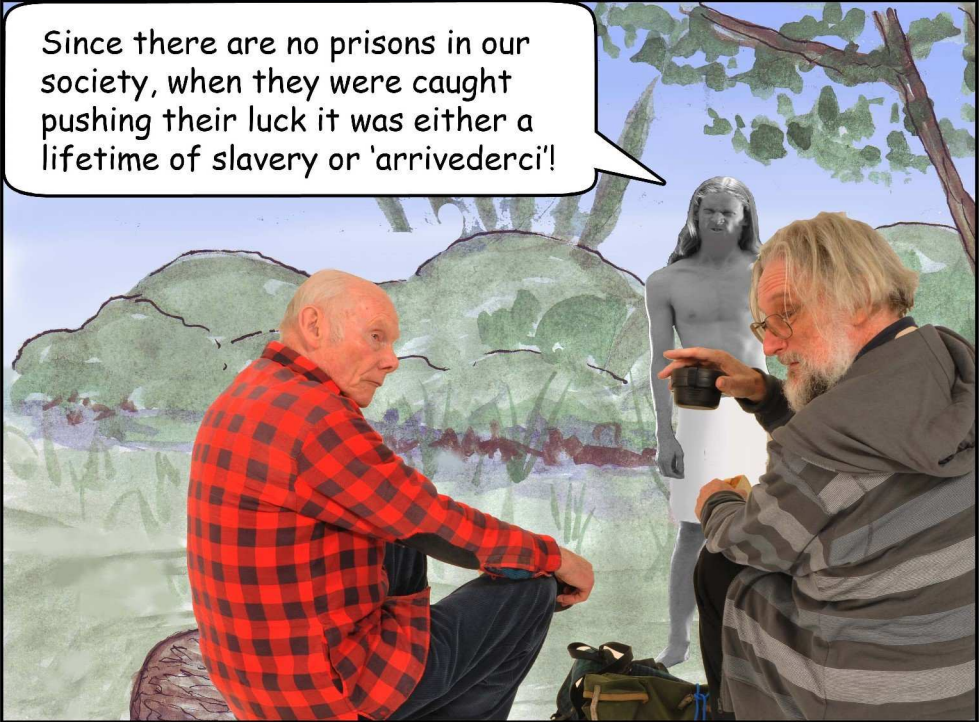
That's
terrible!



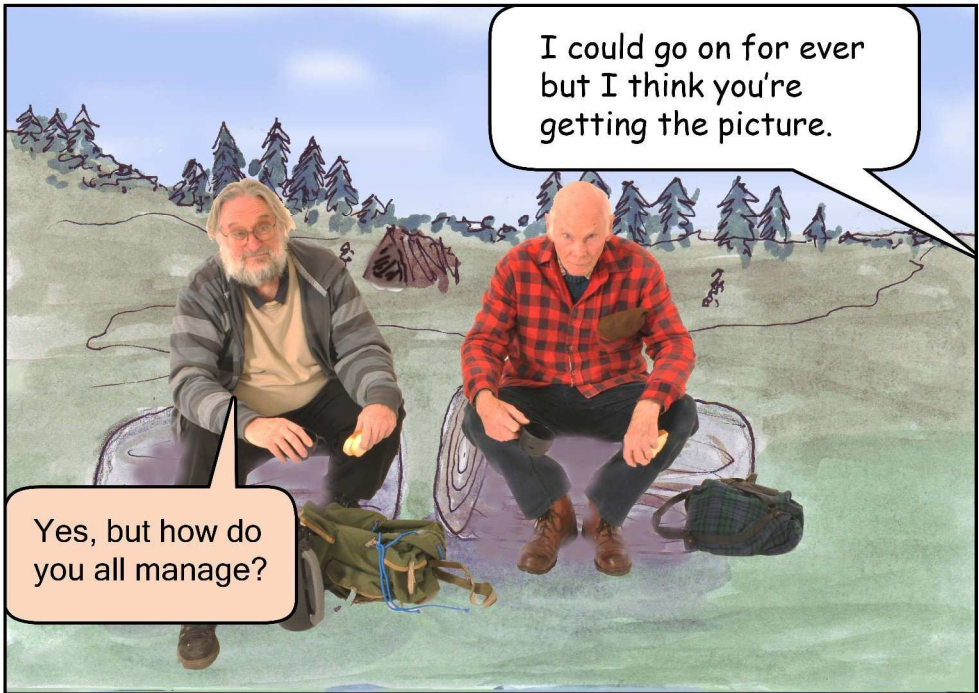
Don't get me wrong. We're not all saints. Pushu-ken and Gudgeriya, over there, have always been chancers.



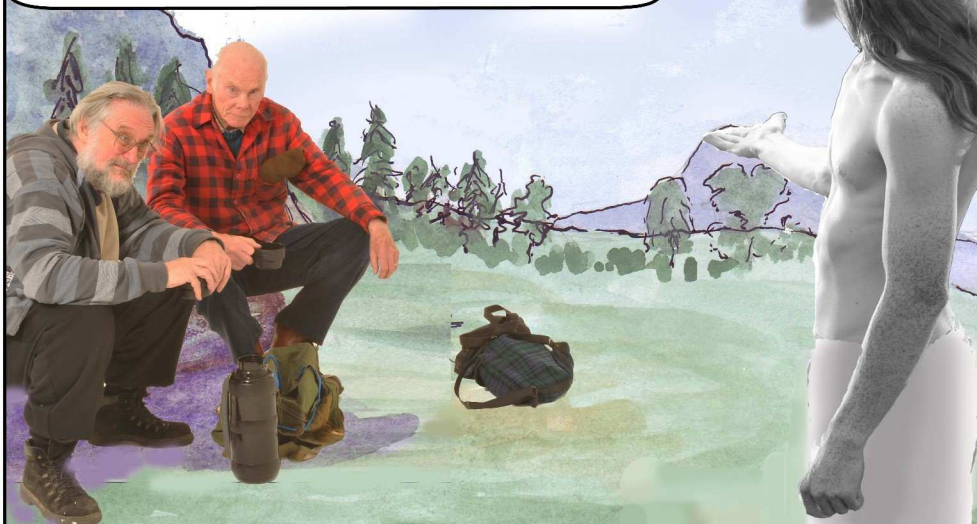
Since there are no prisons in our society, when they were caught pushing their luck it was either a lifetime of slavery or 'arrivederci'!





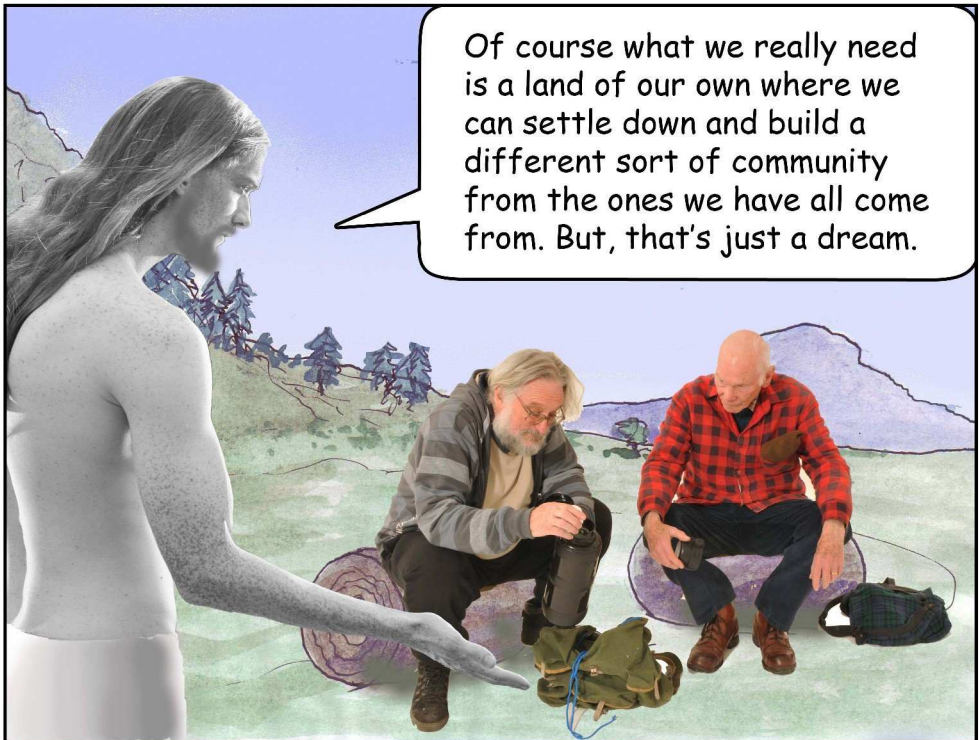


At other times we get together with the other fringe dwellers and go down and raid the farms in the valleys and sometimes even those out there on the plains, but that's dangerous.



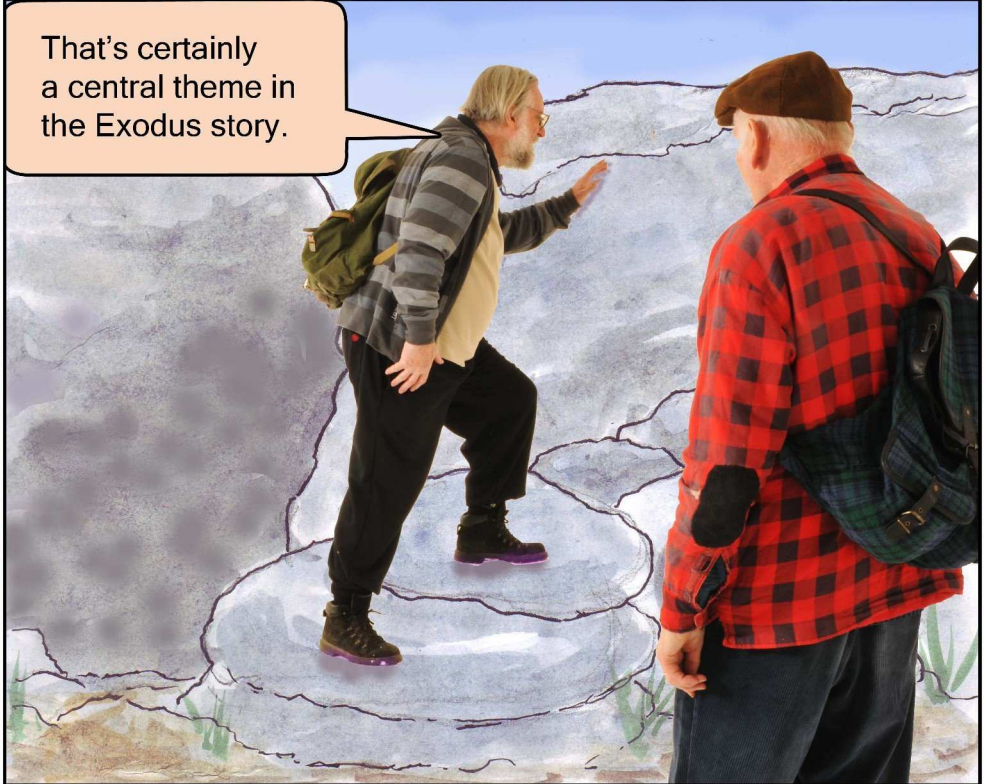
When it's really tough, famine may force us to go into the actual towns to sell ourselves as slaves, But that's the last straw, for we too have our pride.



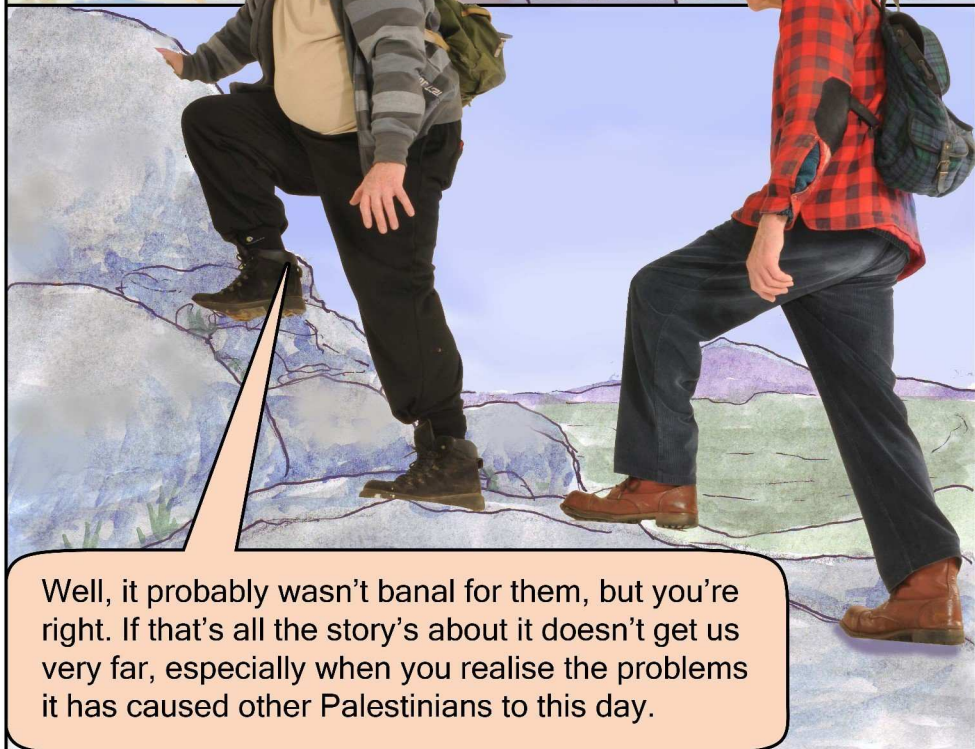
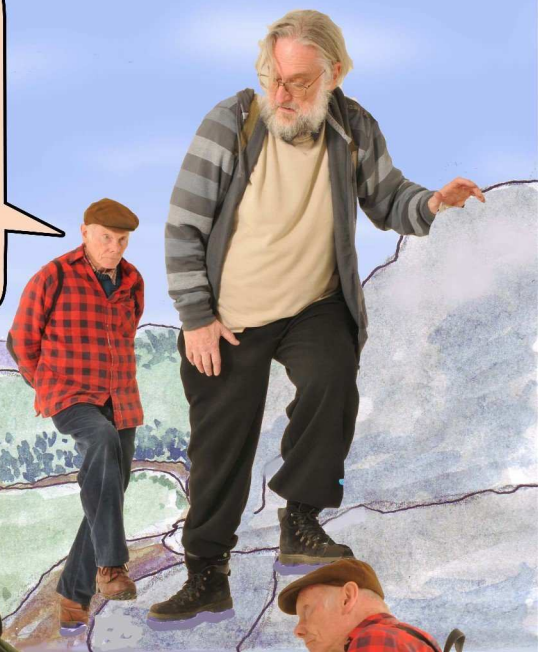


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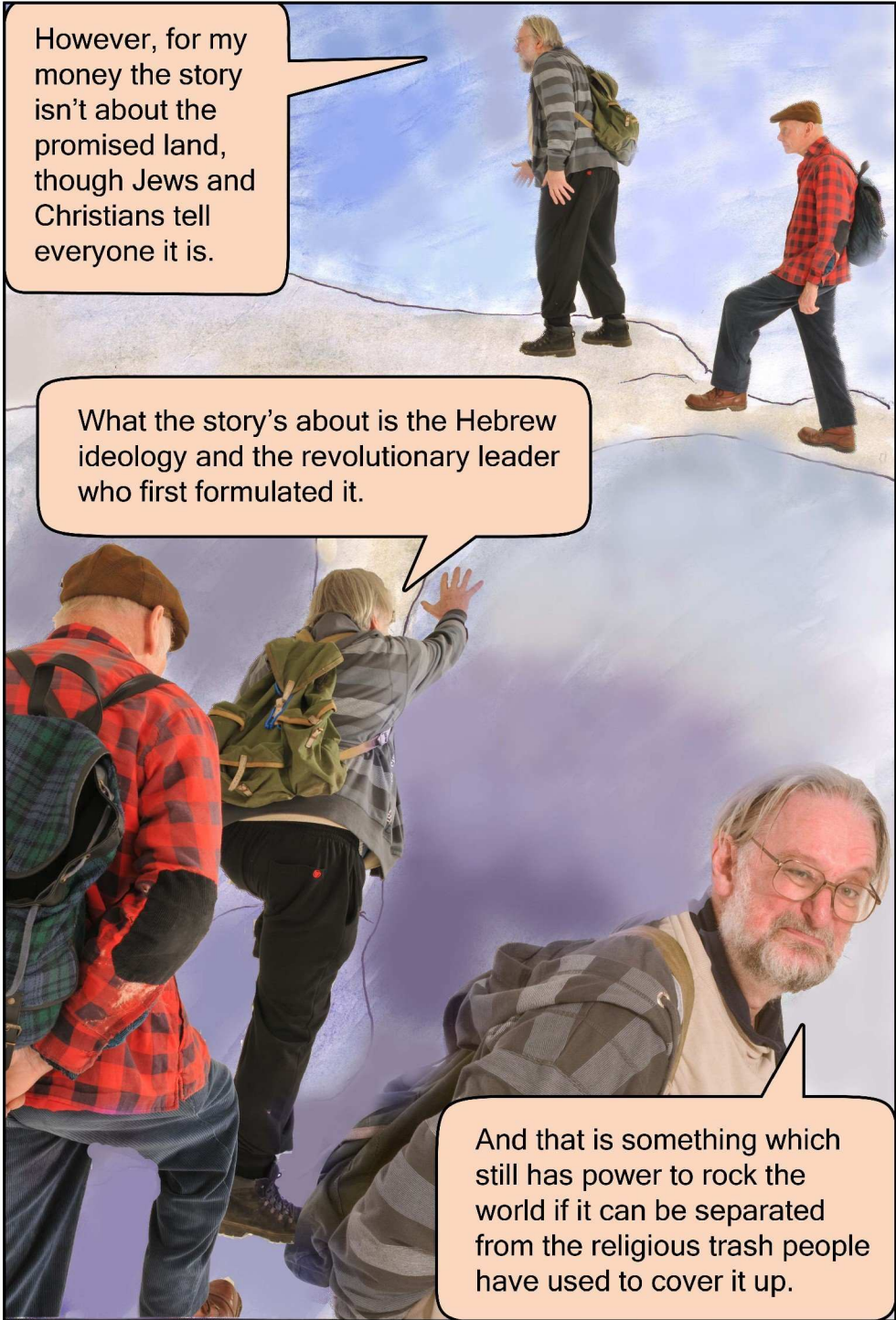
Moses the Marginal Hero



OK. So Exodus tells us how these Hebrews realised this dream, but there's nothing very special about that. Indeed it's rather banal. People have always wanted a homeland of their own.




Well, it probably wasn't banal for them, but you're right. If that's all the story's about it doesn't get us very far, especially when you realise the problems it has caused other Palestinians to this day.



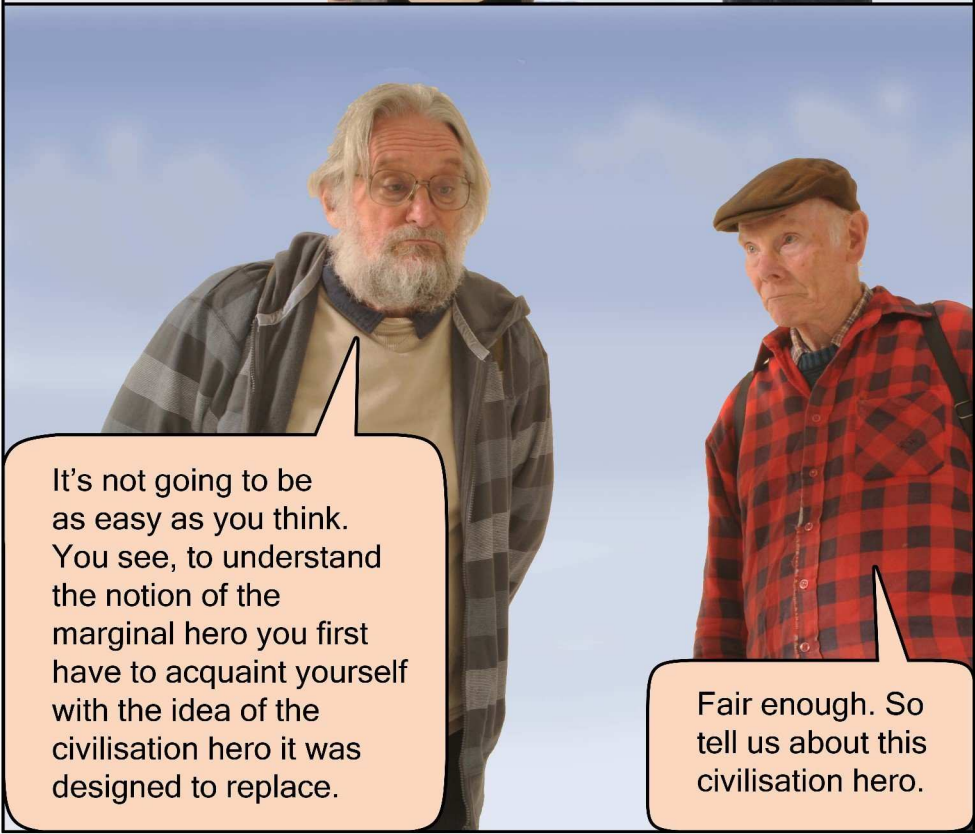
However, for my money the story isn't about the promised land, though Jews and Christians tell everyone it is.

What the story's about is the Hebrew ideology and the revolutionary leader who first formulated it.

And that is something which still has power to rock the world if it can be separated from the religious trash people have used to cover it up.

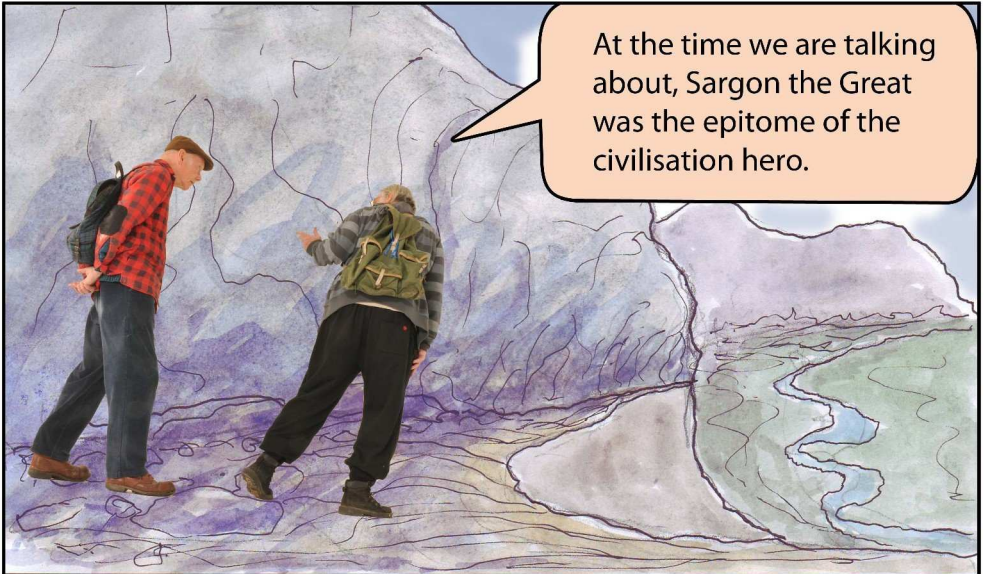


Very well then. Let's hear about this revolutionary marginal hero.



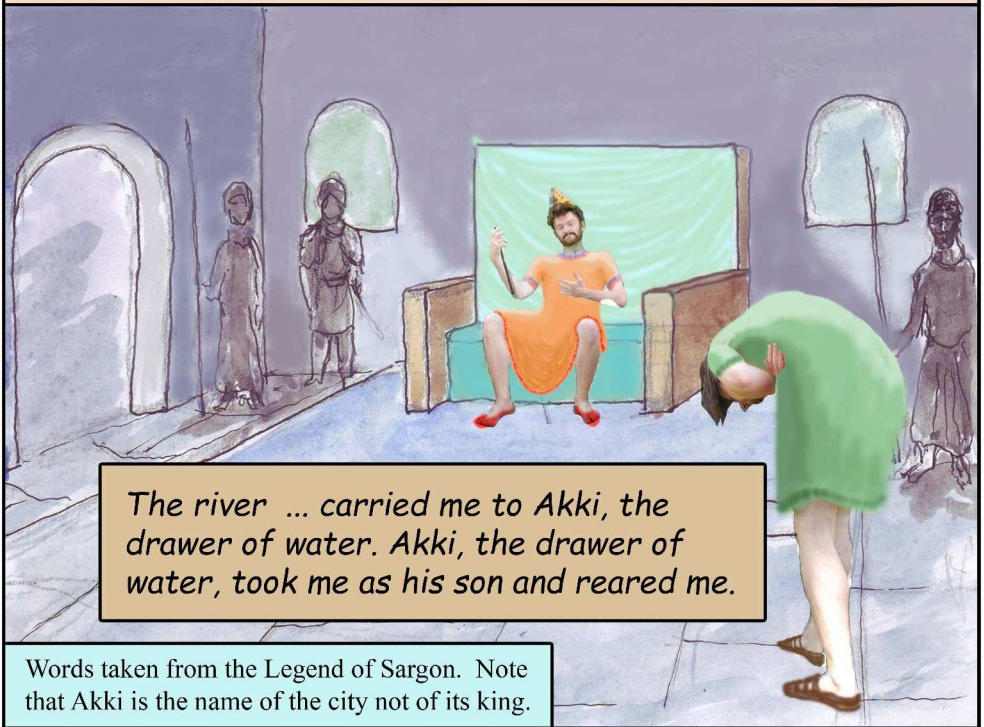
It's not going to be as easy as you think. You see, to understand the notion of the marginal hero you first have to acquaint yourself with the idea of the civilisation hero it was designed to replace.

Fair enough. So tell us about this civilisation hero.



At the time we are talking about, Sargon the Great was the epitome of the civilisation hero.

He had somehow managed to get himself a job as a servant to the king of Akkad, an important Mesopotamian city.



The river ... carried me to Akki, the drawer of water. Akki, the drawer of water, took me as his son and reared me.

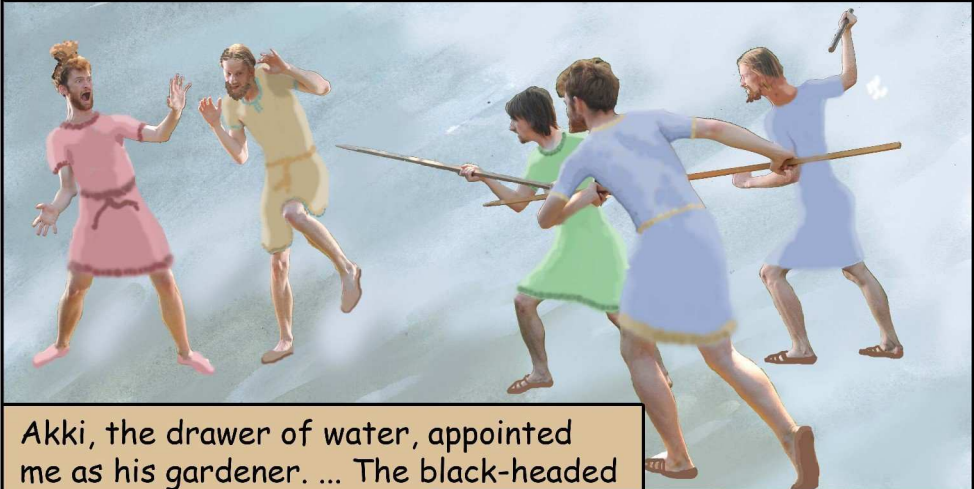
Words taken from the Legend of Sargon. Note that Akki is the name of the city not of its king.

It can't have been easy for him, as a despised foreigner from the hill country to the north, but he was patient and knew how to bide his time.



My mother was a changeling, my father I knew not. The brothers of my father loved the hills.

However, when an opportunity presented itself he showed that he also knew how to take his chance. Throwing caution to the wind, he mounted a successful palace coup and assumed the crown.

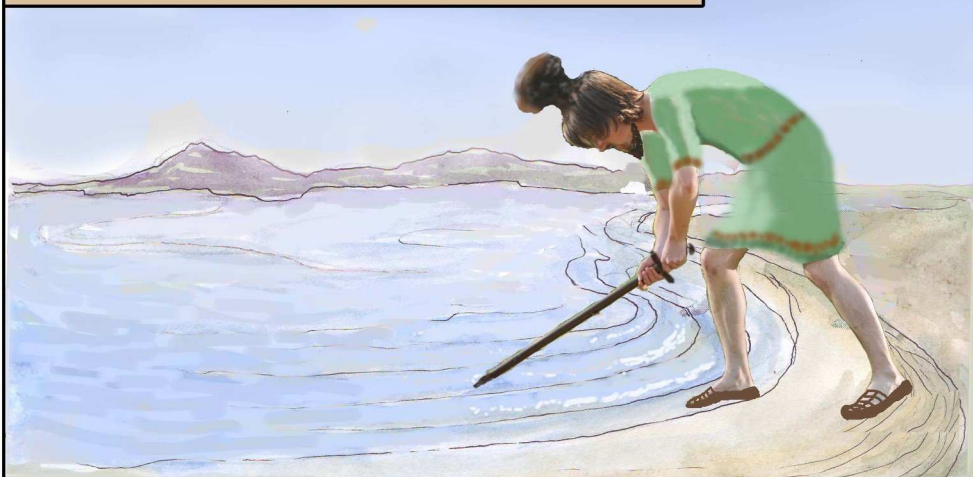


Akki, the drawer of water, appointed me as his gardener. ... The black-headed people I ruled, I governed.

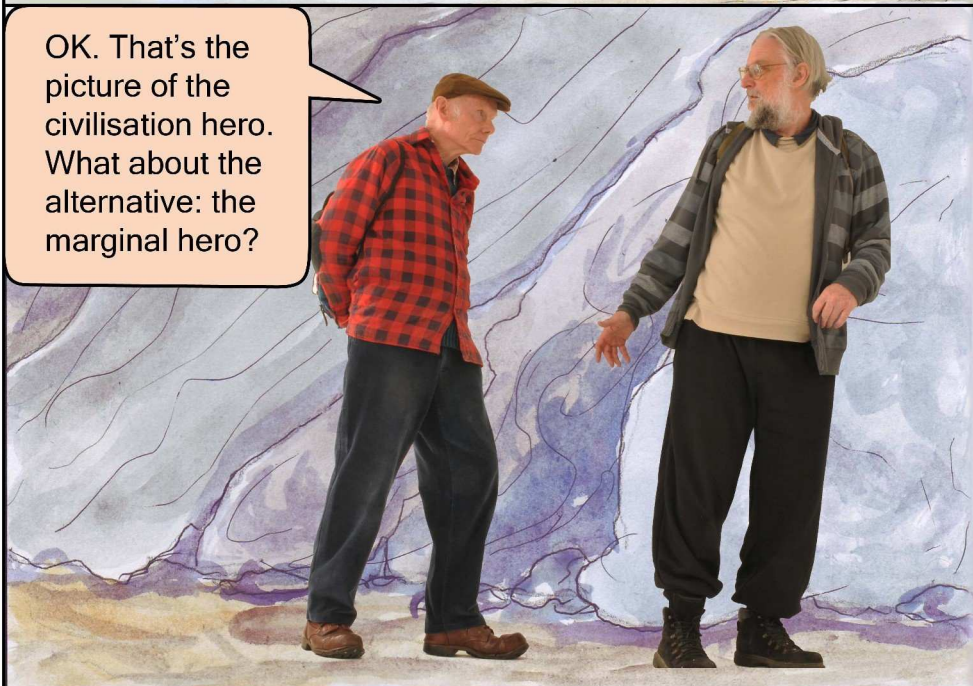
The text is unsurprisingly silent about the coup!

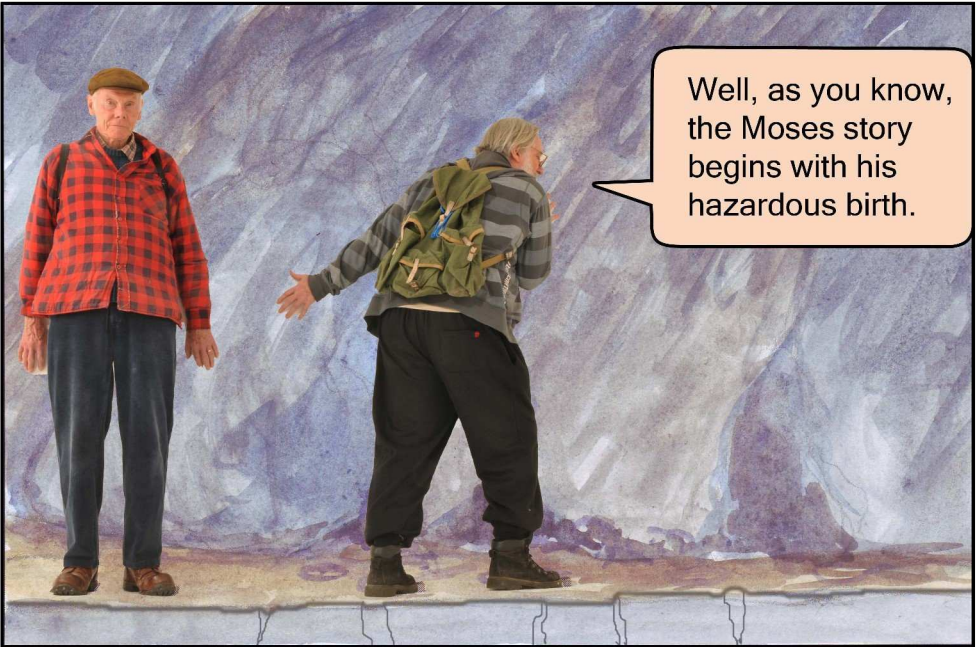
As if that wasn't enough he then extended his power till he had managed to carve out for himself the first great Mesopotamian empire, stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean.

He defeated its entire territory from Lagash as far as the sea. His weapon then he washed in the sea.



OK. That's the picture of the civilisation hero. What about the alternative: the marginal hero?





Well, as you know,
the Moses story
begins with his
hazardous birth.

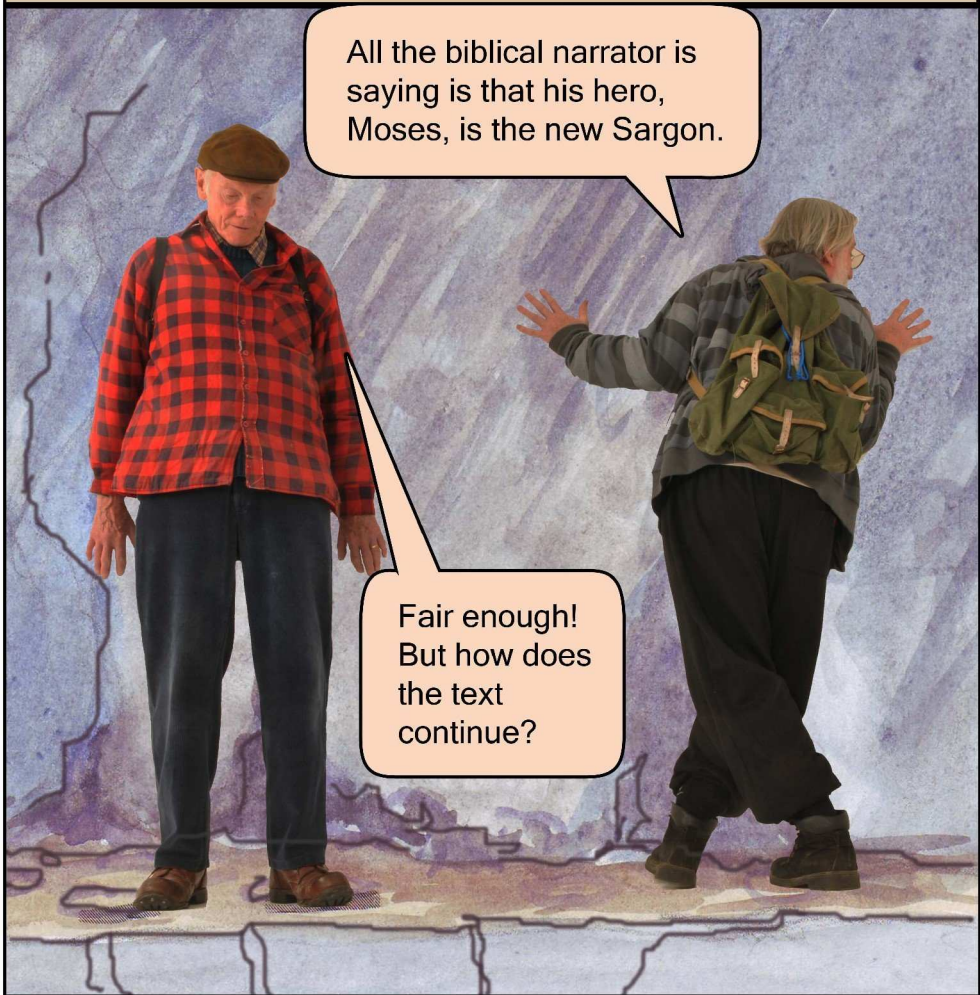
His mother saves him from death by placing him in a basket in the river. Fortunately an Egyptian princess finds him and adopts him as her son.



Ex 2

This is a direct crib from the legend of Sargon who arrives 'on stage' in exactly the same manner.

*My changeling mother conceived me, in secret she bore me.
She set me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen she sealed my lid.
She cast me into the river which rose not over me.
The river bore me up and carried me to Akki, the drawer of water.
Akki the drawer of water lifted me out as he dipped his ewer.
Akki the drawer of water, took me as his son and reared me.*



All the biblical narrator is saying is that his hero, Moses, is the new Sargon.

Fair enough!
But how does the text continue?

Well, it does so in a spectacularly different manner. Whereas Sargon was prepared to bide his time, Moses begins by committing an act of unbelievable political folly.



One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

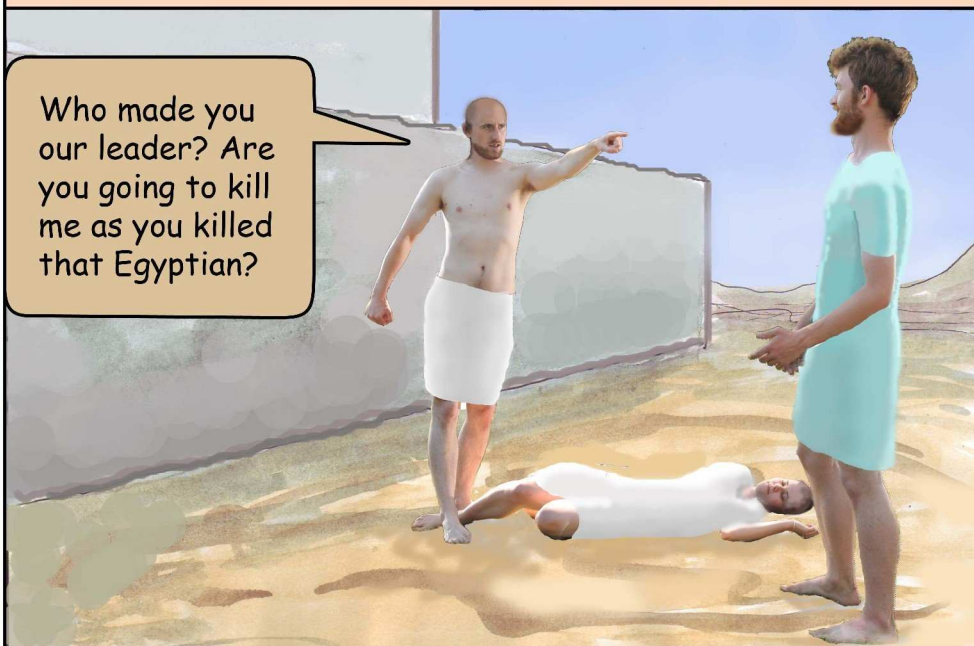
Ex 2. 11-12



Naively he thinks this act of 'solidarity' will ingratiate him with his people...



... but, of course, he couldn't have been more wrong.



Moses pays for his political ineptitude. He has to flee the country.

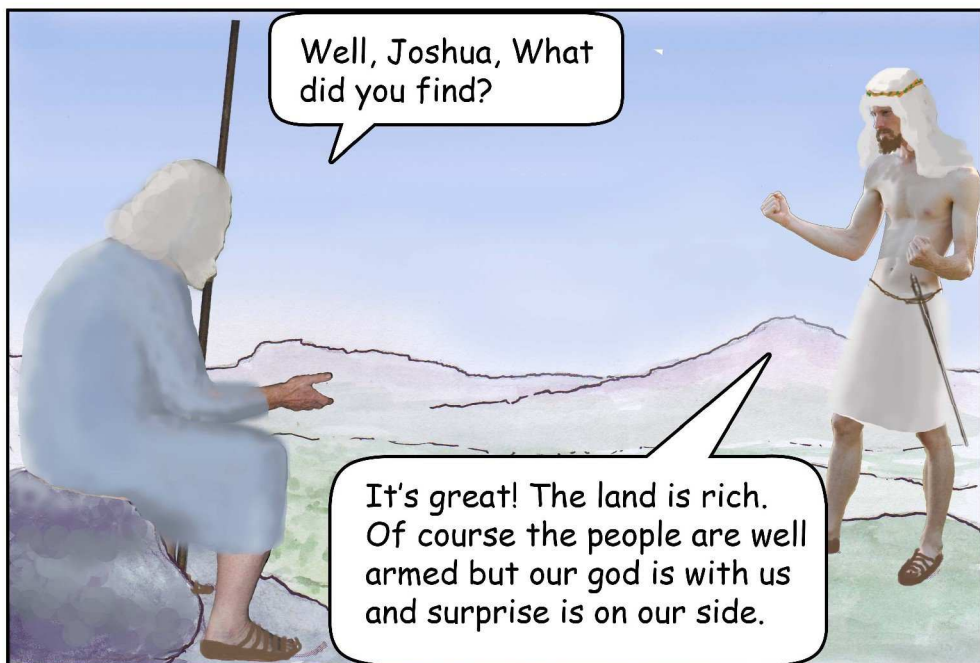


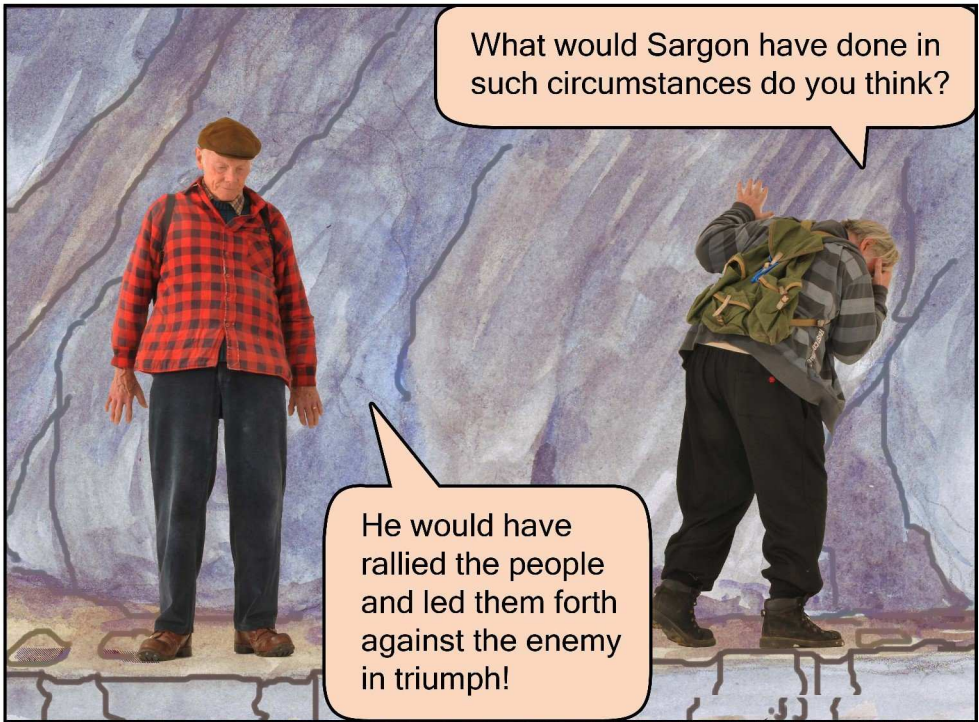
Perhaps the writer aimed to emphasise that his young hero had to learn by his mistakes? But no! That can't be right, for see how he ends his story.

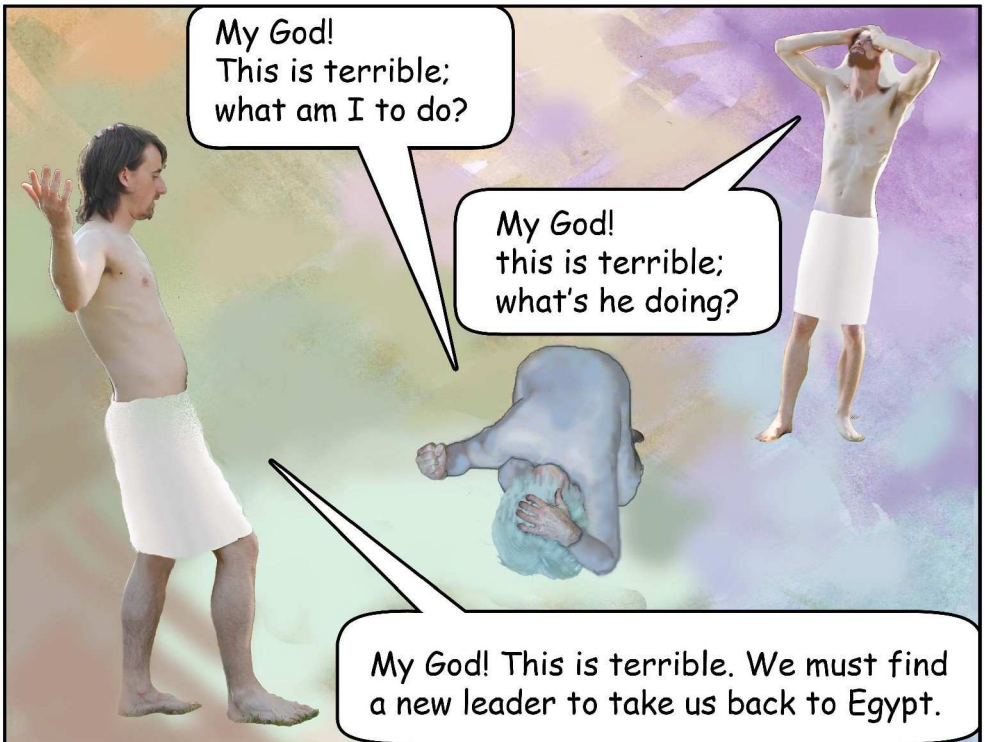
Read Num 13-14



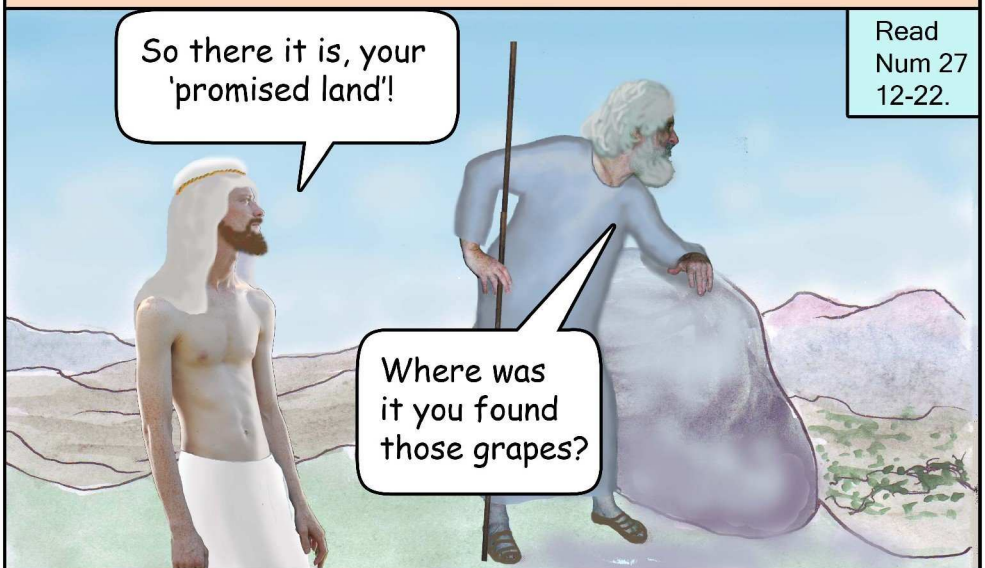
Moses has led the Israelites to the border of the promised land and spies sent out to reconnoitre are now returning.

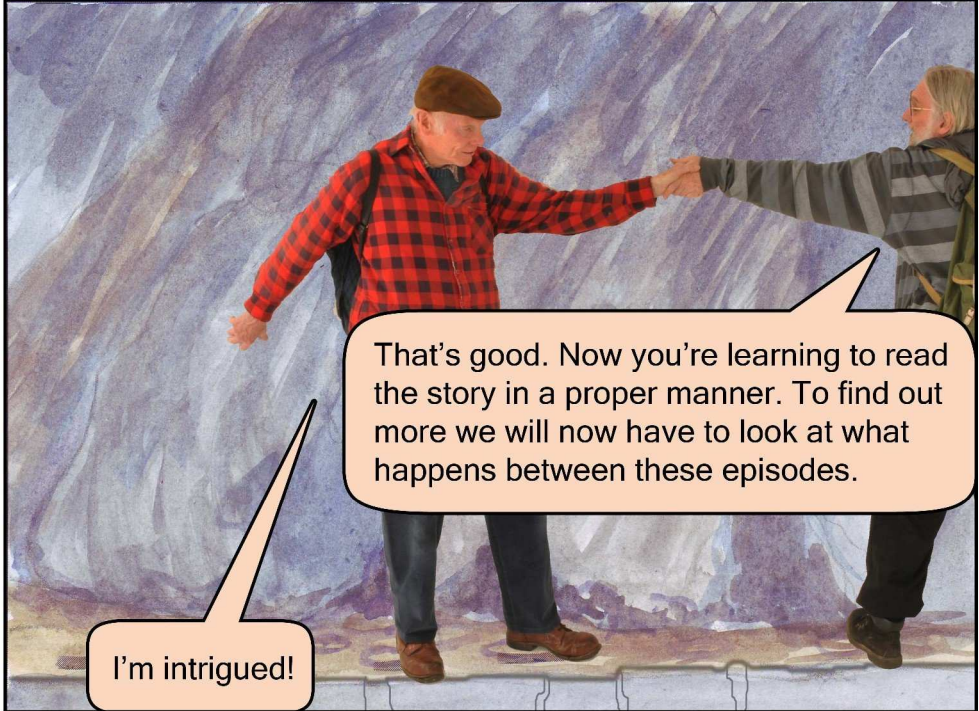
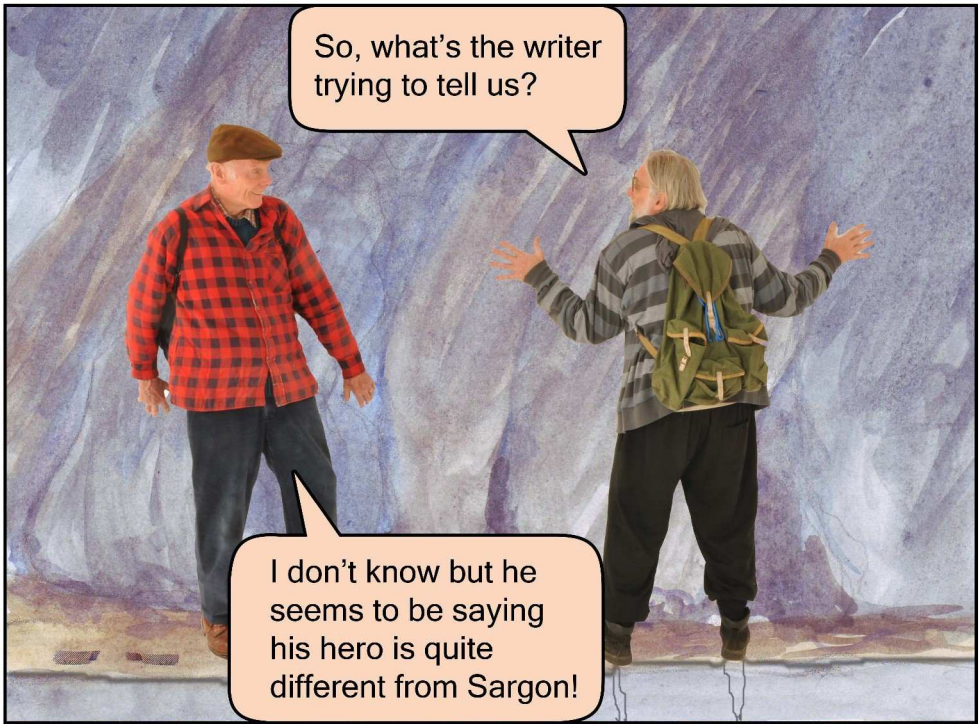






Because of his indecision Moses never got to the promised land and his story ends in failure, at least as we judge such things.





4

The Birth of the Marginal Ideology

Moses is preoccupied by his failure, especially when he hears the old King is dead, and a new regime in place.

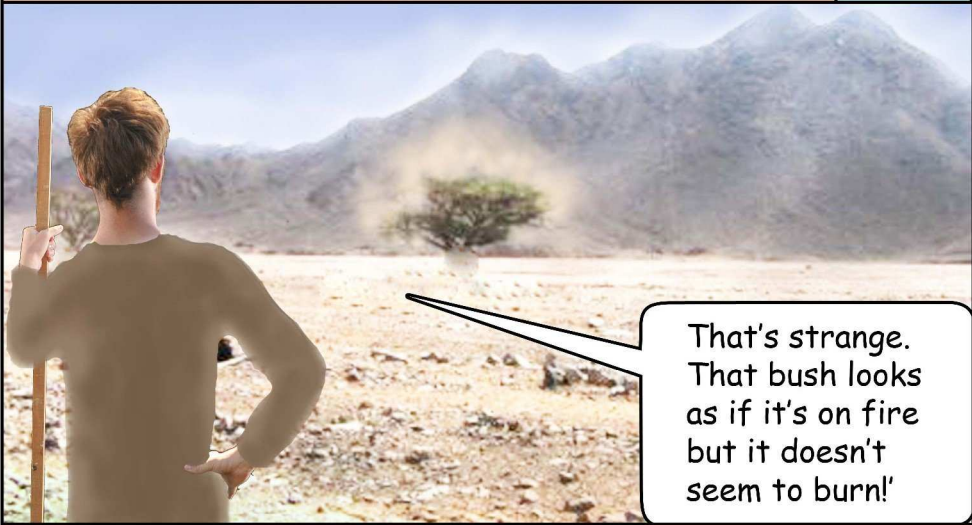


He recognises this as his opportunity, only, unlike Sargon he has difficulty in grabbing it. Once bitten he is, understandably, twice shy.



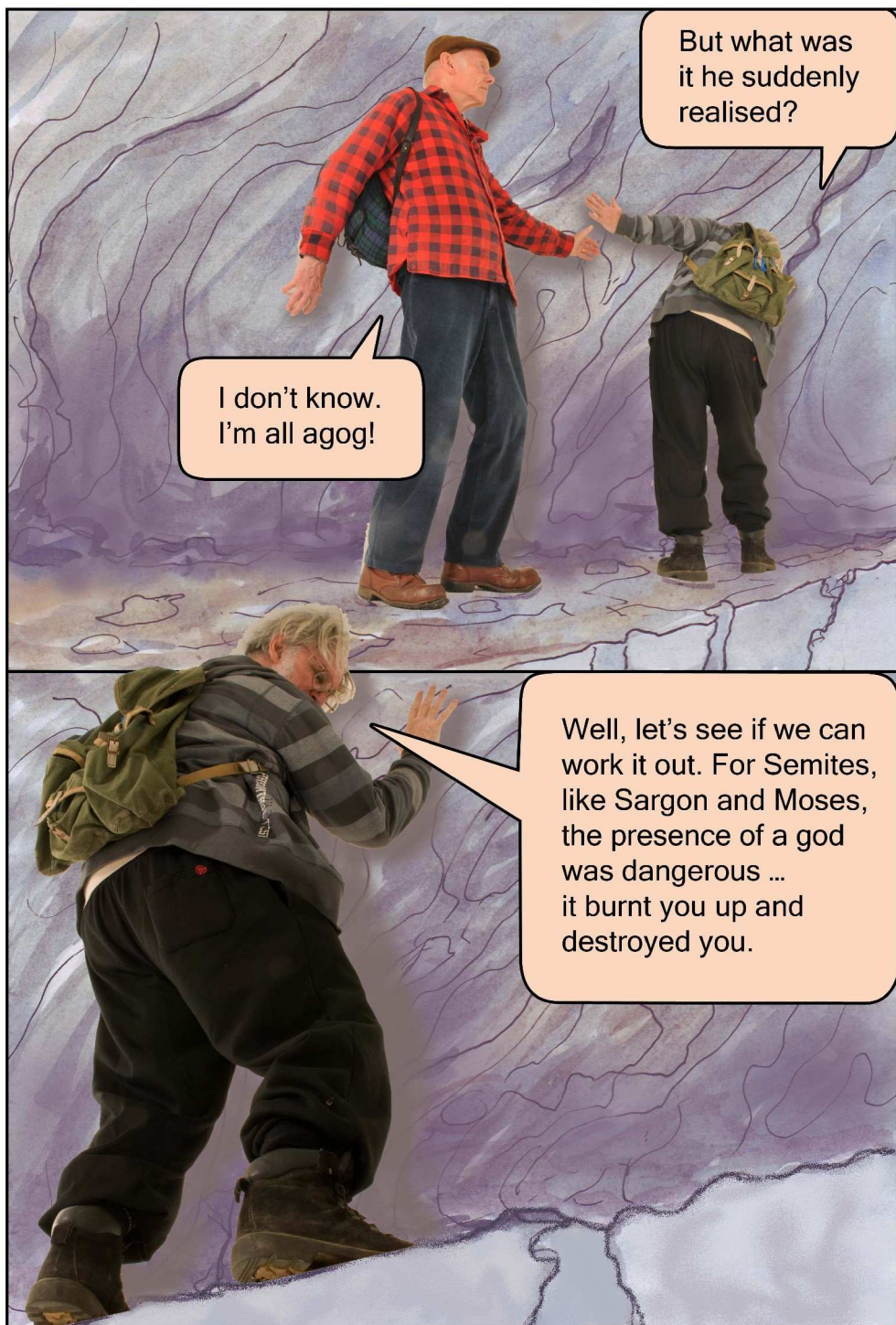
He's in the desert keeping his father-in-law's flocks when suddenly something catches his attention....

Ex 3

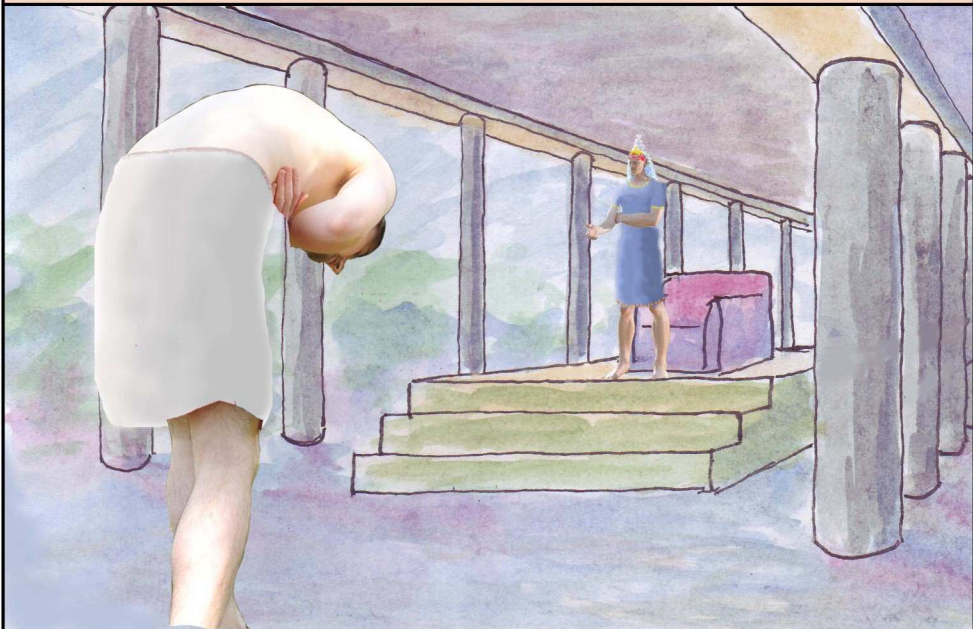


This causes him to do some lateral thinking and suddenly the penny drops.

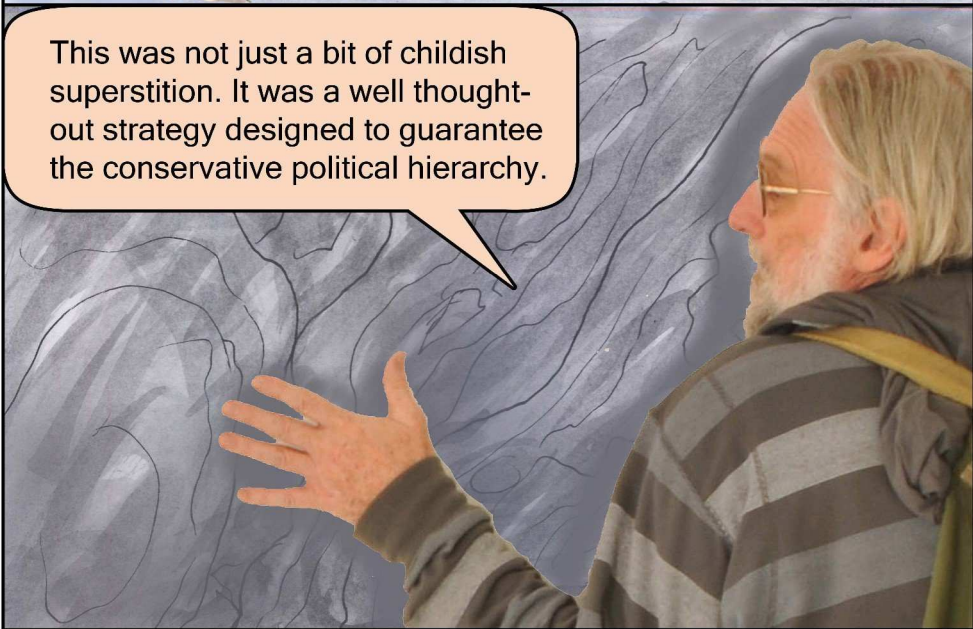




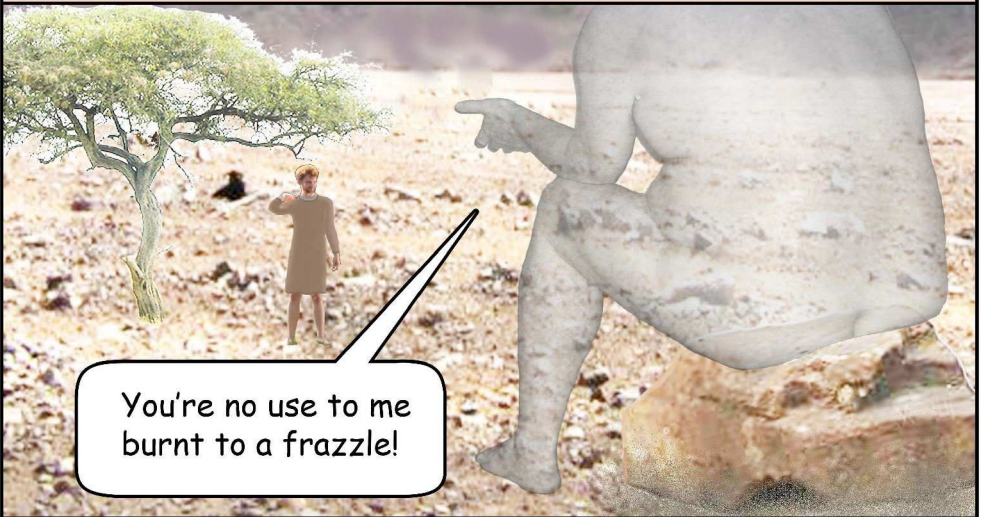
That's what made it necessary to speak to a god through an intermediary - a priest or in the last resort, the king himself, who was high priest.



This was not just a bit of childish superstition. It was a well thought-out strategy designed to guarantee the conservative political hierarchy.

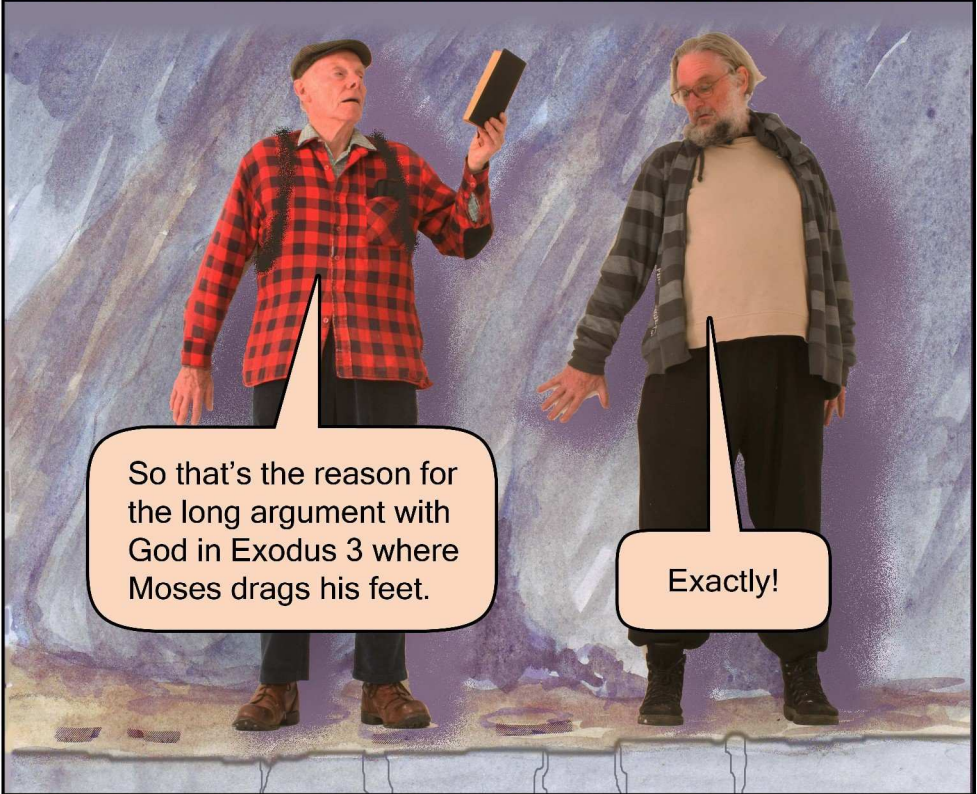


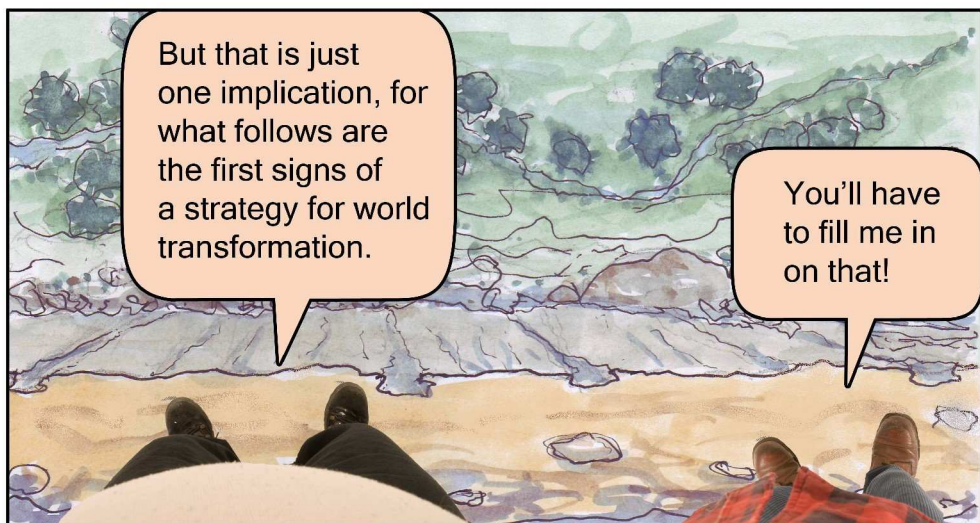
So what we have here is the complete reversal of this normal hierarchical situation. Instead of burning up his people this god insists on having an on-the-level relationship with them.



This does not imply that he and they are equals but it does imply a relationship in which both sides have responsibilities, a situation which the Hebrews spoke about as a covenant.

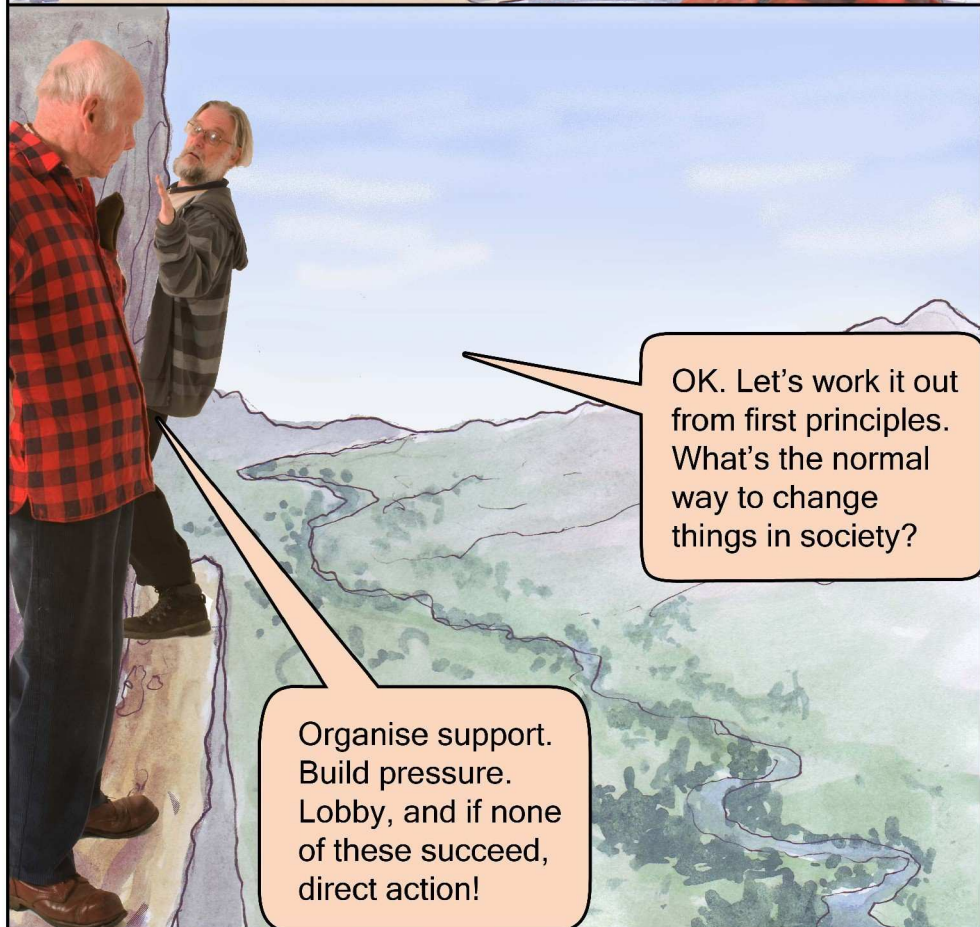






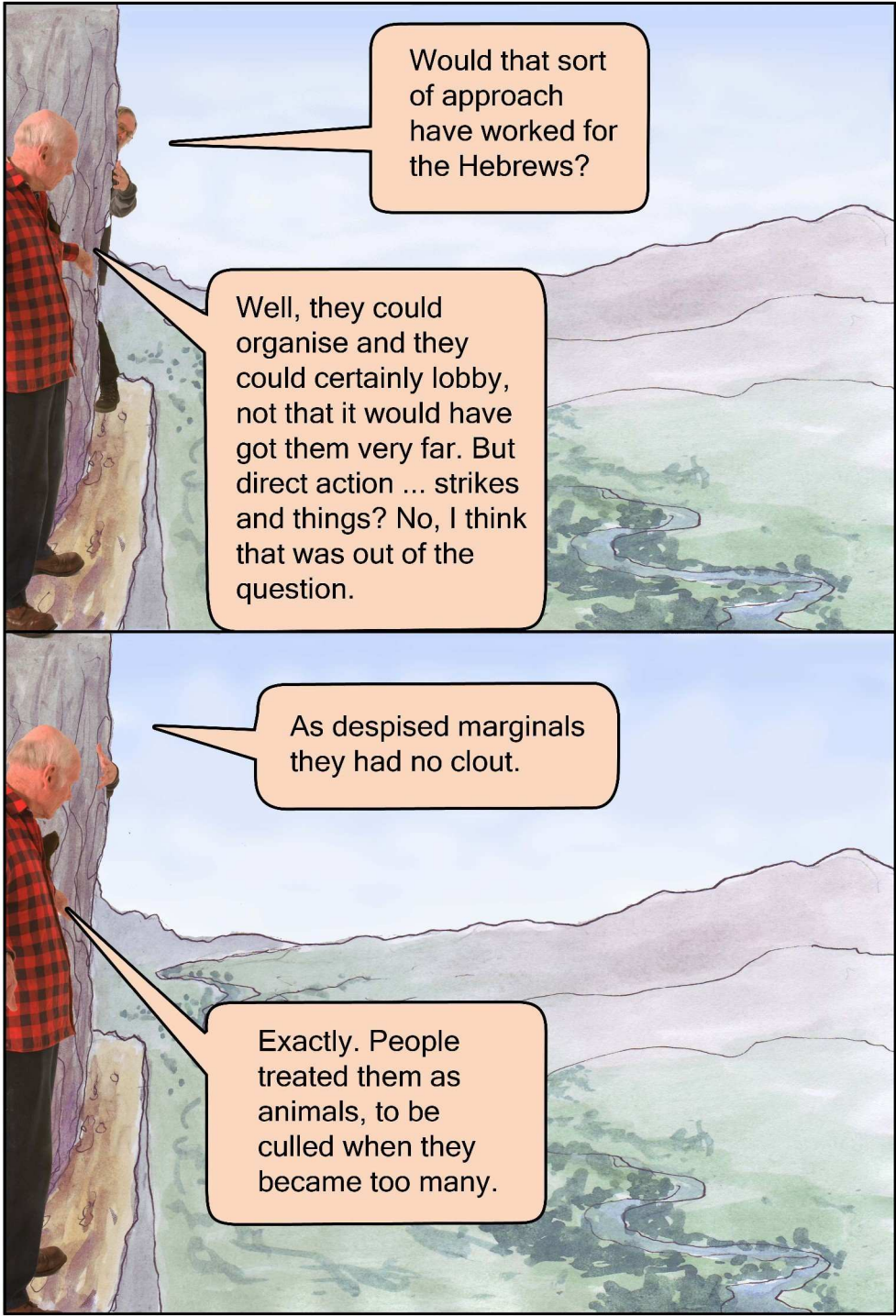
But that is just one implication, for what follows are the first signs of a strategy for world transformation.

You'll have to fill me in on that!



OK. Let's work it out from first principles. What's the normal way to change things in society?

Organise support. Build pressure. Lobby, and if none of these succeed, direct action!

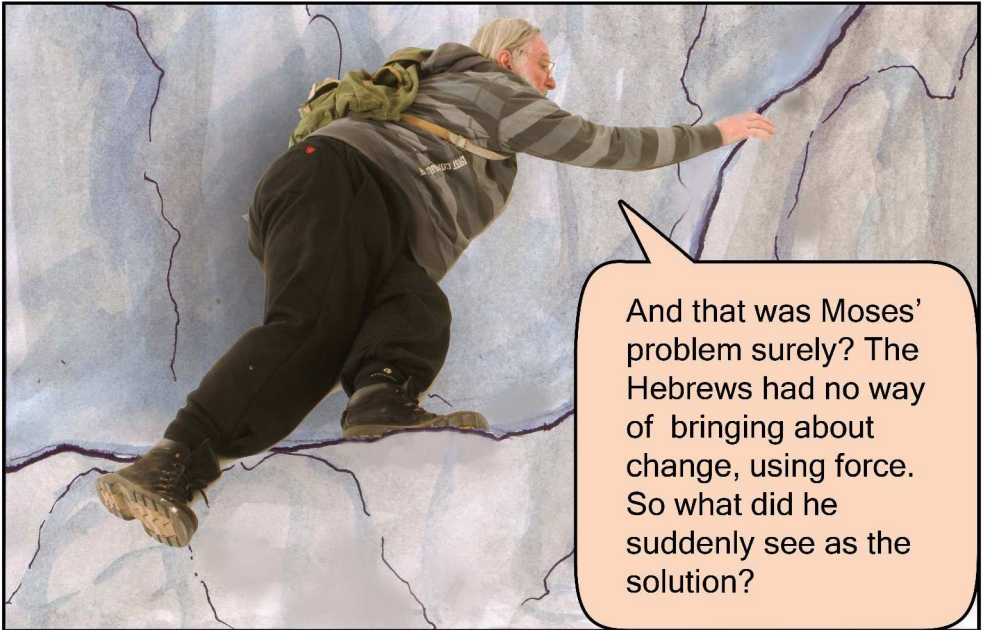


Would that sort of approach have worked for the Hebrews?

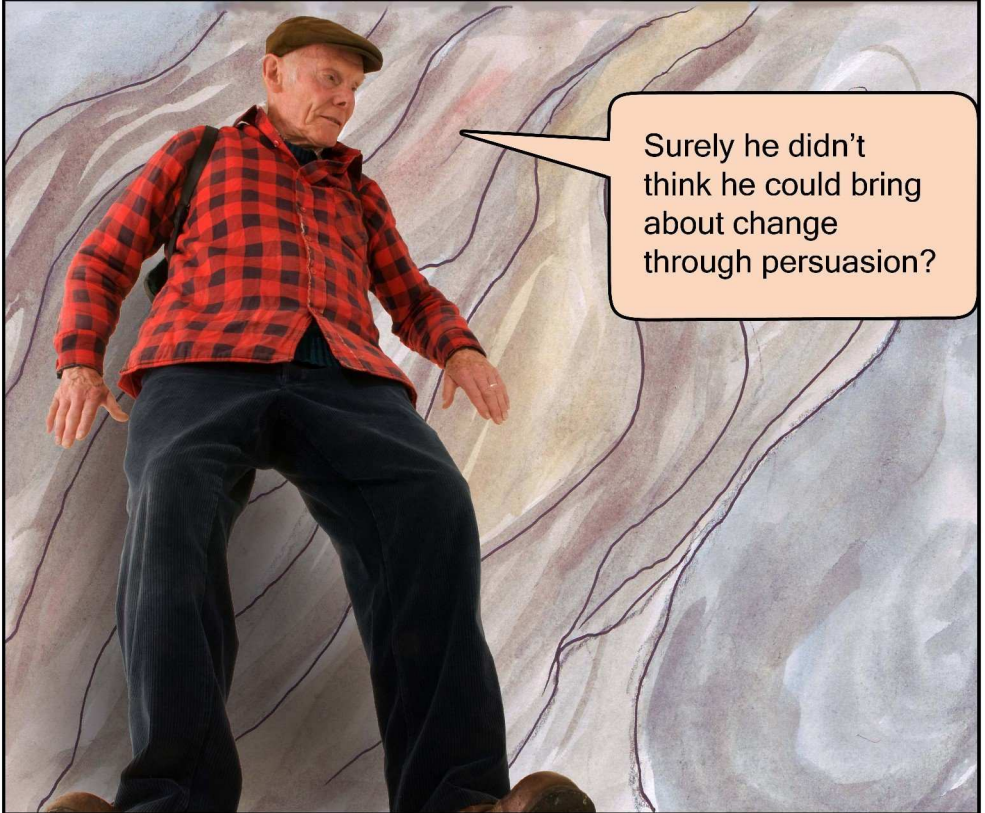
Well, they could organise and they could certainly lobby, not that it would have got them very far. But direct action ... strikes and things? No, I think that was out of the question.

As despised marginals they had no clout.

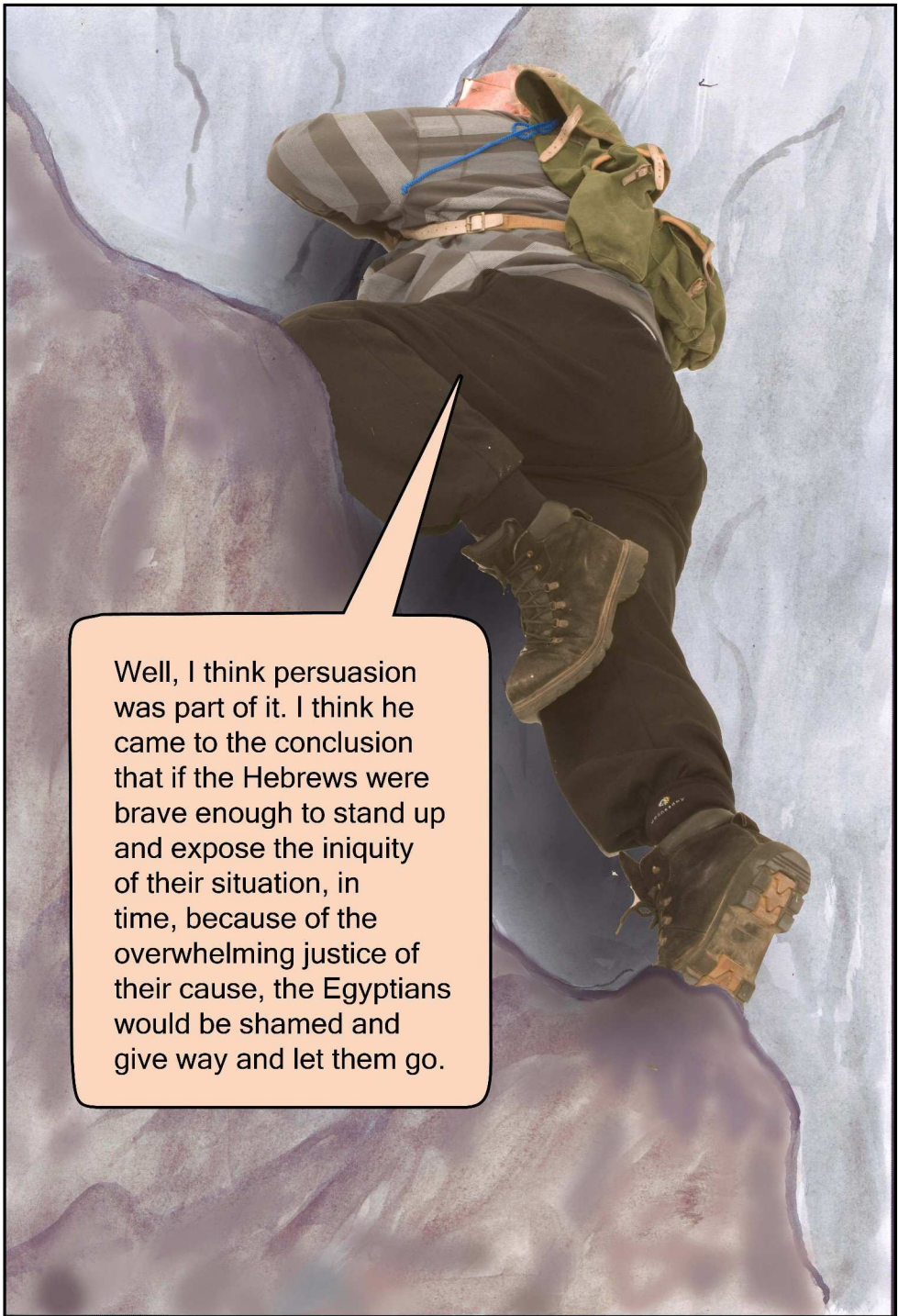
Exactly. People treated them as animals, to be culled when they became too many.



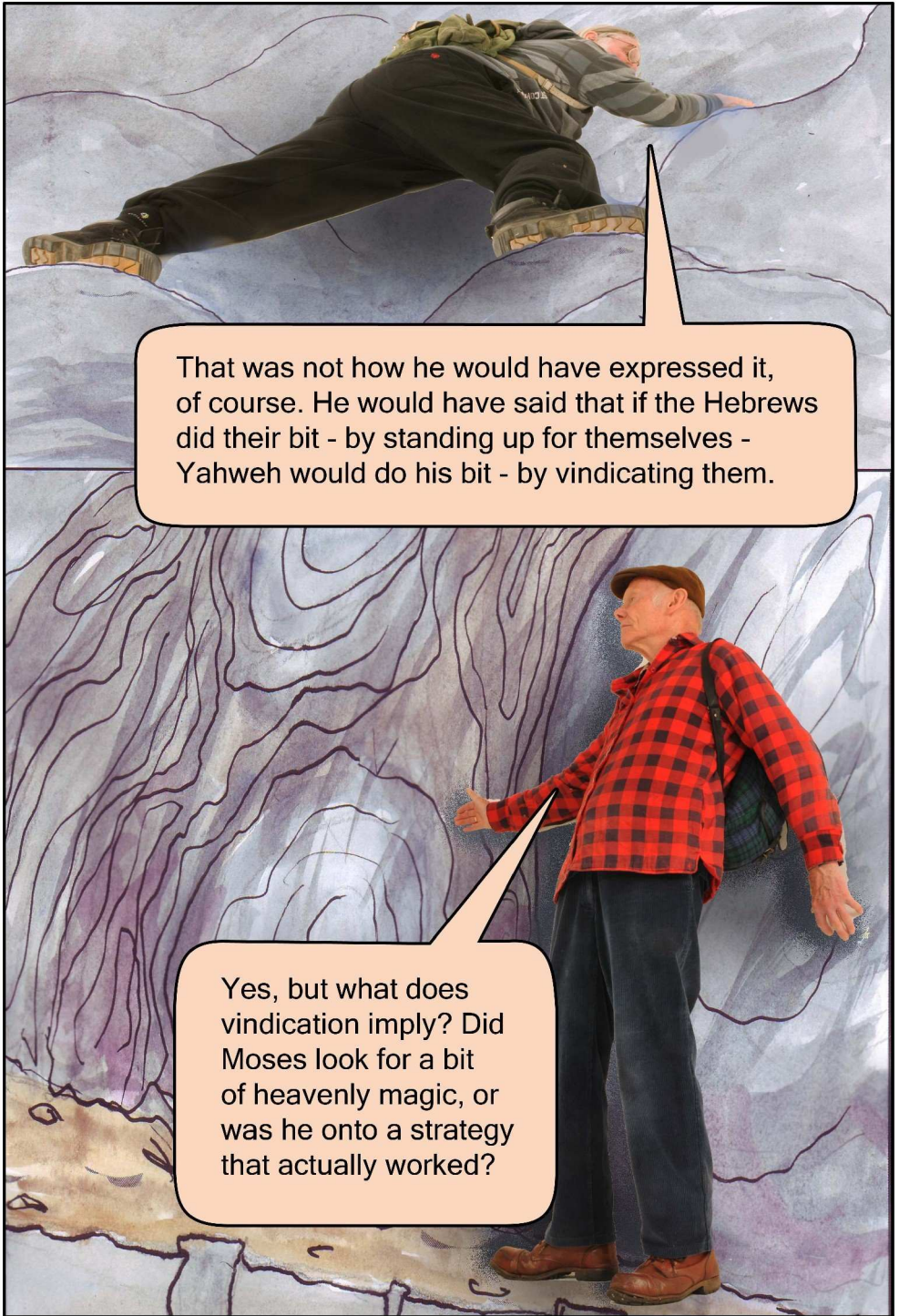
And that was Moses' problem surely? The Hebrews had no way of bringing about change, using force. So what did he suddenly see as the solution?



Surely he didn't think he could bring about change through persuasion?

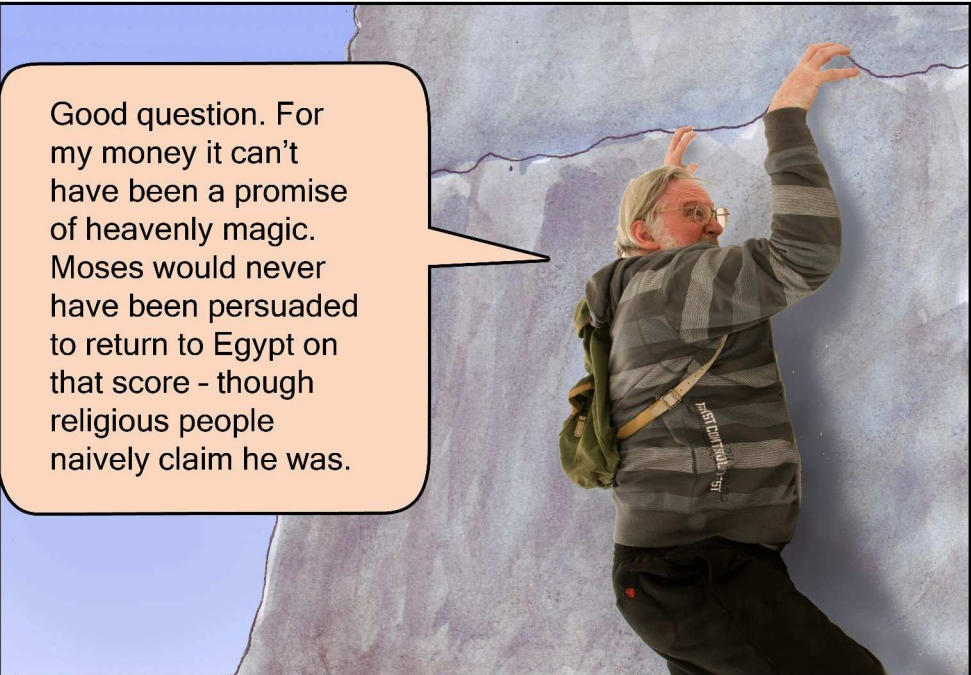


Well, I think persuasion was part of it. I think he came to the conclusion that if the Hebrews were brave enough to stand up and expose the iniquity of their situation, in time, because of the overwhelming justice of their cause, the Egyptians would be shamed and give way and let them go.

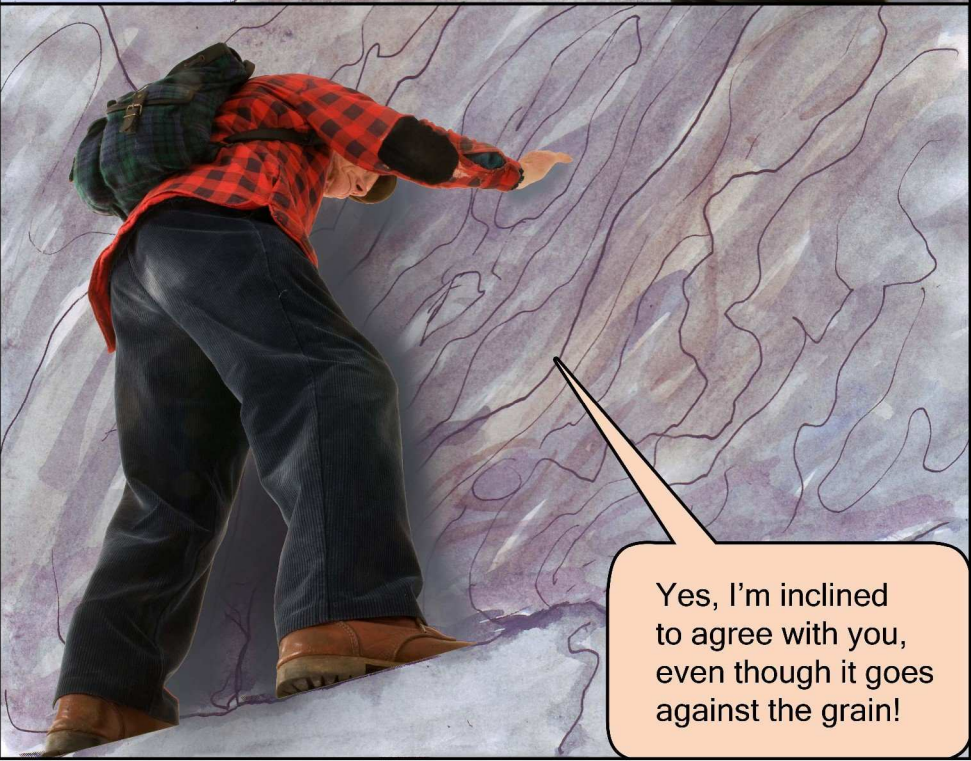


That was not how he would have expressed it, of course. He would have said that if the Hebrews did their bit - by standing up for themselves - Yahweh would do his bit - by vindicating them.

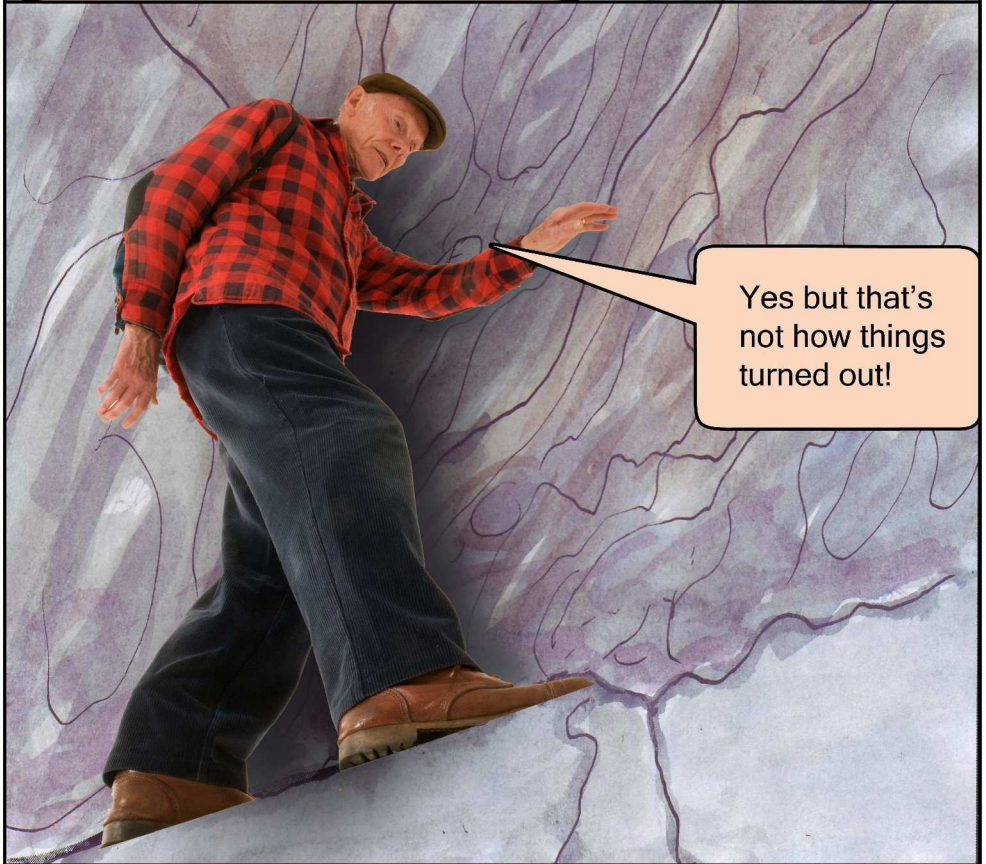
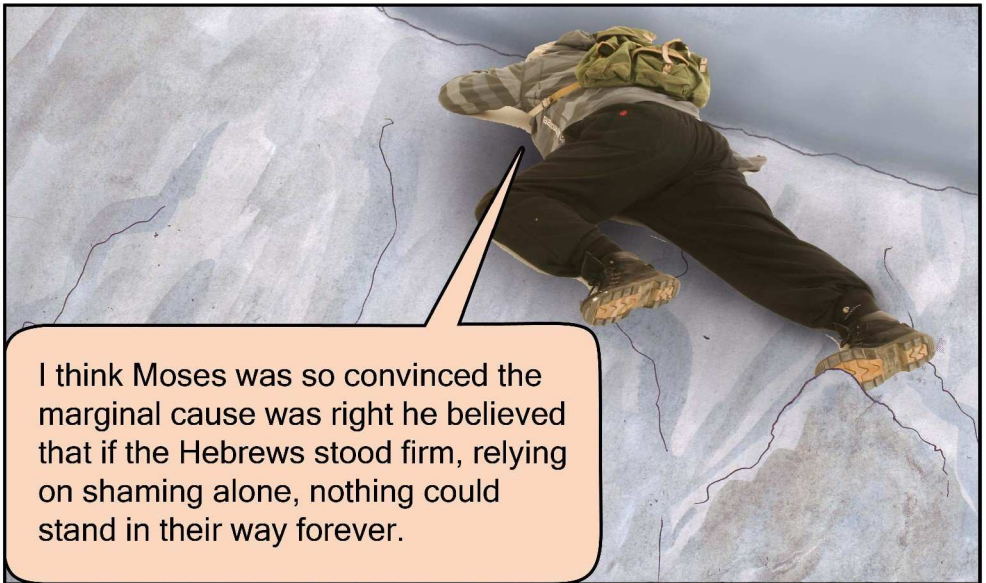
Yes, but what does vindication imply? Did Moses look for a bit of heavenly magic, or was he onto a strategy that actually worked?



Good question. For my money it can't have been a promise of heavenly magic. Moses would never have been persuaded to return to Egypt on that score - though religious people naively claim he was.



Yes, I'm inclined to agree with you, even though it goes against the grain!



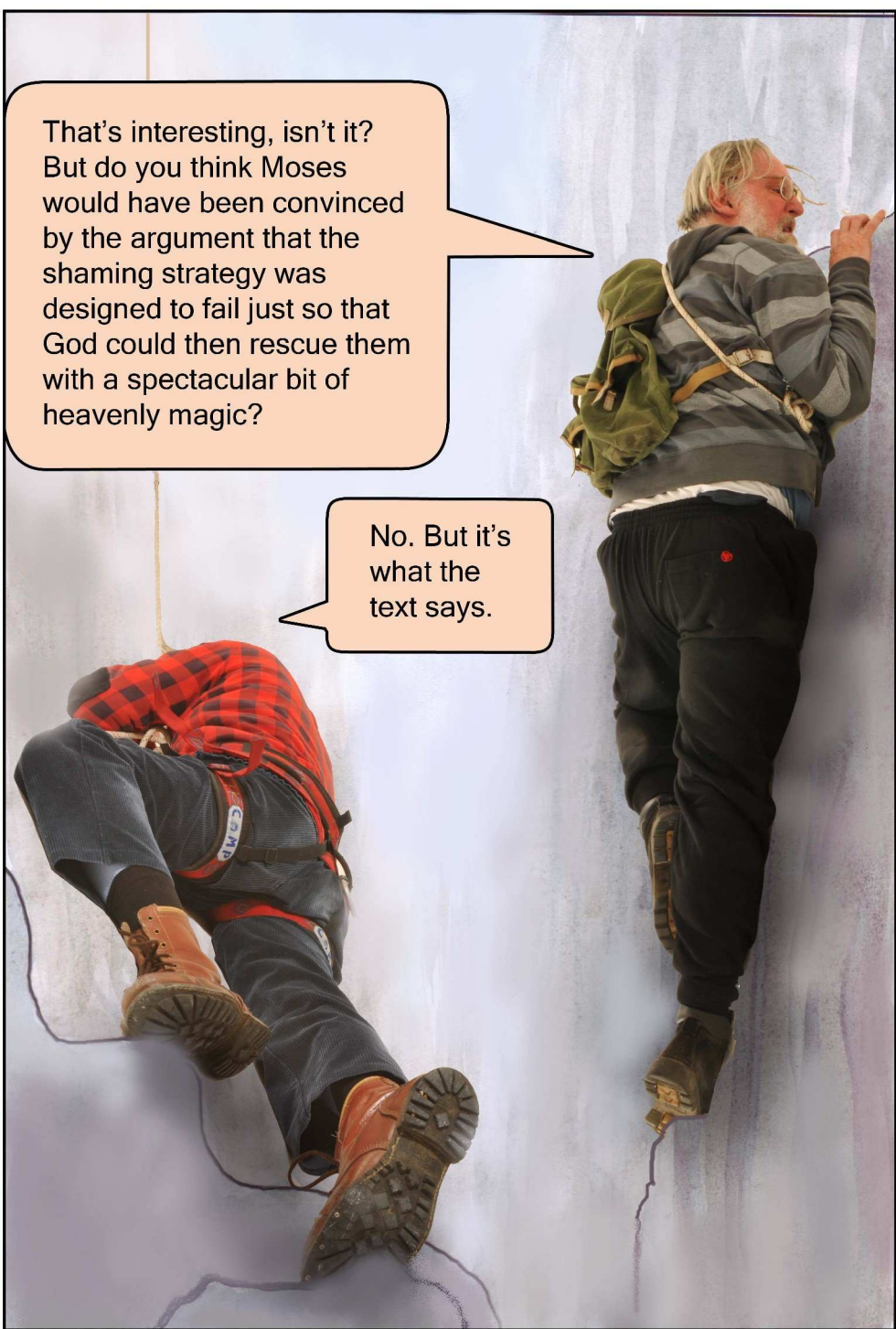
No. You're right. In the end the Egyptians weren't shamed and liberation came about as a result of the Hebrews doing a spectacular bunk!



In fact, the text claims Yahweh foresaw this from the very beginning.*

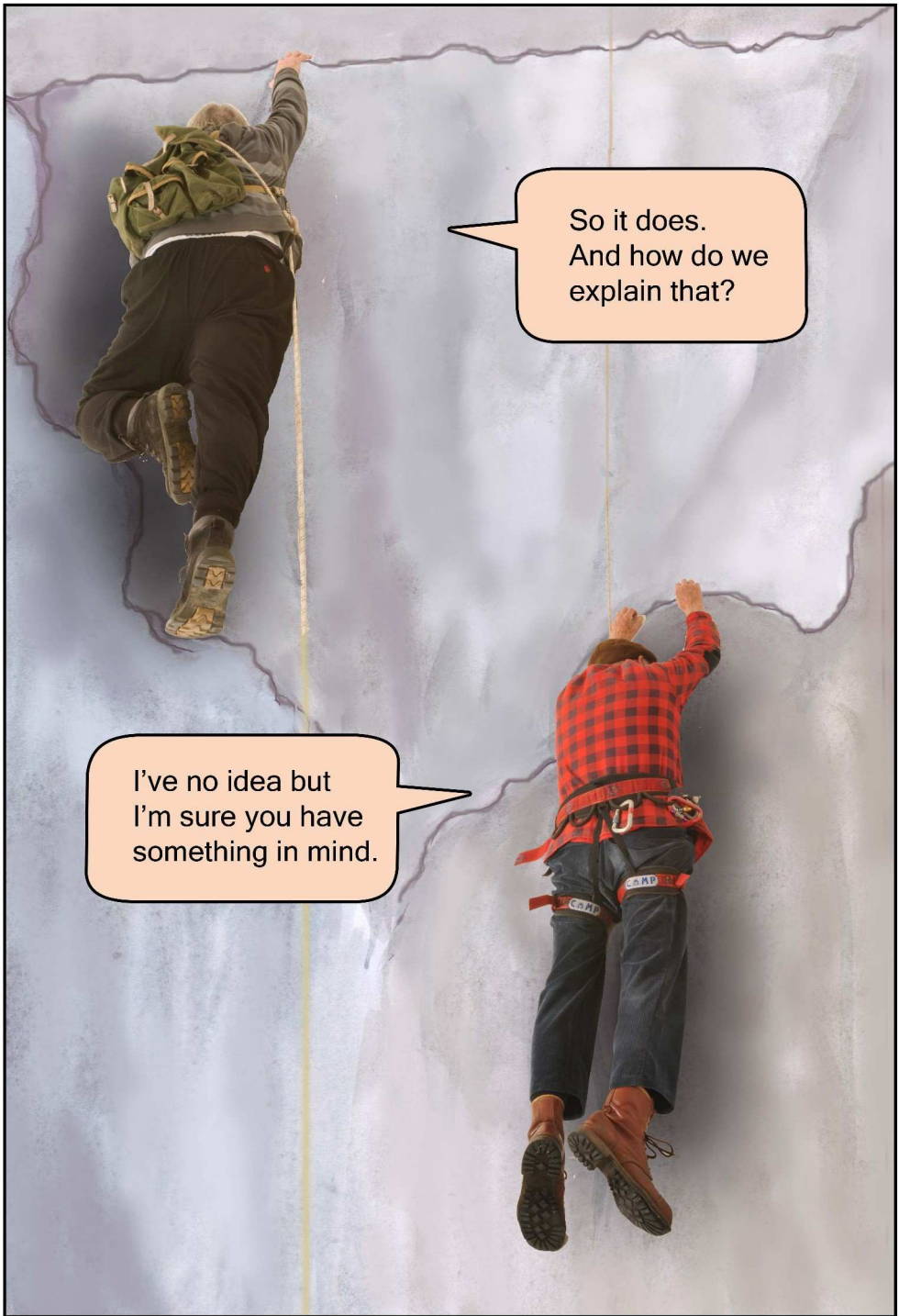


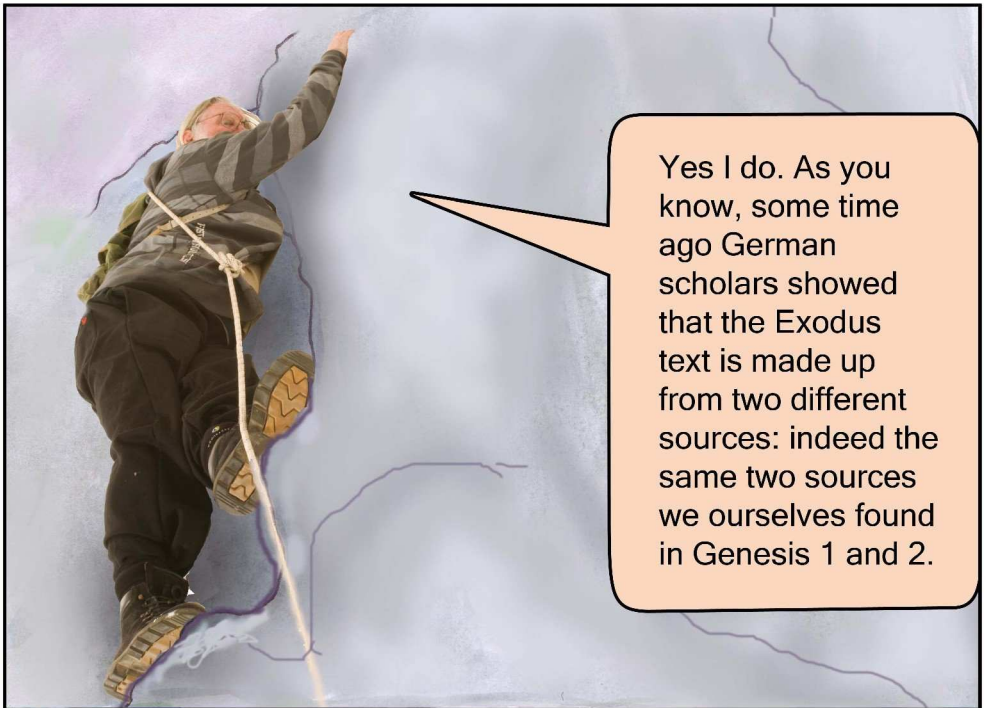
* In Ex 3. 19-22

A photograph of two men ice climbing a vertical wall. The man on the left is wearing a red and black plaid shirt, dark pants, and brown boots. He is positioned lower on the wall, with his back to the camera. The man on the right is wearing a grey and black striped hoodie, dark pants, and black boots. He is positioned higher on the wall, facing the camera. Both men are wearing harnesses and have ropes attached to them. The background is a light blue and white textured wall.

That's interesting, isn't it?
But do you think Moses
would have been convinced
by the argument that the
shaming strategy was
designed to fail just so that
God could then rescue them
with a spectacular bit of
heavenly magic?

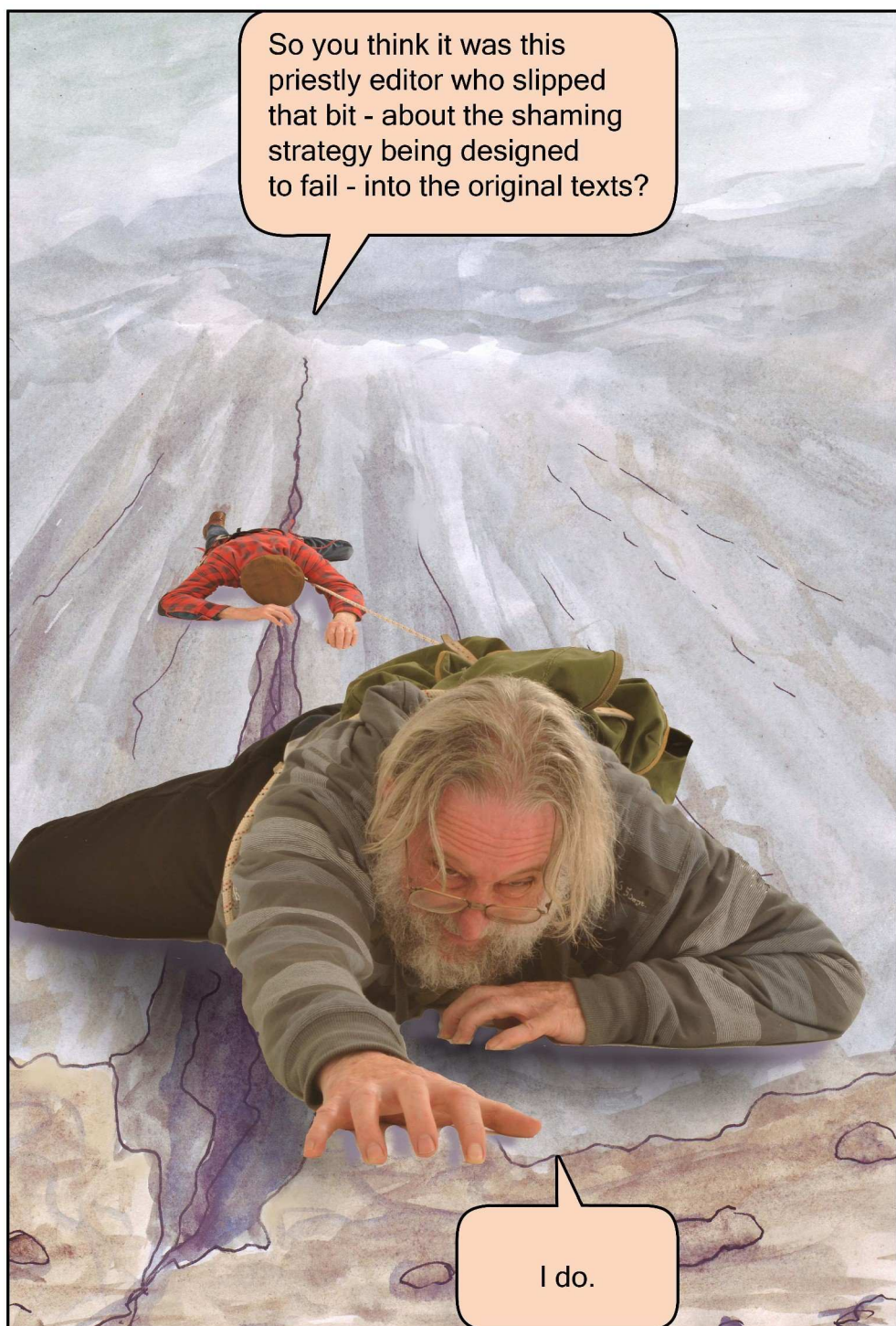
No. But it's
what the
text says.

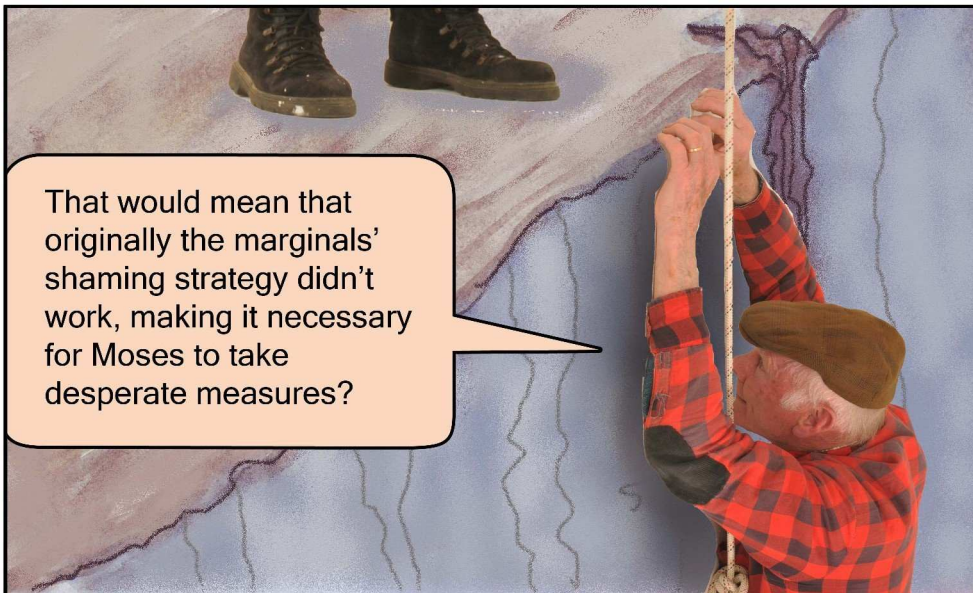




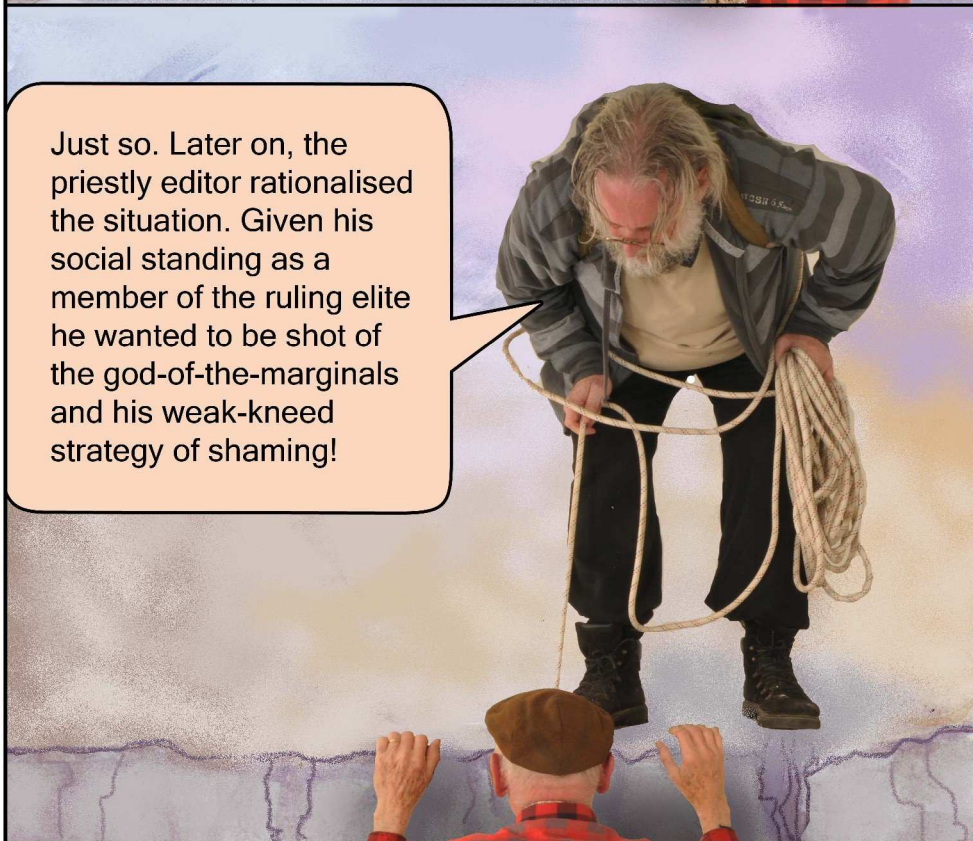
The interesting thing is that this idea of a strategy designed to fail - so that God can intervene with a spectacular performance - appears overwhelmingly in the authoritarian priestly source

... while being quite absent in the other source in which Yahweh operates on-the-level as the god of the marginals.





That would mean that originally the marginals' shaming strategy didn't work, making it necessary for Moses to take desperate measures?



Just so. Later on, the priestly editor rationalised the situation. Given his social standing as a member of the ruling elite he wanted to be shot of the god-of-the-marginals and his weak-kneed strategy of shaming!

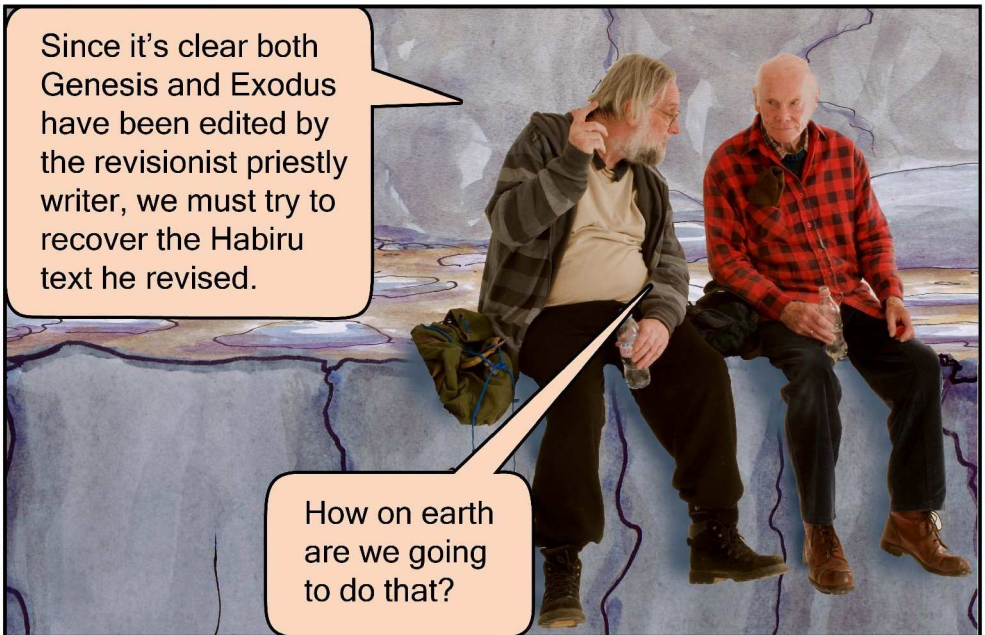
He, therefore, introduced some muscular conservative make-believe - what you would call 'religion' - into the text. This was a great shame since the original story was so much more down-to-earth and inspiring.

Are you ready to return to the Genesis story to see how it reads, now that we know the perspective from which it was written?

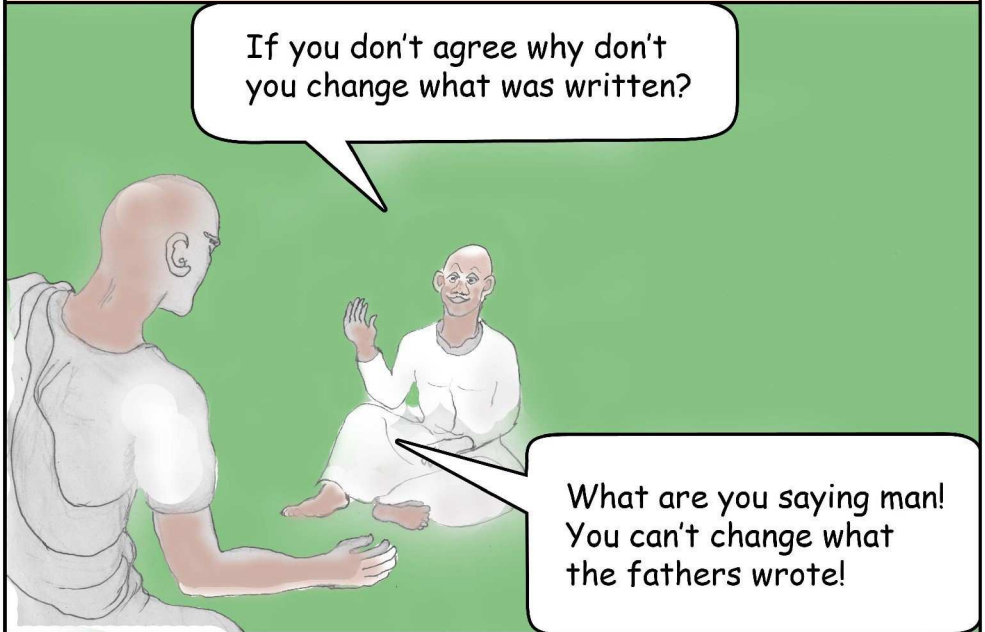
Certainly, but I'd like to come back to this Exodus story since I still have some questions to ask about it.

5

The Garden of Eden



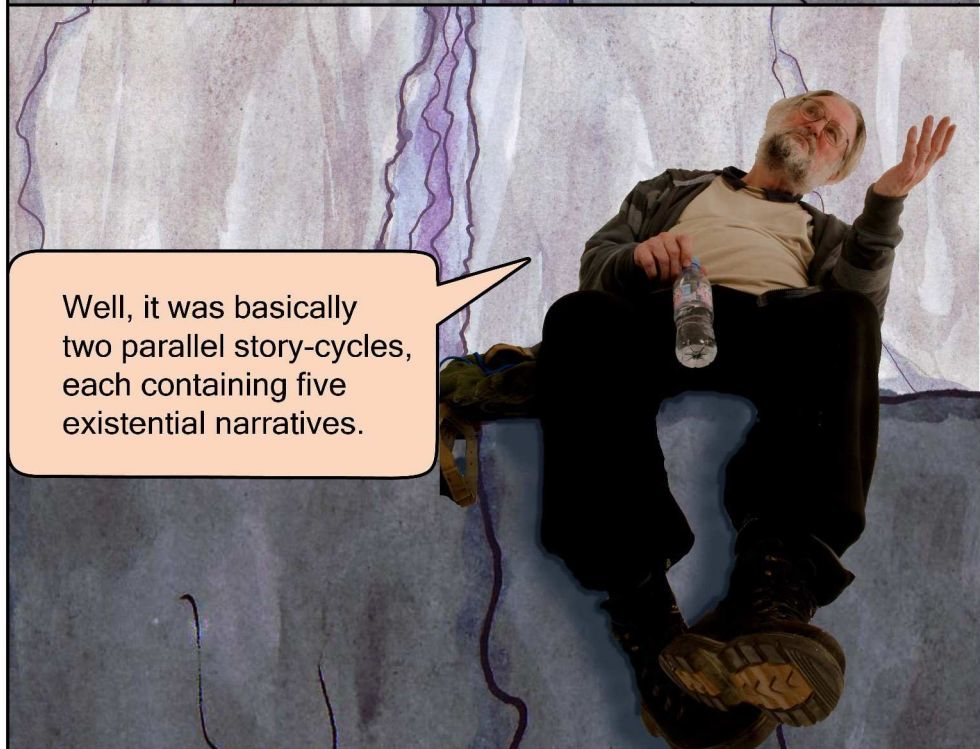
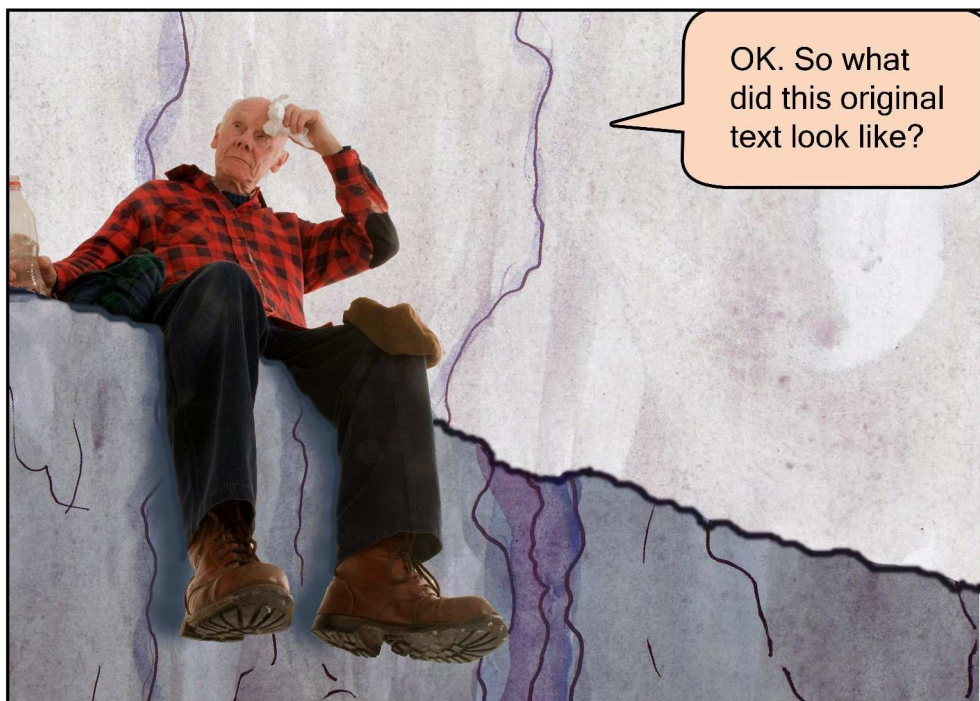
It's not as difficult as you might think for, fortunately, he restricted himself to adding bits. Had he felt free to alter the original text, we would have been in deep trouble, but apparently he didn't.



Further to this, a lot of work has already been done on the text, giving us a head start.

Source Criticism
Do Not Disturb

This means that, if we concentrate on the construction of the book of Genesis as a whole, it isn't that difficult to see what the original text basically consisted of.

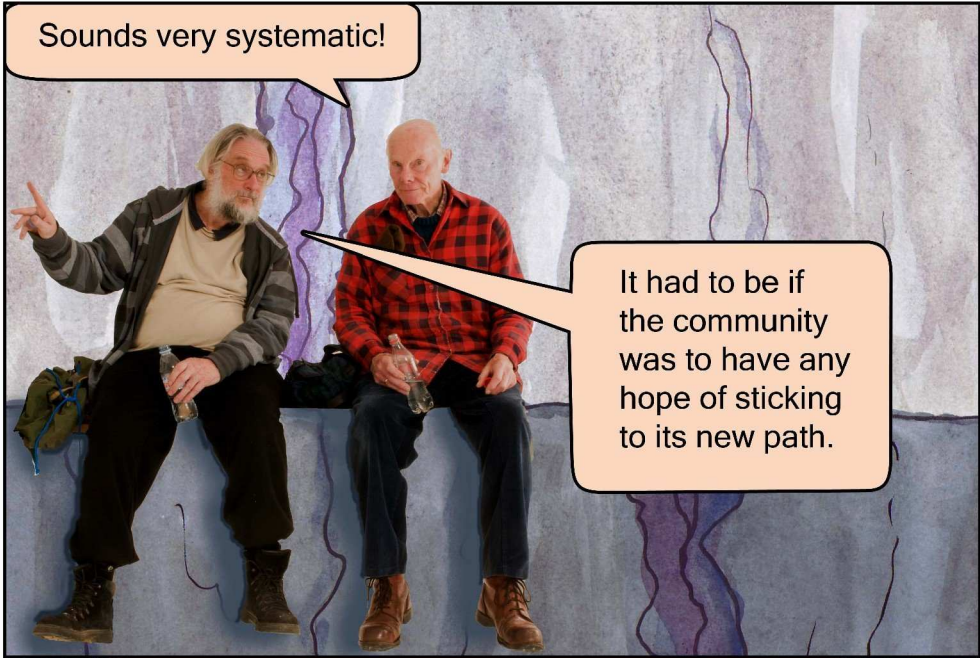


First came a Myth Cycle, spelling out the main lines of the new Hebrew community's marginal worldview.

1. Adam and Eve
2. Cain and Abel
3. The Flood
4. The Tower of Babel
5. The Sons of Noah

Then came a Patriarchal Cycle, dealing with the geographical scene in which this community, with its new marginal perspective, had to operate.

1. Abraham in Egypt
2. Abraham and Ishmael
3. Abraham and Lot
4. Jacob and Esau
5. The Rape of Dinah



Sounds very systematic!

It had to be if the community was to have any hope of sticking to its new path.

Let's take the Myth Cycle first. We have already noticed that, unlike Genesis 1 and the Sumerian myths, Genesis 2 isn't hierarchical or authoritarian.

If a Hebrew had written it, that's only what you would expect.

Exactly. Marginals are turned off by our authoritarian 'civilised' attitudes. They accept the world as it actually is but our luck, in having a recognised place in society, makes us conceited. Consequently we pretend to ourselves that we have been put in charge of the world and it is this pretence, this hypocrisy, which falsifies everything.

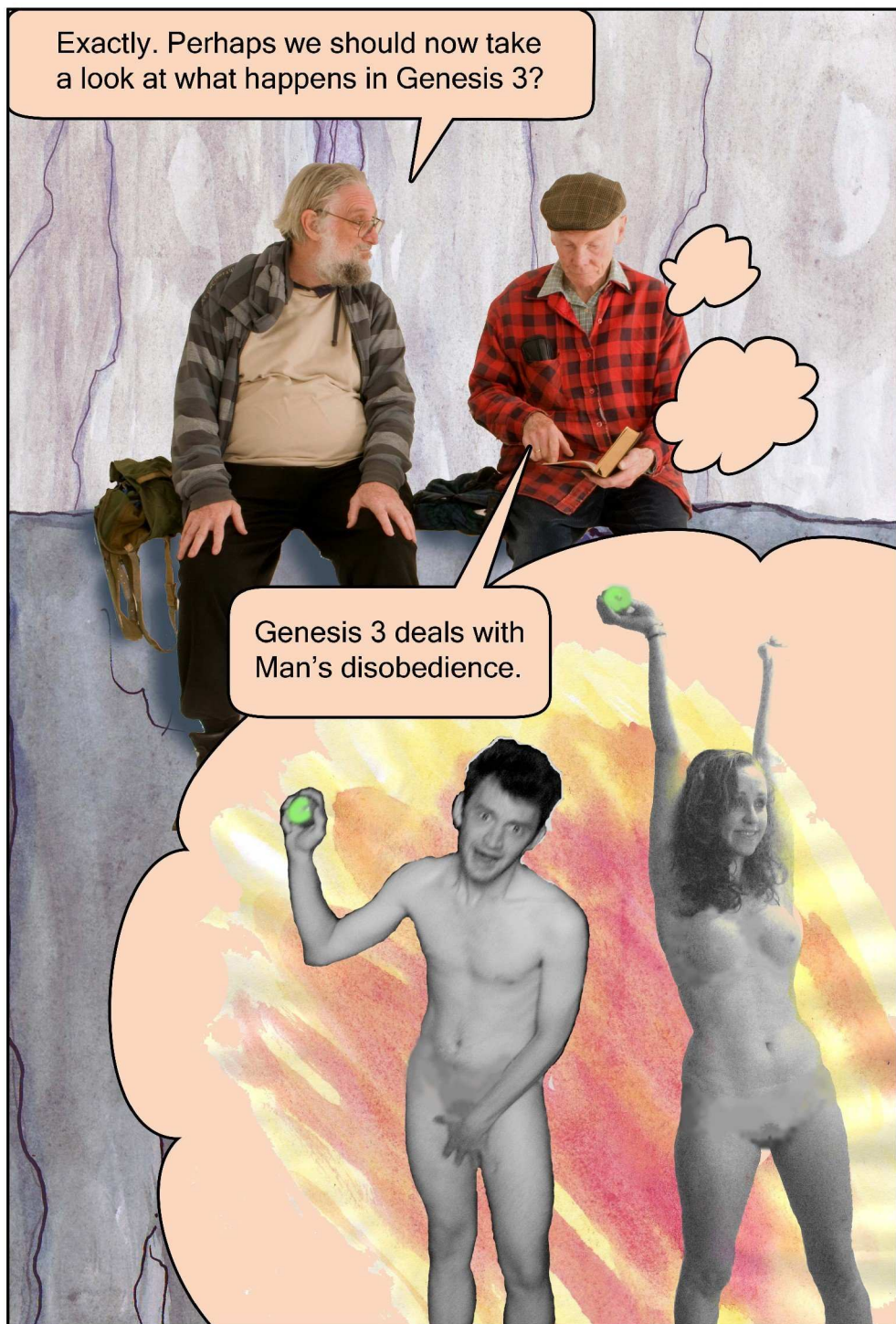


Yes, I can understand that. Marginals see the animals playing out their natural roles and so assume mankind will simply do the same with no pretence.



Exactly. Perhaps we should now take a look at what happens in Genesis 3?

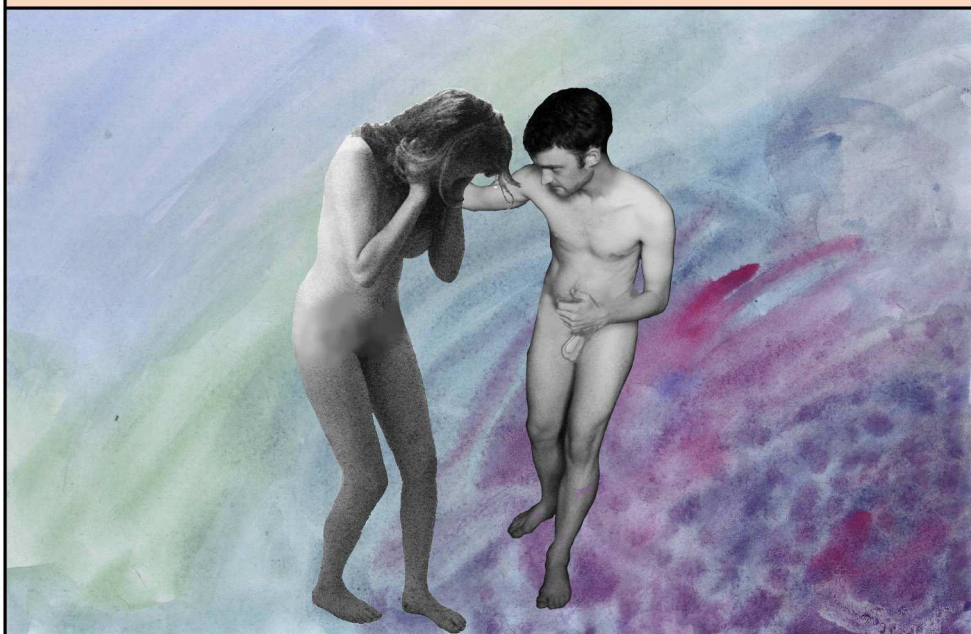
Genesis 3 deals with Man's disobedience.



God puts man and woman in the garden, telling them not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but, of course, they do.



So he slings them out of the garden for being disobedient and they lose everything.



That's certainly how the story
is usually told but what sort of
a god does such a story-line imply?

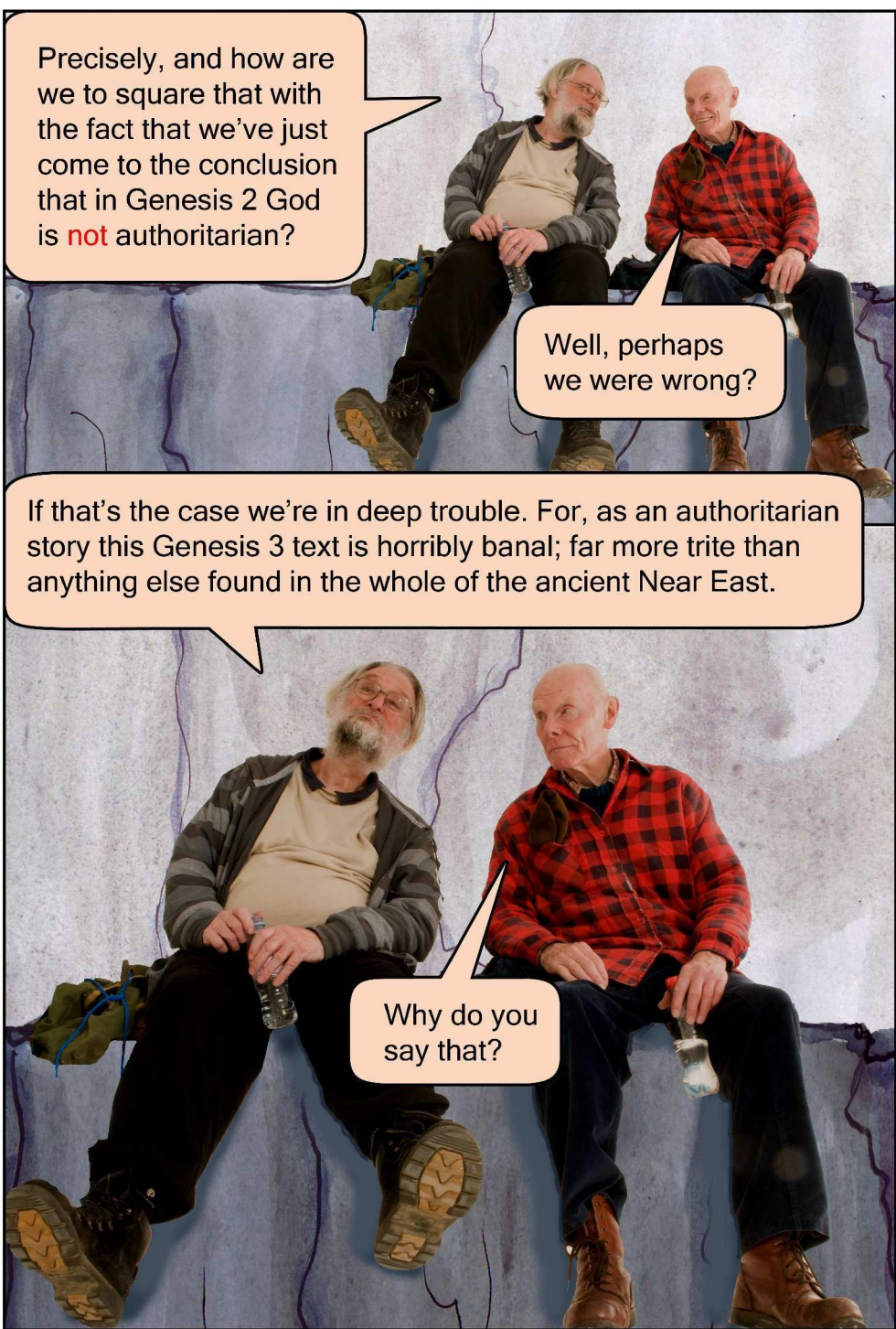
I'm sorry.
I don't
understand.



Well, what sort of a god creates a creature, puts it in a garden with instructions to feed itself and then places in the very same garden a tree whose highly desirable fruit the creature is forbidden, on pain of death, to eat?

Put like that he sounds rather twisted: a puritanical god who enjoys tempting creatures and punishing them when they inevitably fail.





Precisely, and how are we to square that with the fact that we've just come to the conclusion that in Genesis 2 God is **not** authoritarian?

Well, perhaps we were wrong?

If that's the case we're in deep trouble. For, as an authoritarian story this Genesis 3 text is horribly banal; far more trite than anything else found in the whole of the ancient Near East.

Why do you say that?

Well, let's face it. All the stories from the ancient Near East are authoritarian. But none of them are built on the mind-numbing pattern of tempting people so that they can be punished.



So, if this is indeed the pattern on which Genesis 3 is built, we should dismiss it as politically sick and devoid of interest!



I cannot believe that is the case!

Neither can I. But it's not simply that reading Genesis 3 in this way reduces the story to drivel; it also means it makes no sense. For punishment never arrives. Adam and Eve are not executed.

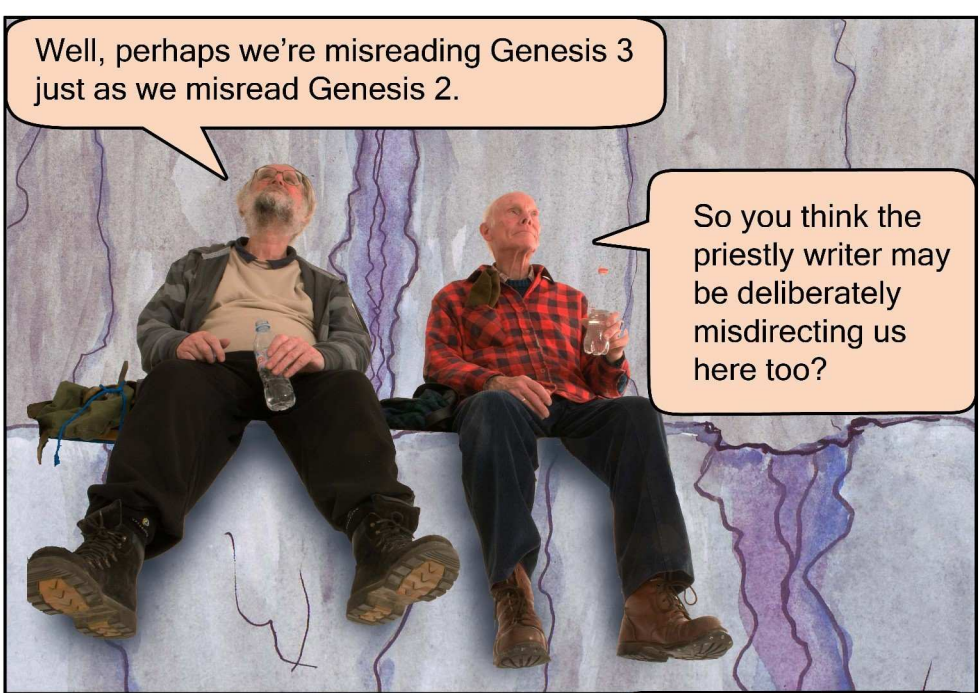


Perhaps that's because God is merciful?

That's not an act of mercy. That's the act of an authoritarian weakling who makes foolish rules only to break them when he finds they don't work!

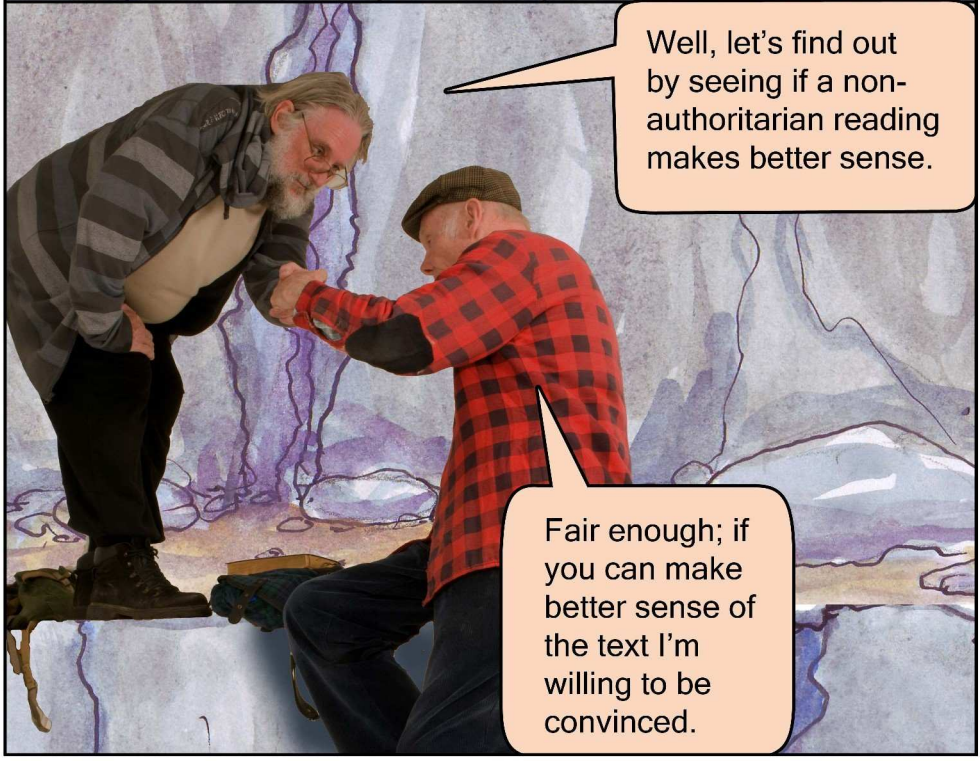


We seem to have got ourselves into a dreadful mess. Is there any way out?



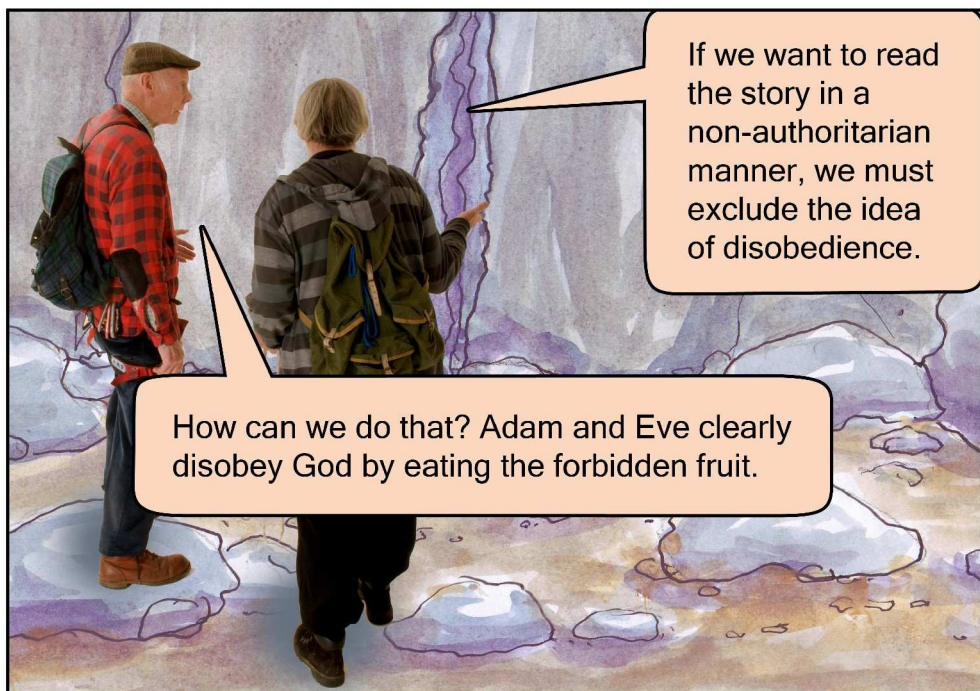
Well, perhaps we're misreading Genesis 3 just as we misread Genesis 2.

So you think the priestly writer may be deliberately misdirecting us here too?



Well, let's find out by seeing if a non-authoritarian reading makes better sense.

Fair enough; if you can make better sense of the text I'm willing to be convinced.



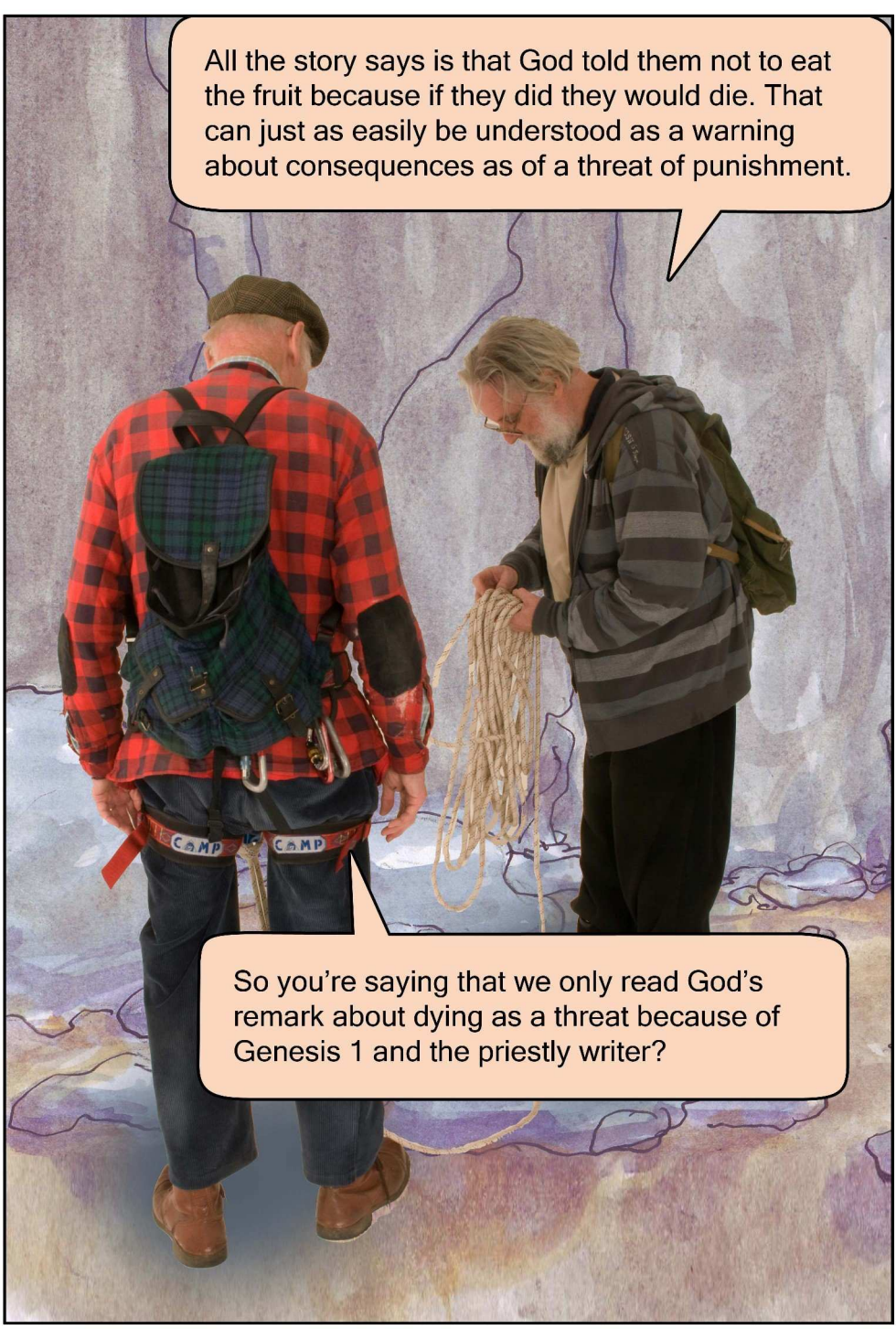
If we want to read the story in a non-authoritarian manner, we must exclude the idea of disobedience.

How can we do that? Adam and Eve clearly disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit.



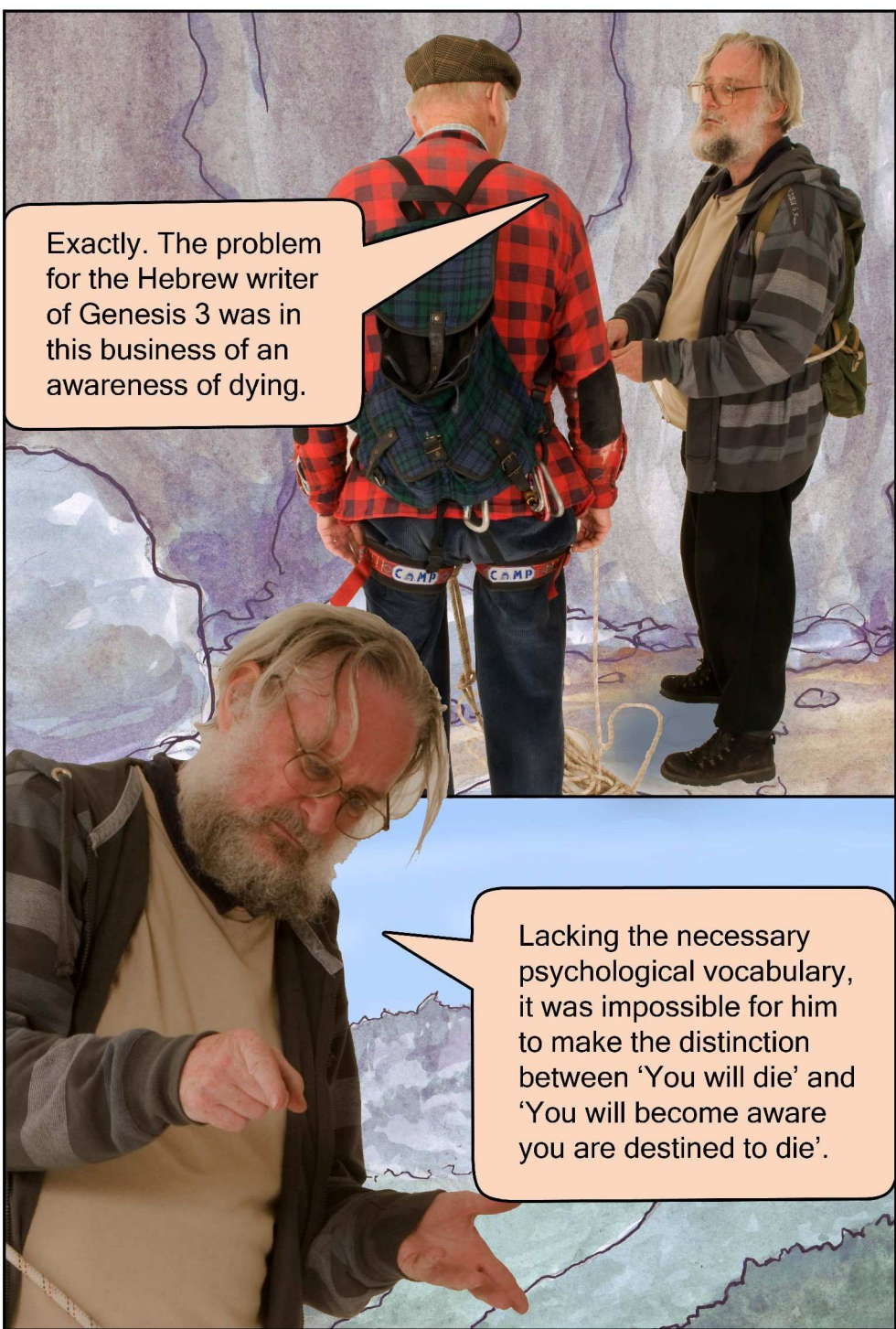
Only if it was 'forbidden'. Let's suppose God was just counselling them against acquiring moral awareness, for their own good.

But surely that's not what the story says!



All the story says is that God told them not to eat the fruit because if they did they would die. That can just as easily be understood as a warning about consequences as of a threat of punishment.

So you're saying that we only read God's remark about dying as a threat because of Genesis 1 and the priestly writer?



Exactly. The problem for the Hebrew writer of Genesis 3 was in this business of an awareness of dying.

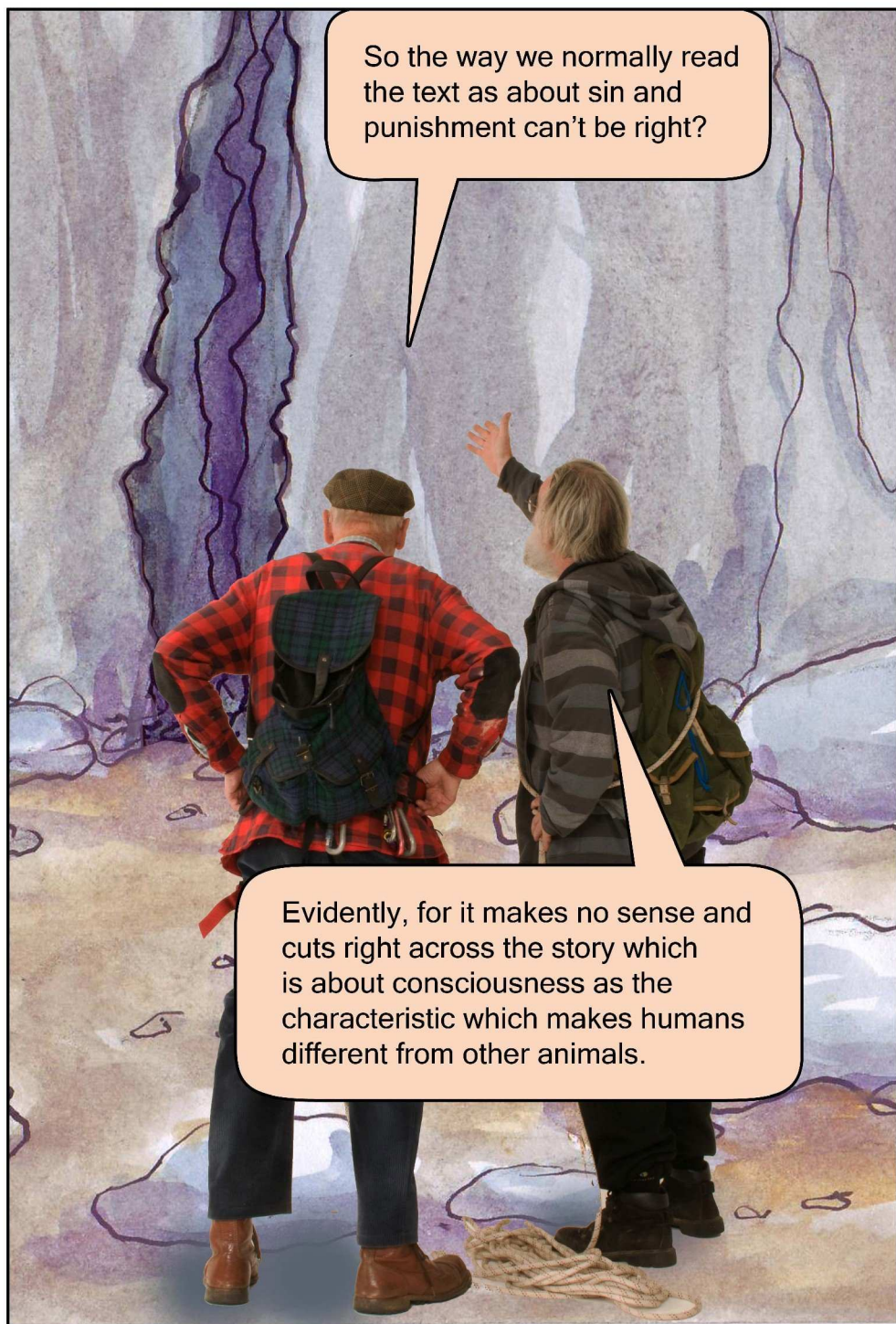
Lacking the necessary psychological vocabulary, it was impossible for him to make the distinction between 'You will die' and 'You will become aware you are destined to die'.

Both had to be written in the same way as 'You will die' leaving it to the reader to understand what was being said in an intelligent manner.



However, there is no possible doubt about what the Hebrew writer had in mind, for Adam and Eve don't die. Moreover the story as a whole is essentially about consciousness: an awareness of sexuality and of morality and so, clearly, also of death.





This difference was, after all, what the Sumerian Adapa story was about and it couldn't be clearer that the Hebrew writer was telling the same story, only from the marginals' point of view.

You amaze me!

You shouldn't be amazed.
What I say is perfectly obvious.

It's only obvious
once you see it.

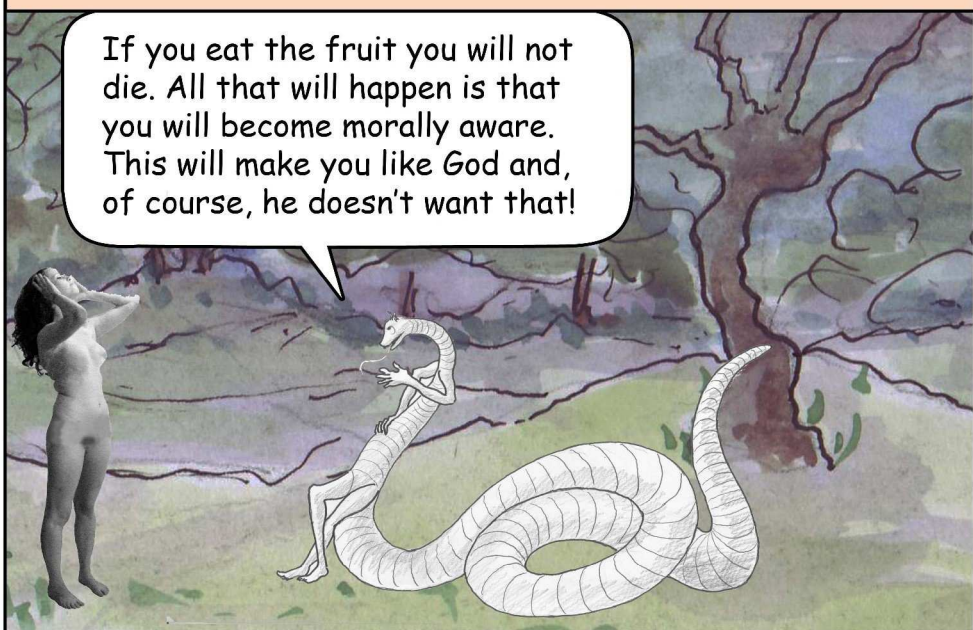
That was what the priestly editor relied on ... people
not seeing what the revolutionary story's about and
of course, as a result of his work, they don't!

So tell me the
story as the
Hebrew writer
told it.

Very well. He begins by saying that the serpent was more subtle than the other animals. It didn't tell outright lies but contented itself with half-truths.



When told by the woman what God had said would result from eating the fruit, the serpent remonstrated with her vigorously.

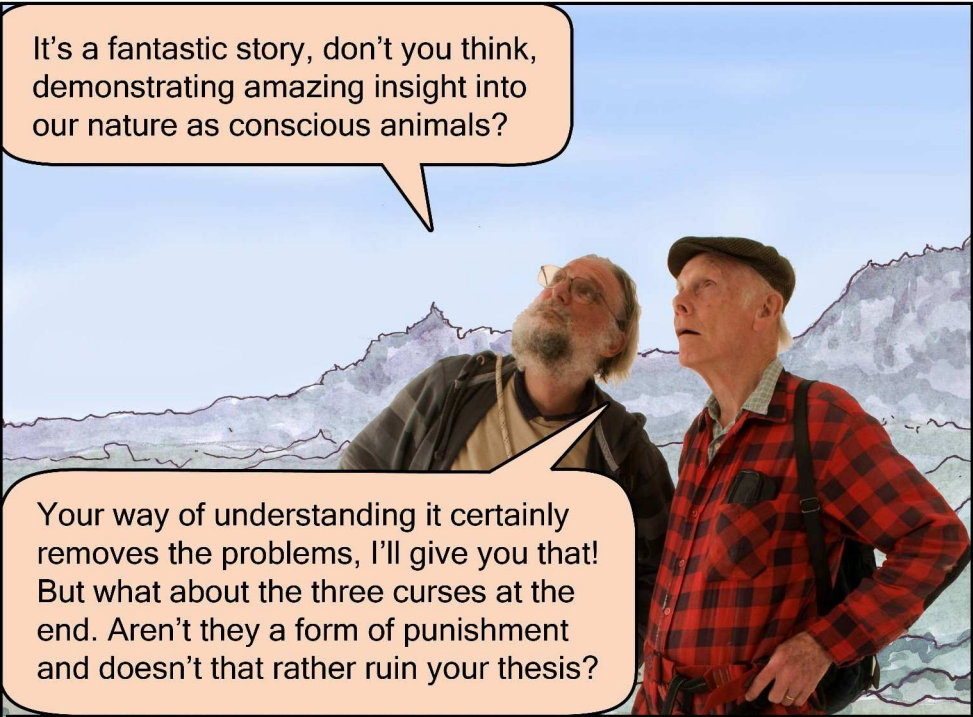


So the woman ate the fruit and gave some to Adam. As a result both of them became ideologically aware and conscious of right and wrong. This gave them a fantastic creative power none of the other animals possessed.



But unfortunately, consciousness came as a package. So, as God had warned, they also became aware of other less agreeable things about themselves, notably the embarrassment of their sexuality, the dread of dying and, worst of all, the realisation that their natural animal desire to dominate stank.

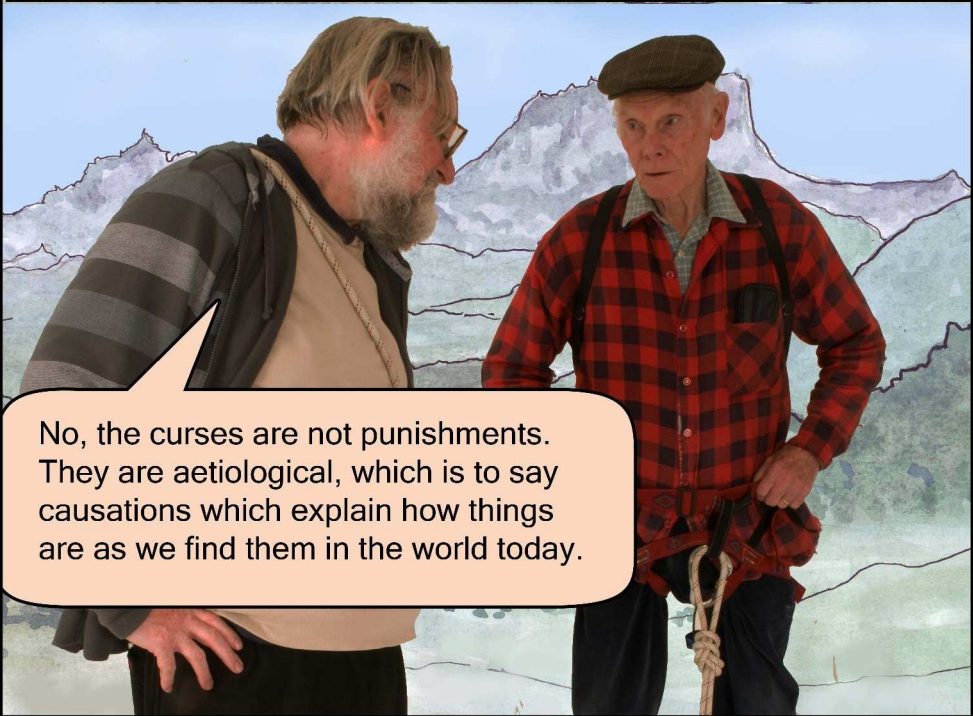




It's a fantastic story, don't you think, demonstrating amazing insight into our nature as conscious animals?

A comic panel showing two men from the chest up. The man on the left has a beard and glasses, wearing a dark jacket over a light shirt. The man on the right is older, wearing a red and black plaid shirt, a dark cap, and a backpack. They are both looking upwards towards a stylized, purple and blue mountain range in the background under a light blue sky.

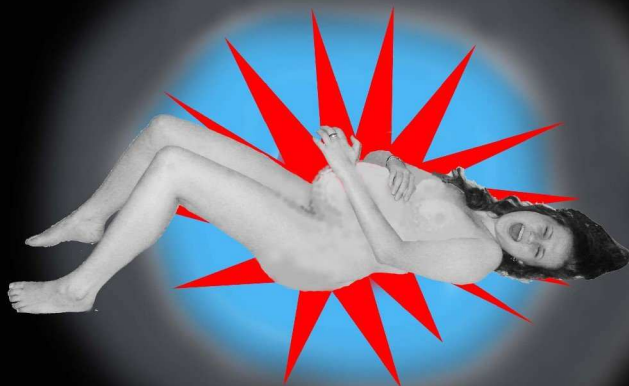
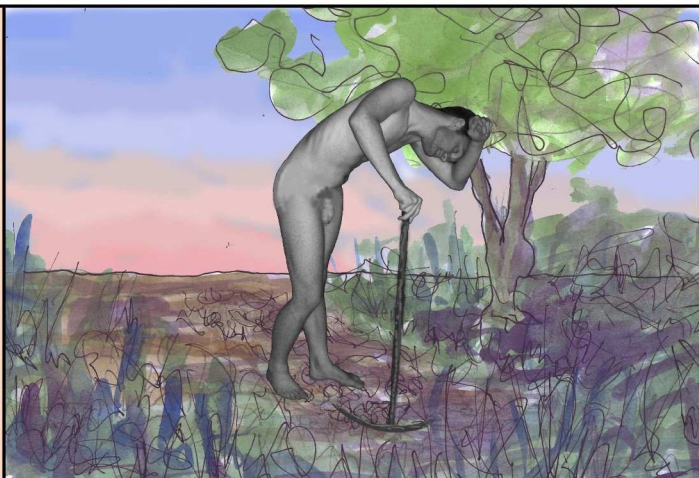
Your way of understanding it certainly removes the problems, I'll give you that! But what about the three curses at the end. Aren't they a form of punishment and doesn't that rather ruin your thesis?



A comic panel showing the same two men from the chest up, now in profile facing each other. The man on the left is looking towards the man on the right. The background remains the same stylized mountain range.

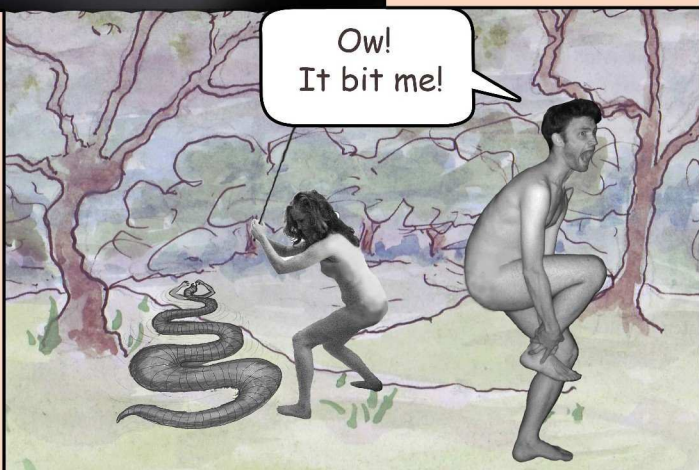
No, the curses are not punishments. They are aetiological, which is to say causations which explain how things are as we find them in the world today.

They tell us
that Men
can
only
produce
food
to
eat,
by
backbreaking
labour.



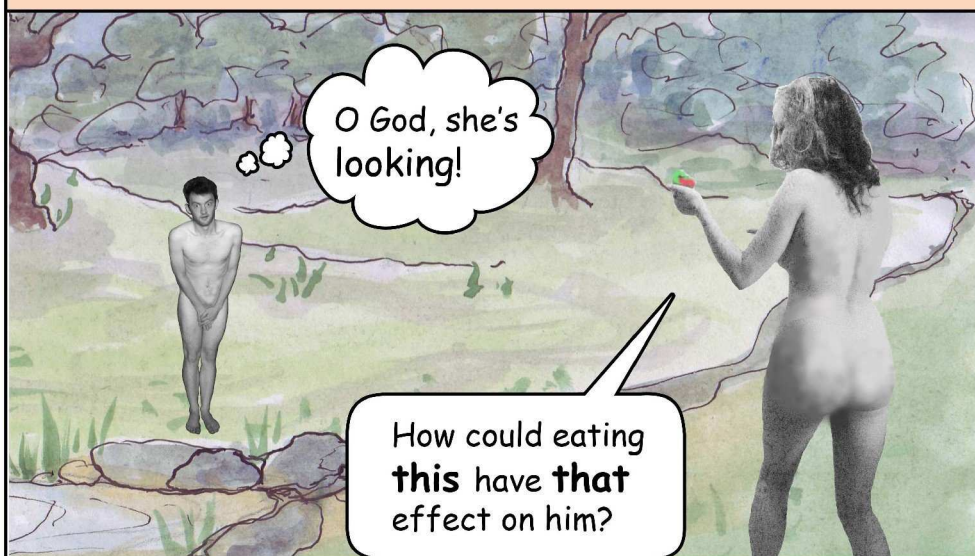
That
Women
can
only
produce
offspring
by
suffering
excruciating
pain.

And that
Humans
and
serpents
can
only
live
together
in perpetual
enmity.





One important feature of this story, which we haven't yet properly examined, is the business of sex.



Previously I pointed out that because biblical writers had a limited political vocabulary they found it easier to speak about ideological matters using the language of sex.

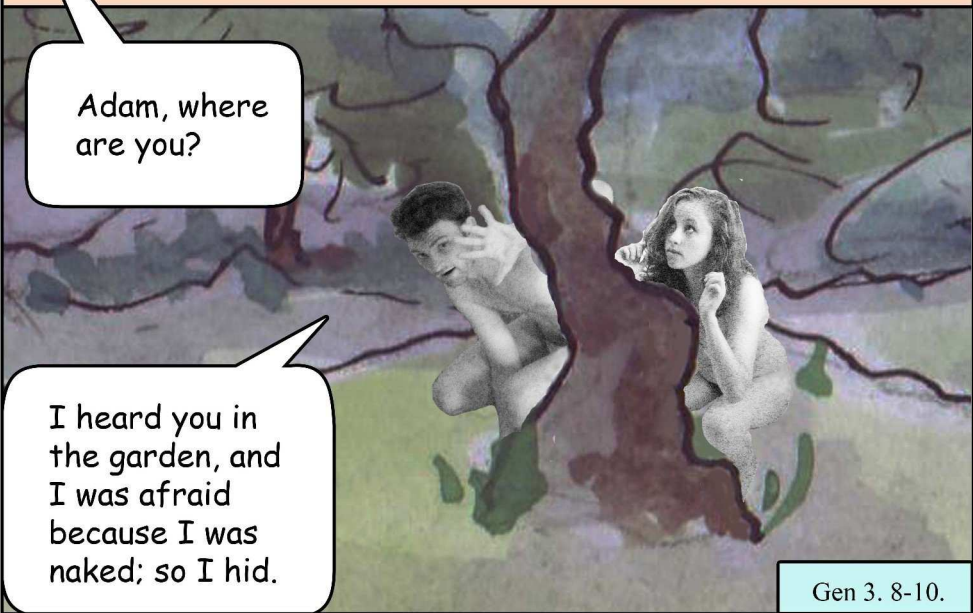
See Book 1 p. 13

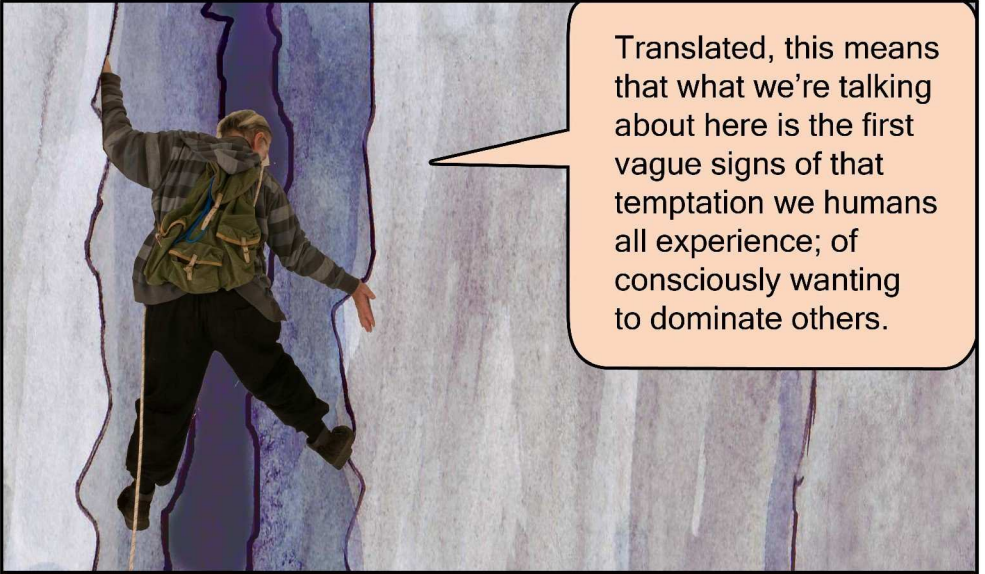


So we can say that, generally speaking, sexual misdemeanor in the Bible indicates more than simply giving way to what comes naturally. It represents a political sin: a wilful desire to dominate other people or creatures.



However, in this story no sin of any sort is committed... that comes later. All that is talked of here is the arrival of sexual **awareness**, not sexual **sinning**.



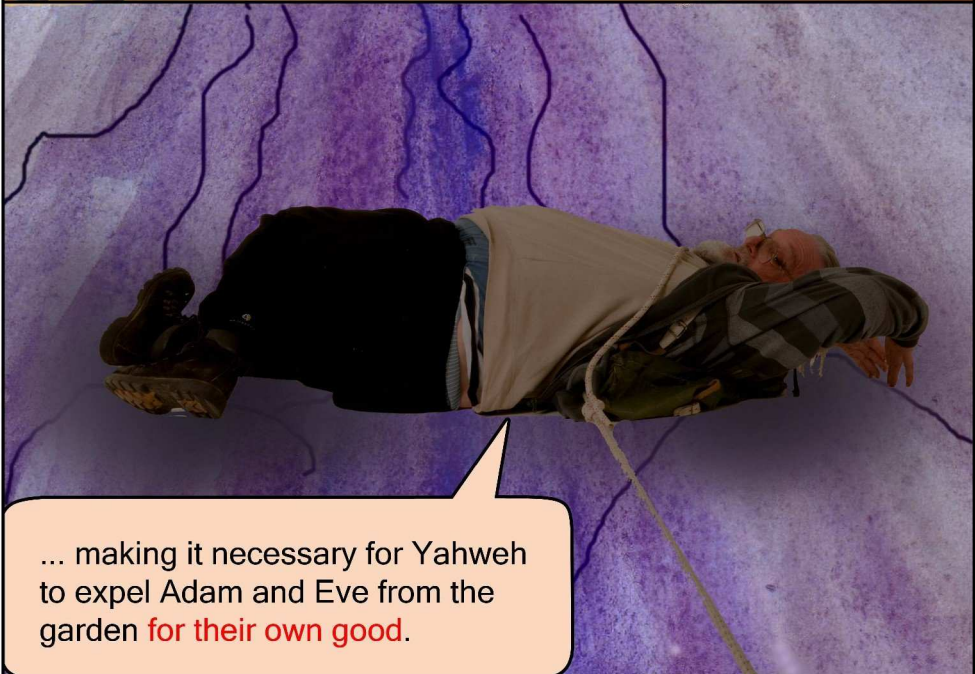


Translated, this means that what we're talking about here is the first vague signs of that temptation we humans all experience; of consciously wanting to dominate others.

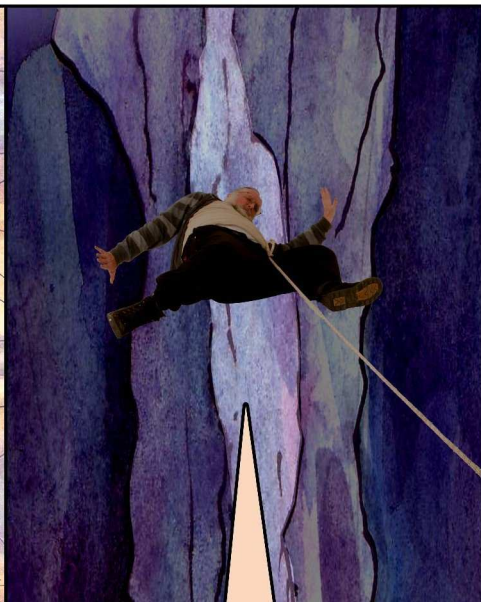
This is something different from what went as it were 'before': animal aggression which, though self-centred, was **blind**.



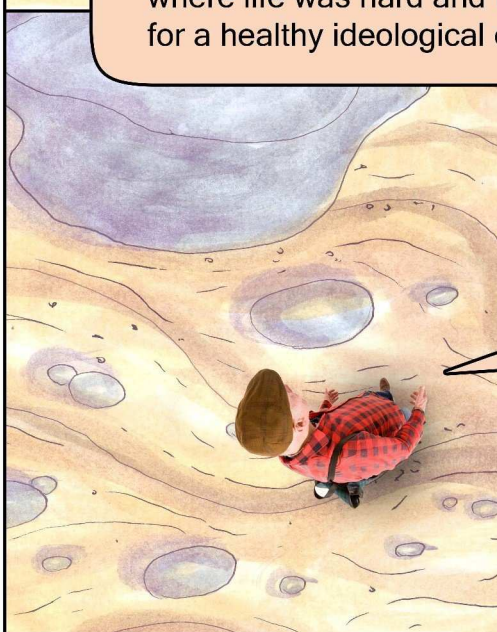
The inference seems to be that the garden situation proved to be a serious threat for mankind, for people with leisure and wealth naturally espouse ideologies of dominance...



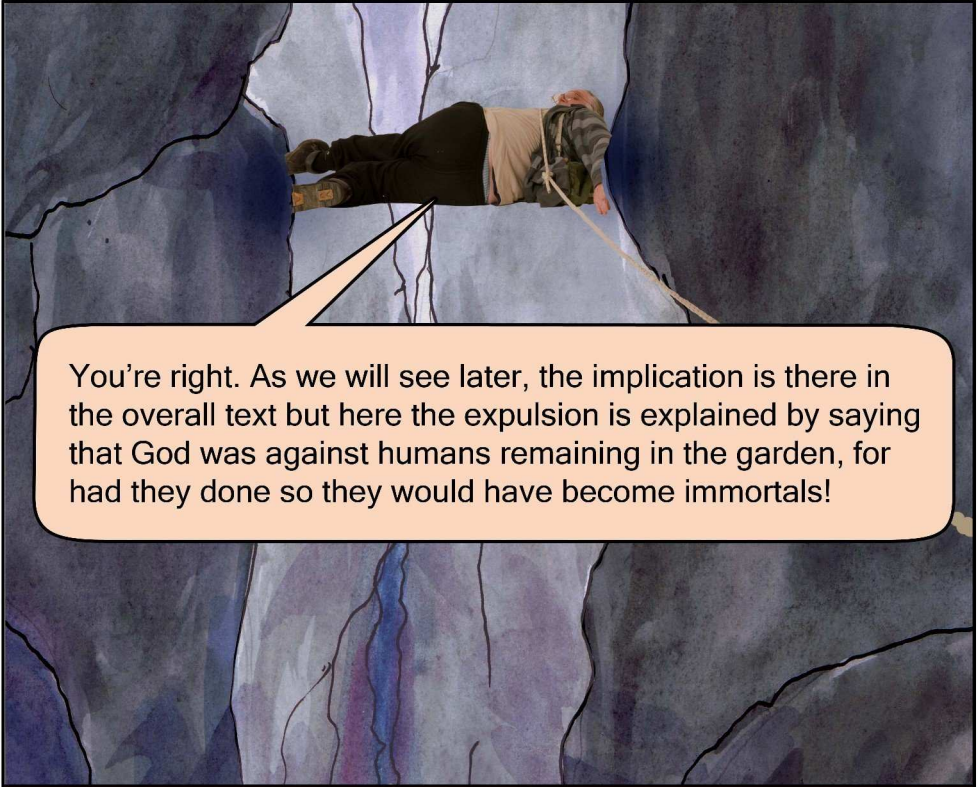
So you're saying that humans were expelled from paradise, not as a punishment, but in order to protect them from themselves?



Exactly. However, the Hebrew writer's concern was not to point out that humans were made to live in this world, which is pretty obvious. He wanted to make it clear that the Israelites were fortunate in living in central Palestine where life was hard and the going tough since this made for a healthy ideological environment.



That's all very well but unfortunately the story doesn't say that Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise for their own good!



You're right. As we will see later, the implication is there in the overall text but here the expulsion is explained by saying that God was against humans remaining in the garden, for had they done so they would have become immortals!

The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.

Gen 3.22

This is terribly weak but you have to understand the Hebrew writer found himself in a difficult position. Having little psychological vocabulary he was unable to say God's garden had become bad for man because of his new **awareness**.



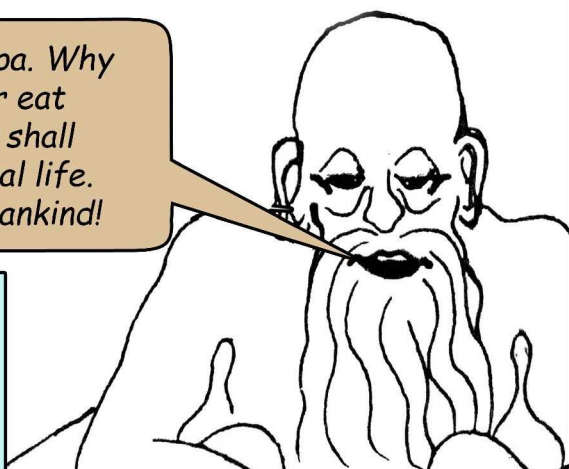
All he could say was that God's garden was bad and that would have given quite the wrong impression! So he took refuge in the Sumerian story and its preoccupation with immortality ... even though it was obviously a subject that didn't interest him.*

As An looked at Adapa he laughed at him.

See Book 1
page 119

*Come now Adapa. Why
did you neither eat
nor drink? You shall
not have eternal life.
Ah perverse mankind!*

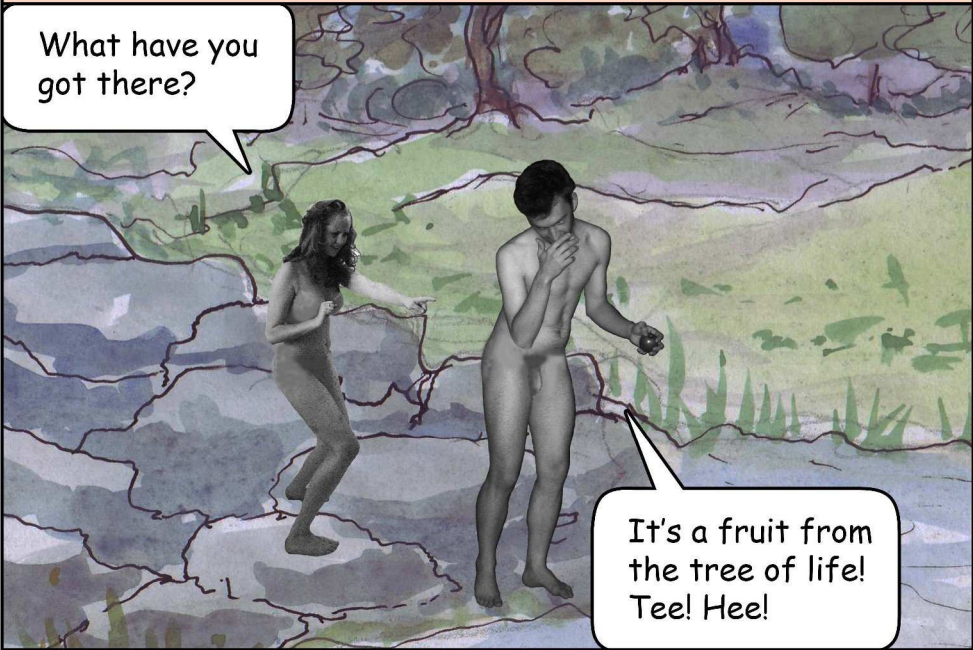
*Apart from this single reference in Genesis, which cribs the Adapa story, the Bible has nothing to say about immortality: a subject which only interests wealthy folk.

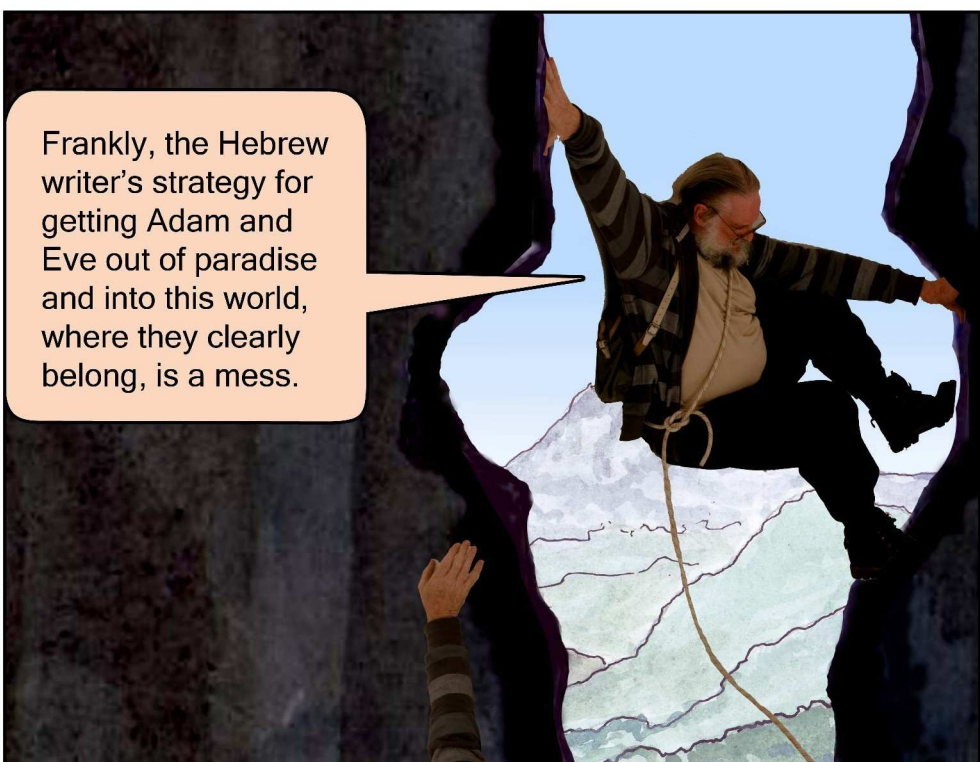


He introduces this new idea of immortality rather baldly, suddenly speaking about a second tree: the tree of life.

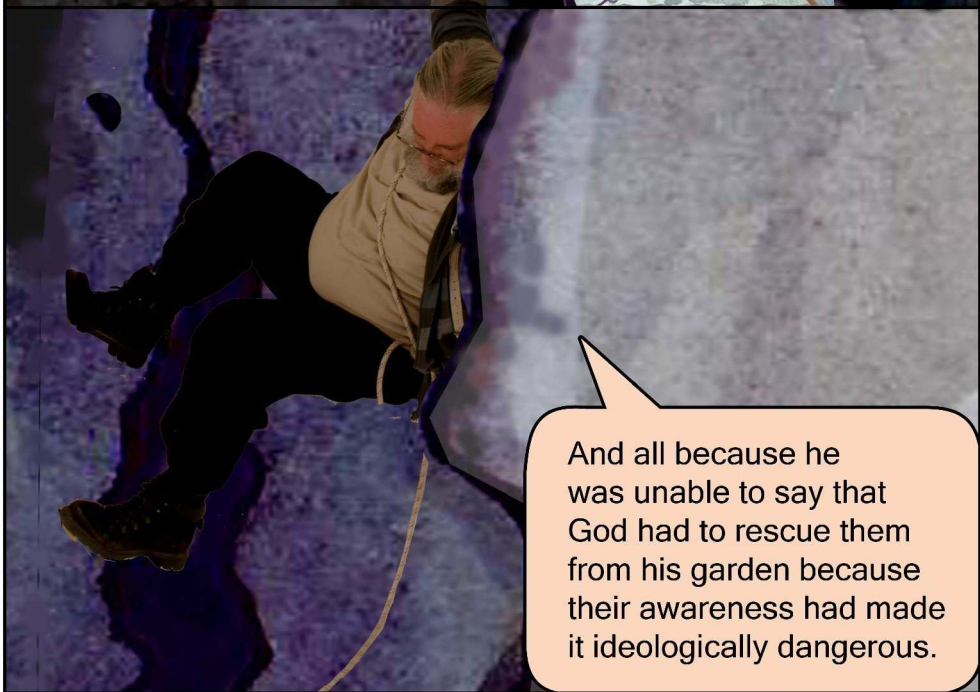


This is very artificial for had there been such a tree in the garden in the beginning, Adam and Eve would certainly have eaten its fruit. Understandably, this is not a matter explored.

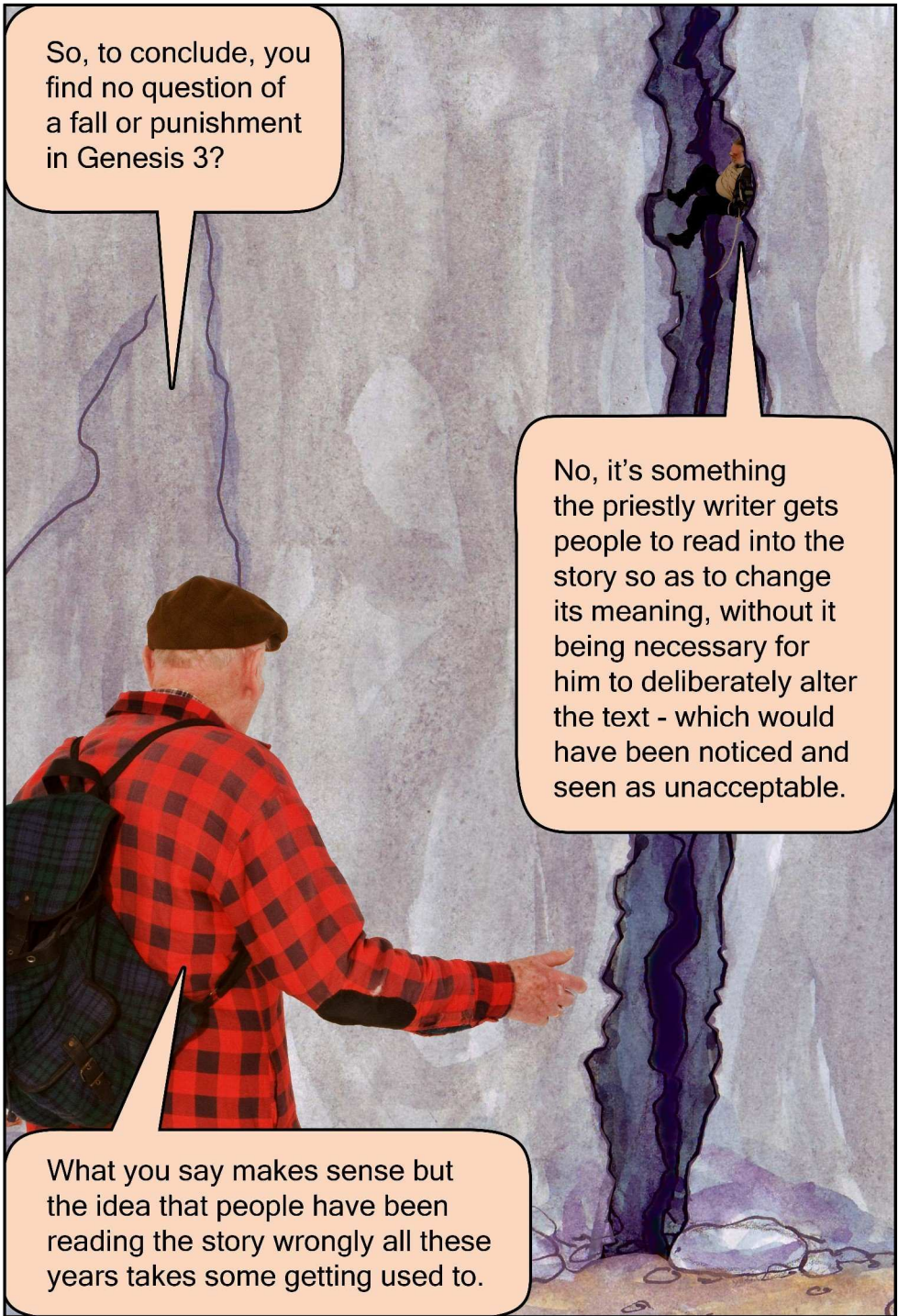




Frankly, the Hebrew writer's strategy for getting Adam and Eve out of paradise and into this world, where they clearly belong, is a mess.



And all because he was unable to say that God had to rescue them from his garden because their awareness had made it ideologically dangerous.



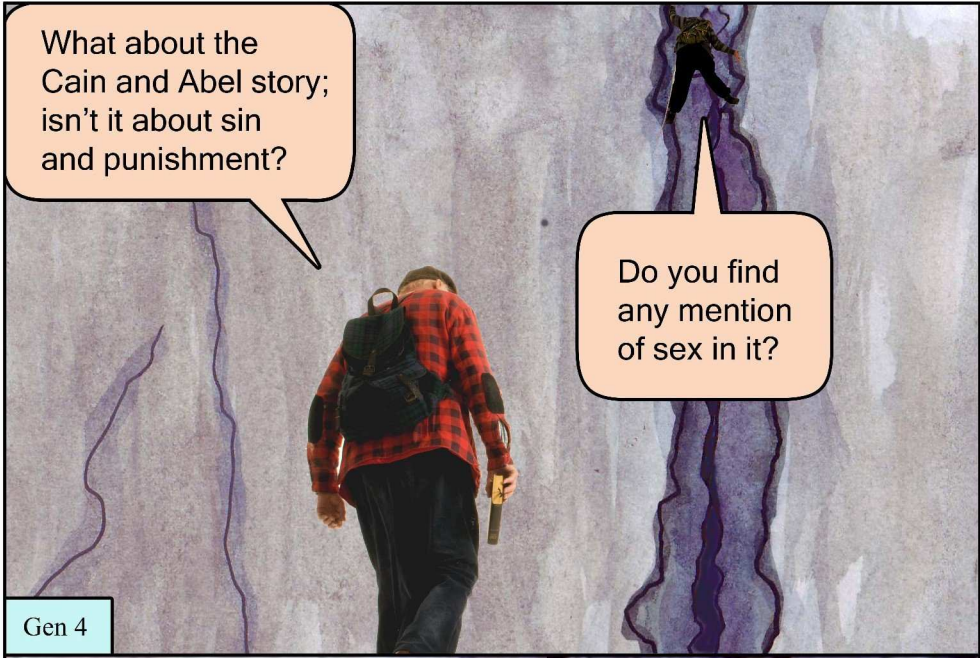
So, to conclude, you find no question of a fall or punishment in Genesis 3?

No, it's something the priestly writer gets people to read into the story so as to change its meaning, without it being necessary for him to deliberately alter the text - which would have been noticed and seen as unacceptable.

What you say makes sense but the idea that people have been reading the story wrongly all these years takes some getting used to.

6

The Marginal Cain



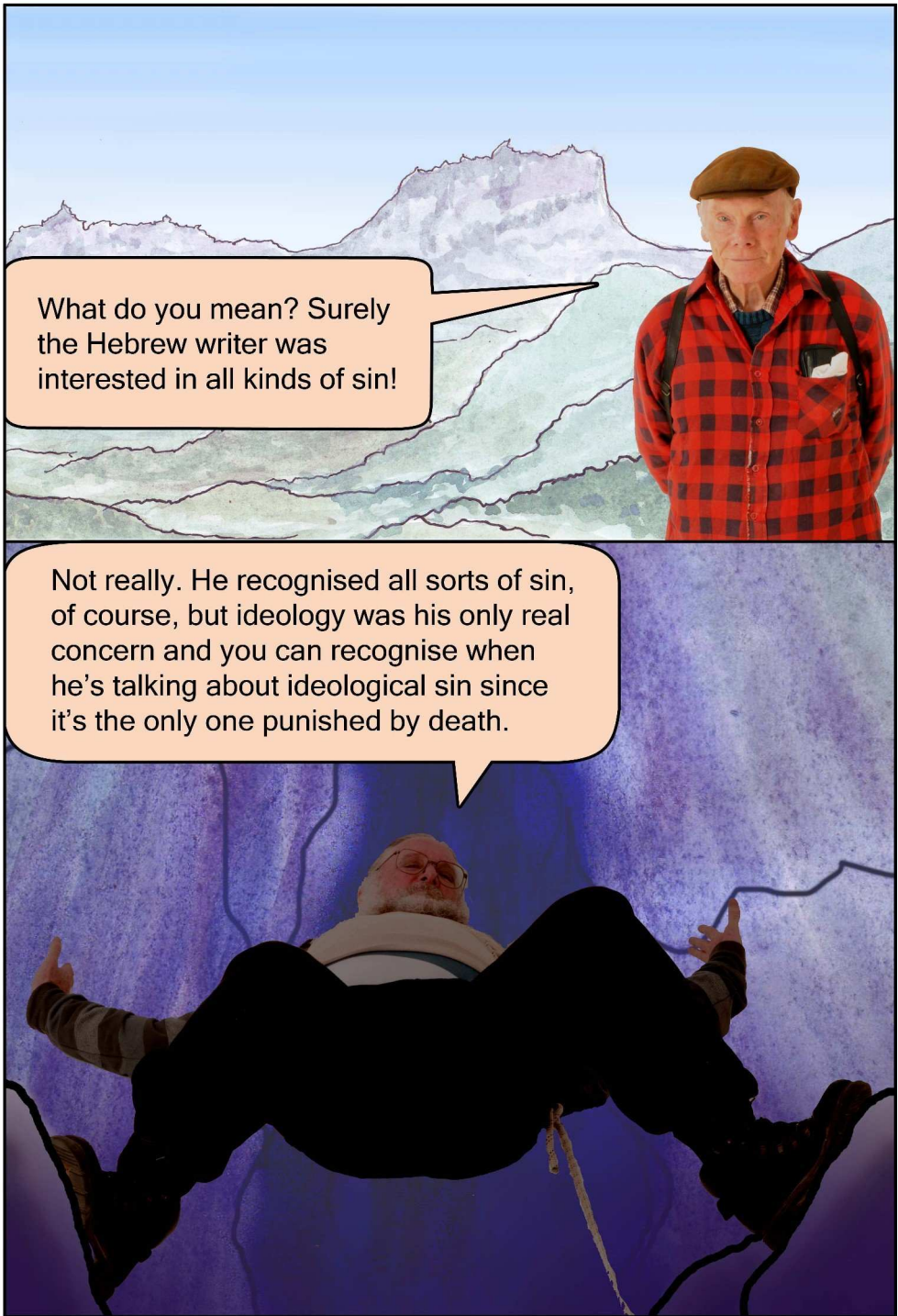
What about the
Cain and Abel story;
isn't it about sin
and punishment?

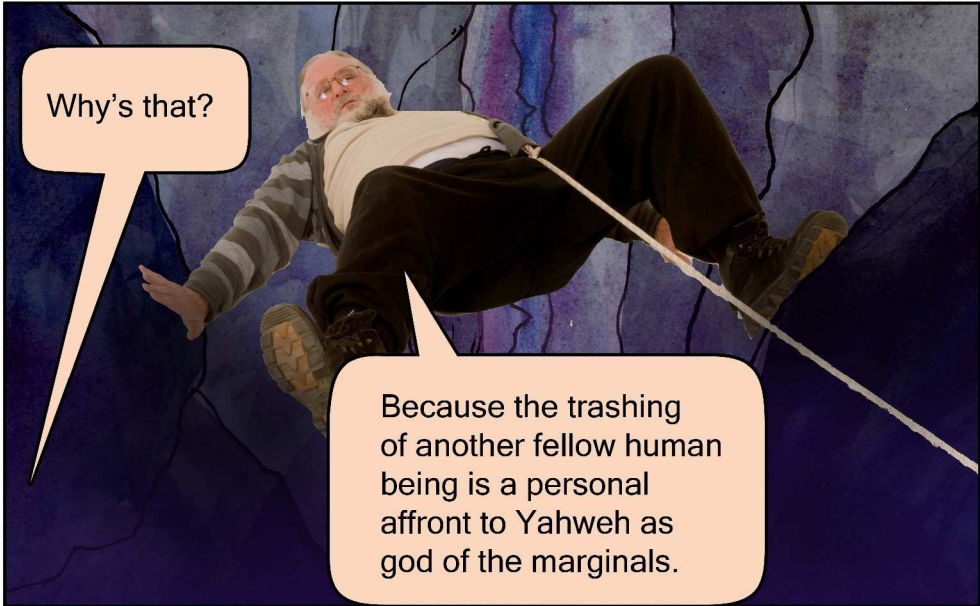
Do you find
any mention
of sex in it?

Gen 4

No.
Can't say
that I do.

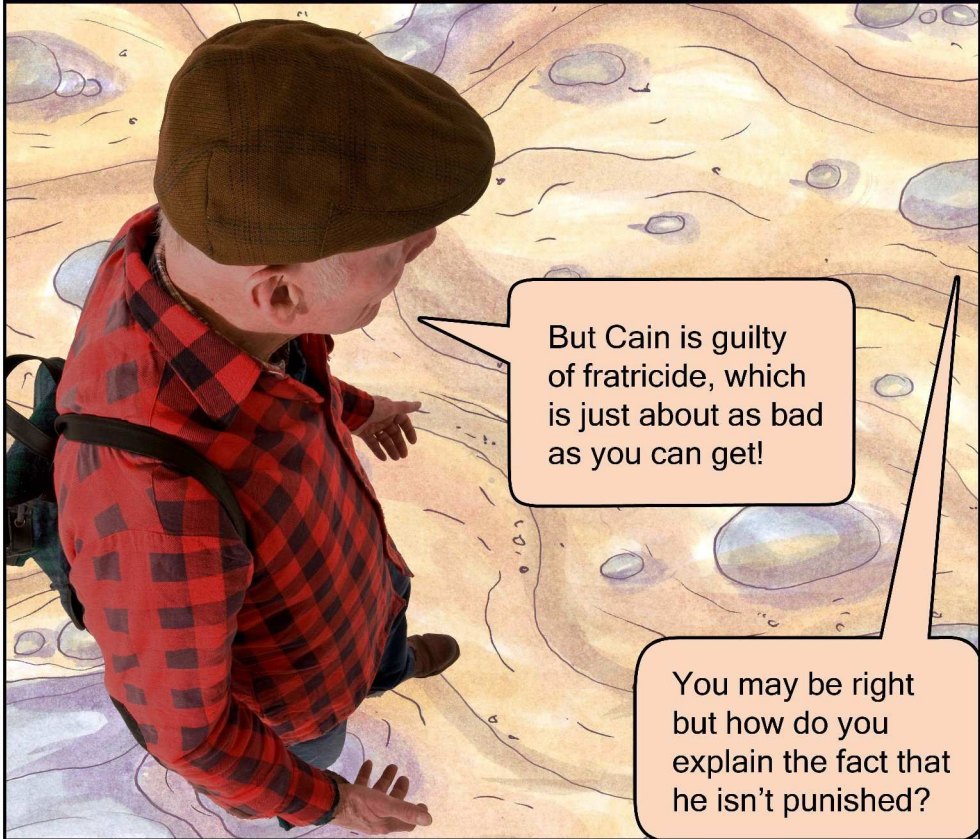
That means it is
most unlikely the
story's concerned
with ideological
misdemeanour -
the only sin which
counted for the
Hebrew writer.





Why's that?

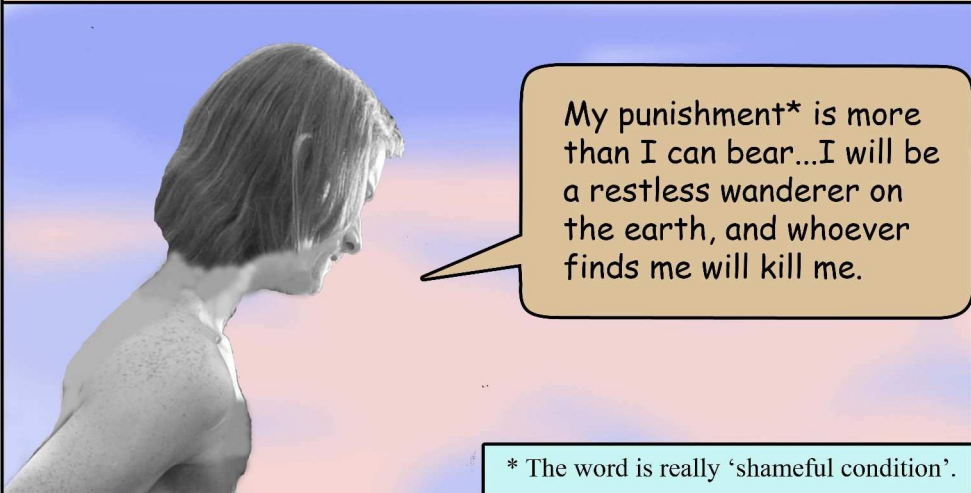
Because the trashing of another fellow human being is a personal affront to Yahweh as god of the marginals.



But Cain is guilty of fratricide, which is just about as bad as you can get!

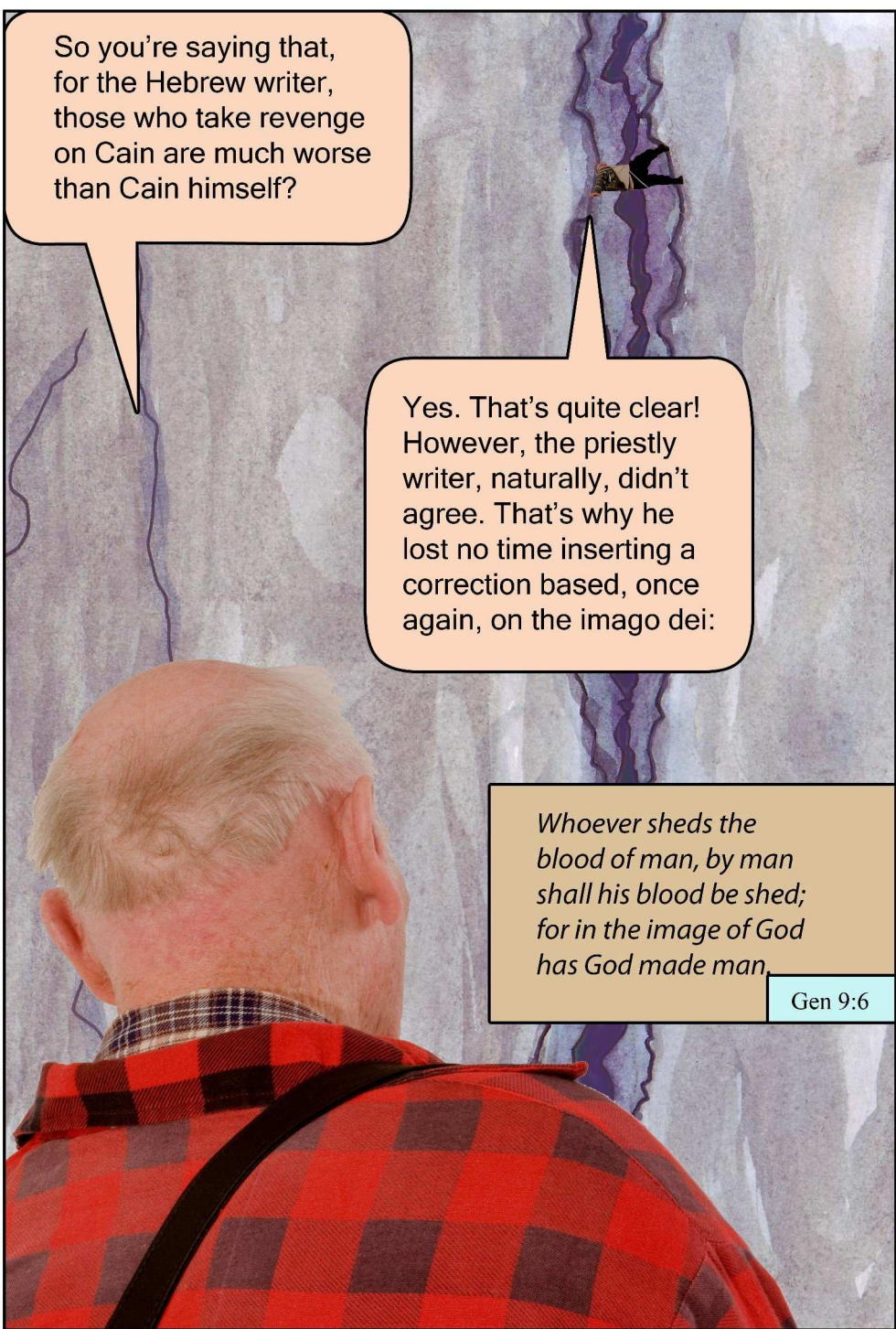
You may be right but how do you explain the fact that he isn't punished?

Cain speaks of his 'punishment' in verse 13 but he's not talking about an additional hurt God intends to impose on him. He's just talking about the inevitable consequences of what he has done.



So Cain has to leave the community, thereby becoming a marginal and the only punishment the text truly speaks about - the maximum, a sevenfold death penalty - is for anyone who dares to take revenge on Cain.



A man with white hair, seen from the back, wearing a red and black plaid shirt, is looking at a large mural. The mural depicts a figure (Cain) standing on a rocky outcrop, looking down at a body of water. The background of the mural is a mix of light and dark purple and blue washes.

So you're saying that,
for the Hebrew writer,
those who take revenge
on Cain are much worse
than Cain himself?

Yes. That's quite clear!
However, the priestly
writer, naturally, didn't
agree. That's why he
lost no time inserting a
correction based, once
again, on the *imago dei*:

*Whoever sheds the
blood of man, by man
shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.*

Gen 9:6

I can understand the priestly editor's concern without necessarily agreeing with him but how do you make sense of what the Hebrew writer is saying?

By reading his story very carefully.

He tells us that Cain killed his brother and so became a marginal forced to wander around in the land of Nod, a symbolic place where there's no hope, for nothing grows.

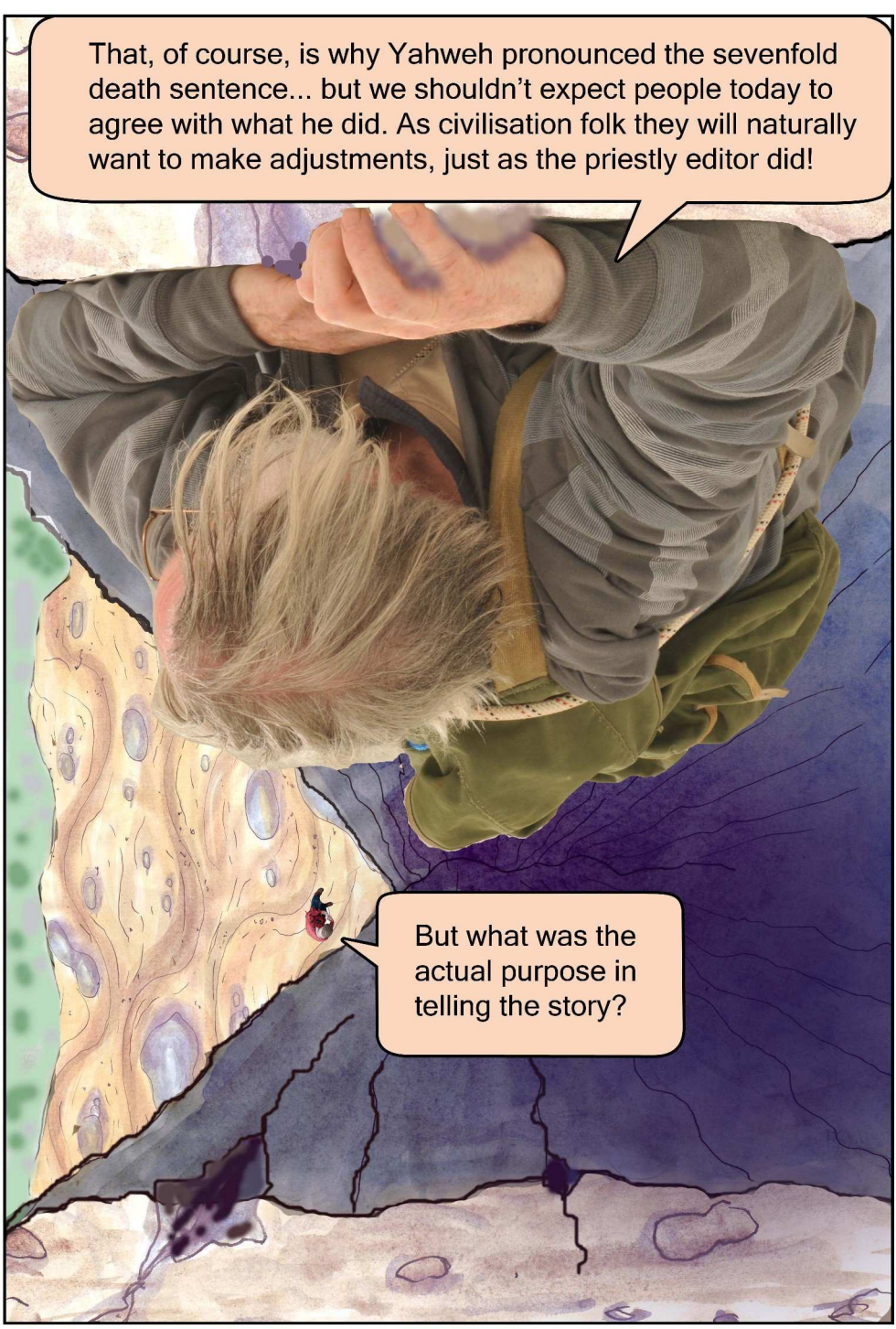


However, as a marginal, Cain came under the protection of Yahweh who was god of the marginals.



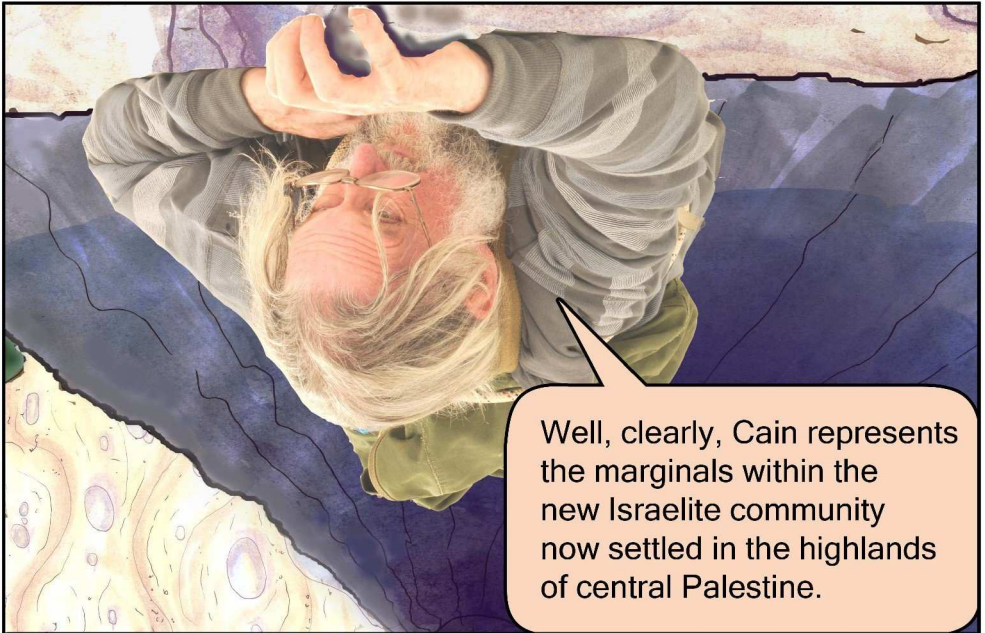
So if anyone decided to take revenge on Cain they were guilty of the one sin which was unforgivable in the eyes of every marginal: treating someone as a worthless piece of human shit.





That, of course, is why Yahweh pronounced the sevenfold death sentence... but we shouldn't expect people today to agree with what he did. As civilisation folk they will naturally want to make adjustments, just as the priestly editor did!

But what was the actual purpose in telling the story?



Well, clearly, Cain represents the marginals within the new Israelite community now settled in the highlands of central Palestine.

The painful question his presence poses is this: given that the community of former marginals has changed its character in settling, isn't it necessary for the character of the god who represents their interests to change as well?

Don't you think Yahweh's a bit passé?

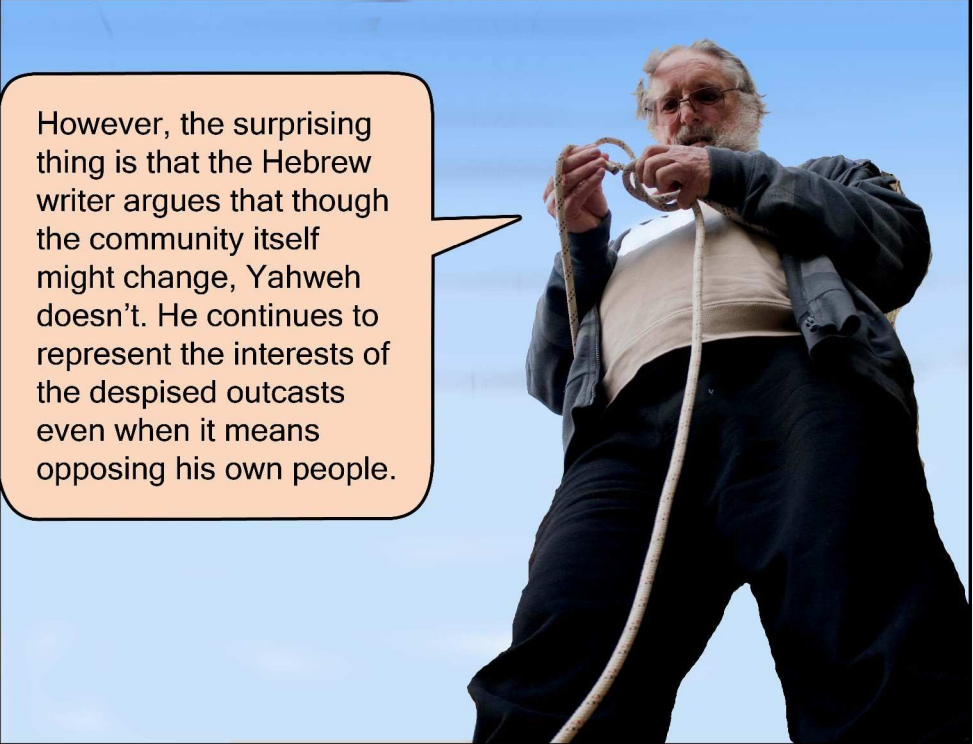


I do indeed, after all we are now cultivated people!

Normally a settled community would have had a god who represented its settled interests, not a god who represented the interests of the despised outcasts the Hebrews formerly were.



However, the surprising thing is that the Hebrew writer argues that though the community itself might change, Yahweh doesn't. He continues to represent the interests of the despised outcasts even when it means opposing his own people.

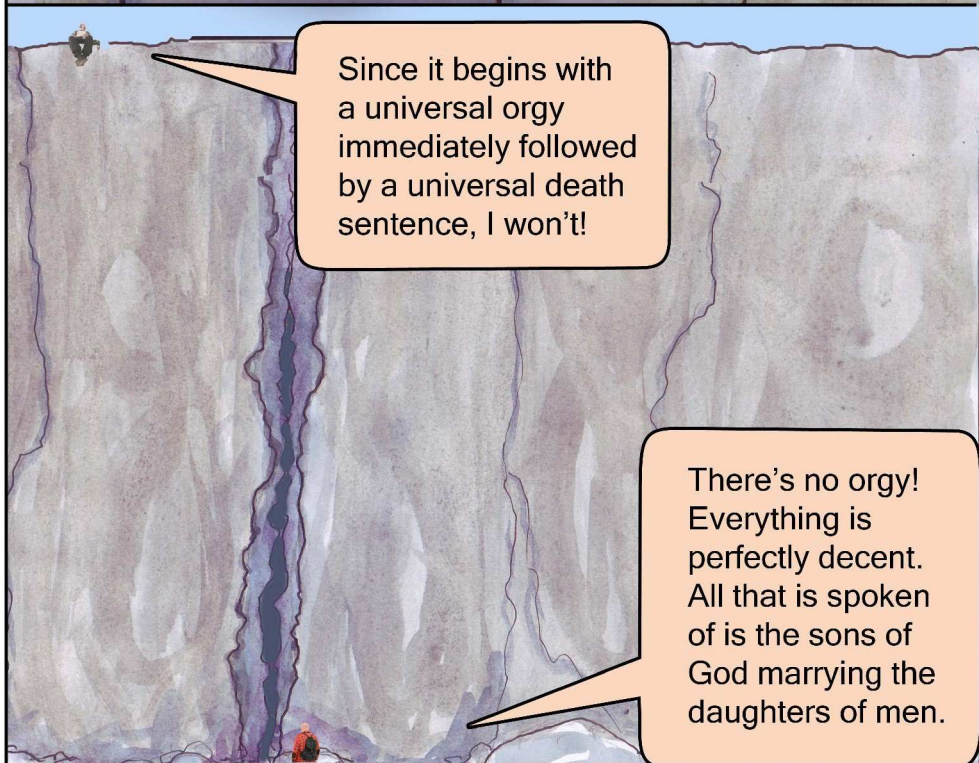


7

The Flood



What about the flood story. Don't tell me it's not about punishment!



Since it begins with a universal orgy immediately followed by a universal death sentence, I won't!

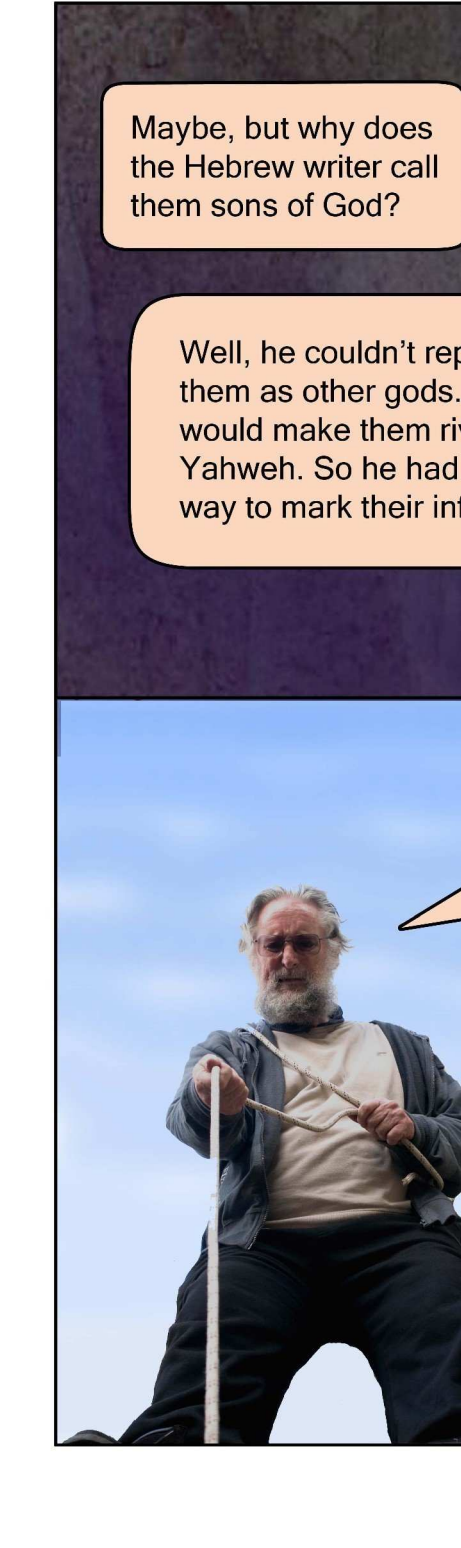
There's no orgy! Everything is perfectly decent. All that is spoken of is the sons of God marrying the daughters of men.



So what do you think these 'sons of God' represent?

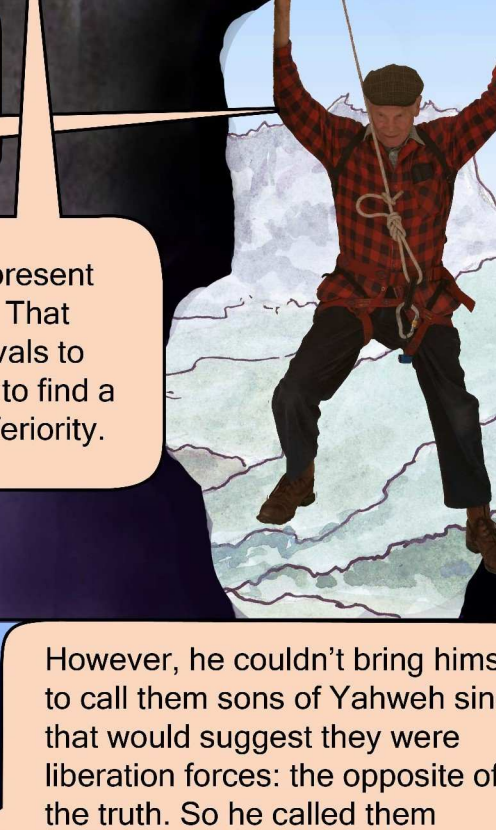
I've no idea!

Don't they stand for the cosmic powers - the oppressive conservative forces which have been in control of civilization since it began?




Maybe, but why does the Hebrew writer call them sons of God?

Well, he couldn't represent them as other gods. That would make them rivals to Yahweh. So he had to find a way to mark their inferiority.




However, he couldn't bring himself to call them sons of Yahweh since that would suggest they were liberation forces: the opposite of the truth. So he called them sons of God instead.

So what's the writer suggesting by saying that these gods married the daughters of men?



He's saying that as time went by it became clear that every human community had taken the oppressive, conservative road, except Israel of course, represented by Noah and his family.

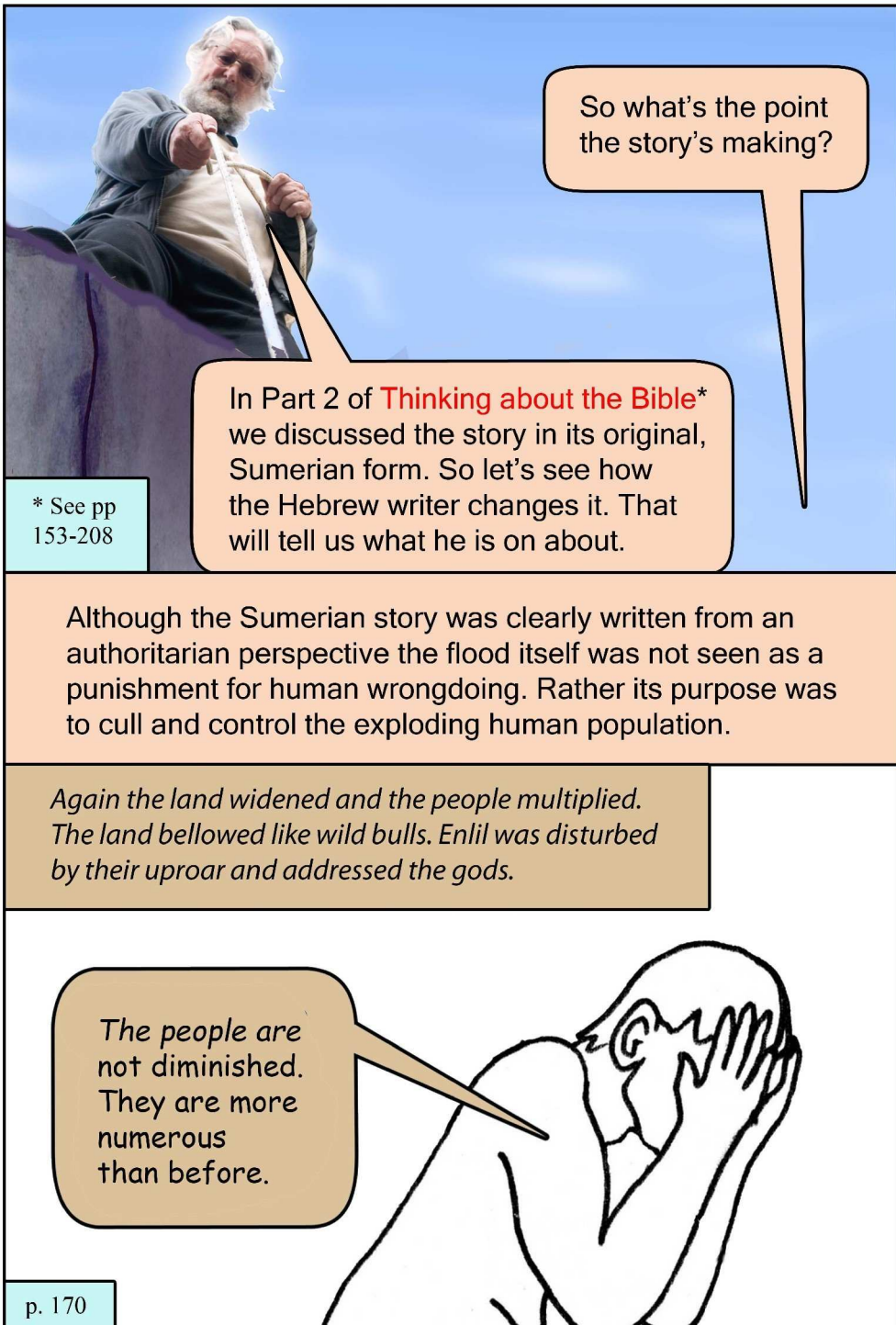
How can you be sure you've properly understood him?



Because he immediately goes on to state that Yahweh came to the conclusion the situation was ideologically hopeless.

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Gen 6.5



* See pp
153-208

In Part 2 of **Thinking about the Bible*** we discussed the story in its original, Sumerian form. So let's see how the Hebrew writer changes it. That will tell us what he is on about.

Although the Sumerian story was clearly written from an authoritarian perspective the flood itself was not seen as a punishment for human wrongdoing. Rather its purpose was to cull and control the exploding human population.

Again the land widened and the people multiplied. The land bellowed like wild bulls. Enlil was disturbed by their uproar and addressed the gods.

The people are not diminished. They are more numerous than before.

p. 170

Clearly the priestly writer associates natural catastrophes with the mindless aggressivity of the military who constitute the senior wing in the ruling alliance of which he himself is part.

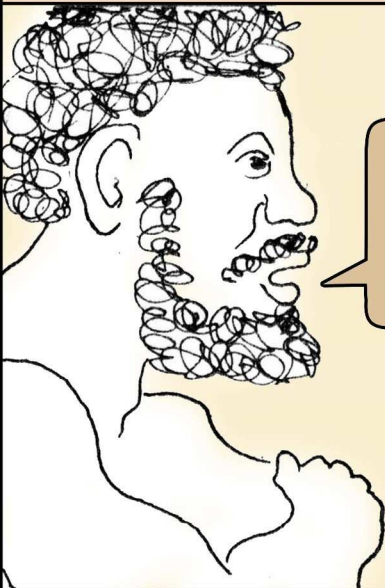
Enki opened his mouth to speak, saying to valiant Enlil...



You wisest of the gods.
You hero! How could you
unreasoningly bring about
the deluge, on the sinner.

p. 204

The point he was anxious to make was that this destructive violence in the natural order was only kept in check by the administrative wisdom he and his priestly associates provide.



Be lenient lest
man be cut off
be patient lest
he be destroyed!

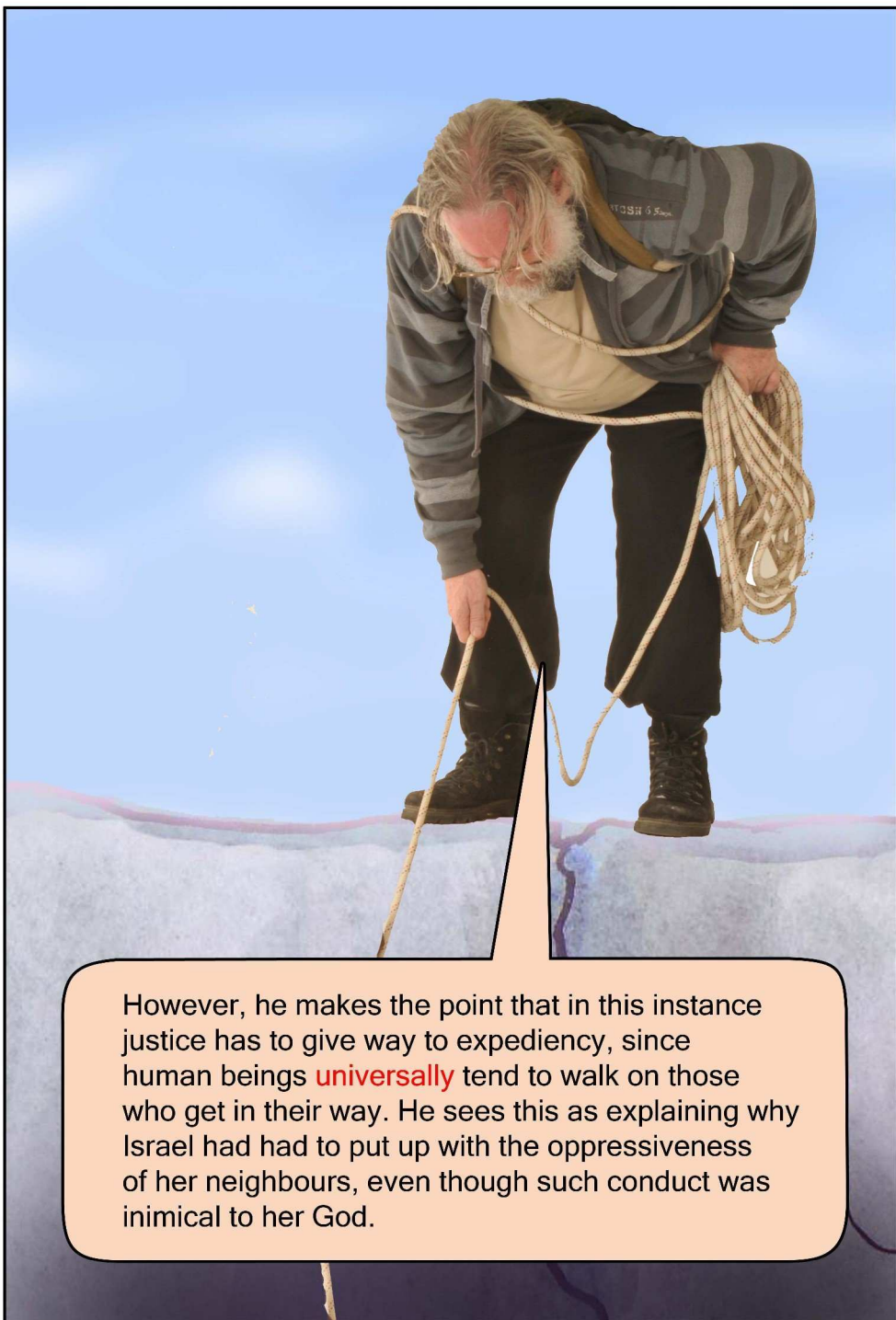


The Hebrew writer, for his part, uses the story to deal specifically with the problem of marginalisation: the sin of treating another human as if he or she has no worth.

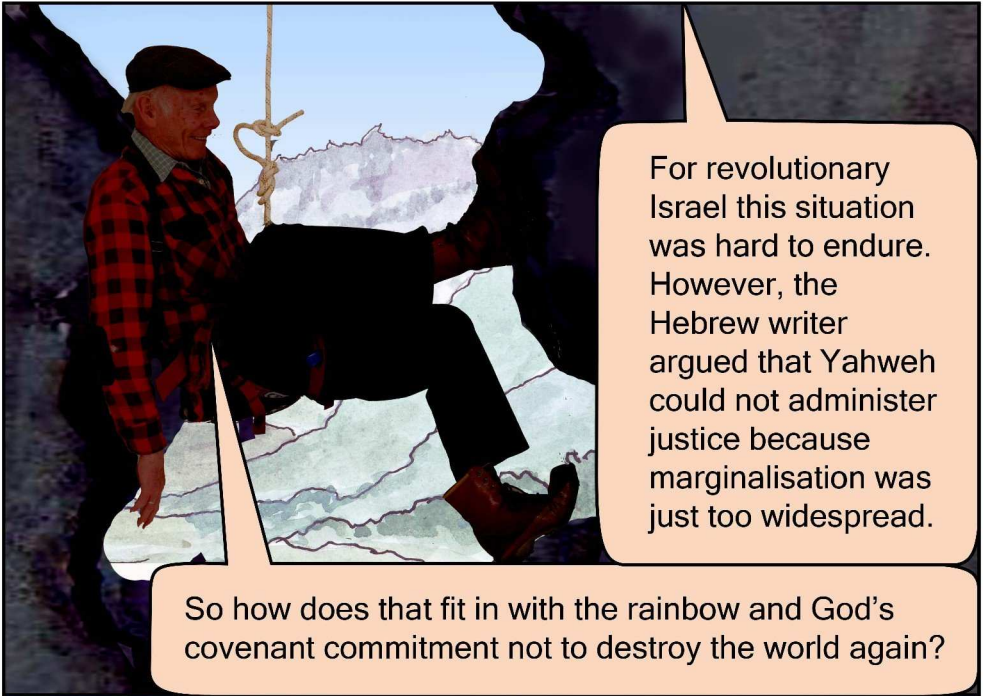


Since this sin is a direct affront to Yahweh as god of the marginals, he deems that death is the only appropriate punishment.





However, he makes the point that in this instance justice has to give way to expediency, since human beings **universally** tend to walk on those who get in their way. He sees this as explaining why Israel had had to put up with the oppressiveness of her neighbours, even though such conduct was inimical to her God.



For revolutionary Israel this situation was hard to endure. However, the Hebrew writer argued that Yahweh could not administer justice because marginalisation was just too widespread.

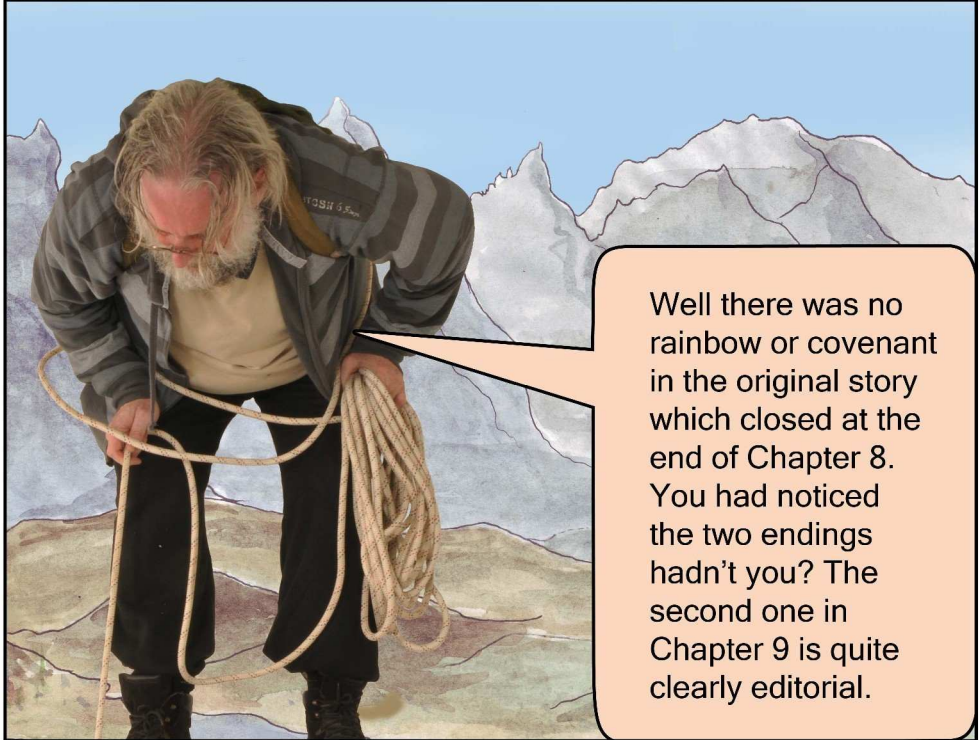
So how does that fit in with the rainbow and God's covenant commitment not to destroy the world again?



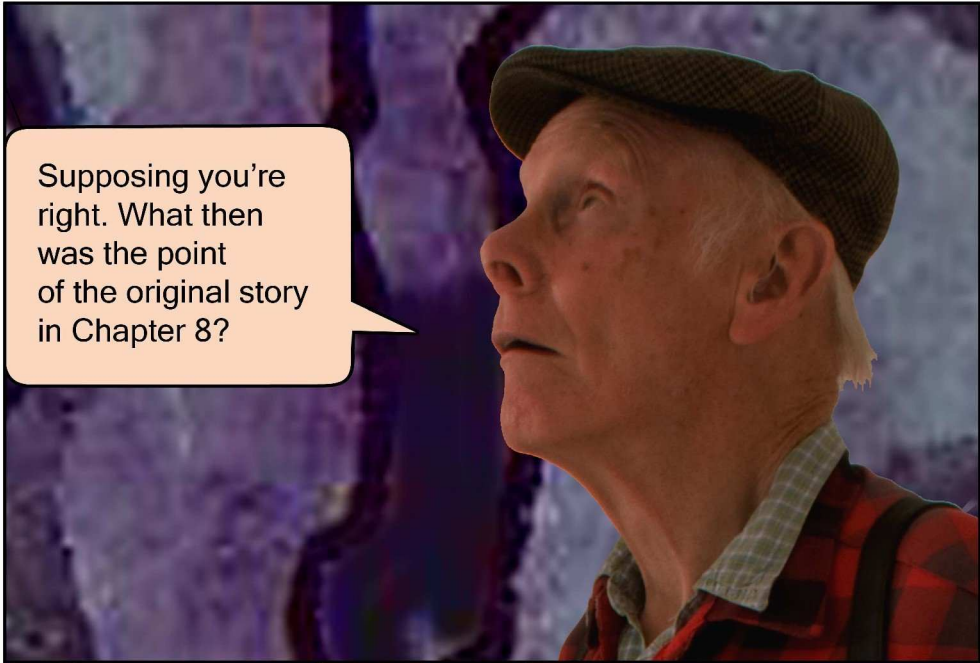
That's just eyewash introduced by the revisionist editor to befuddle people!



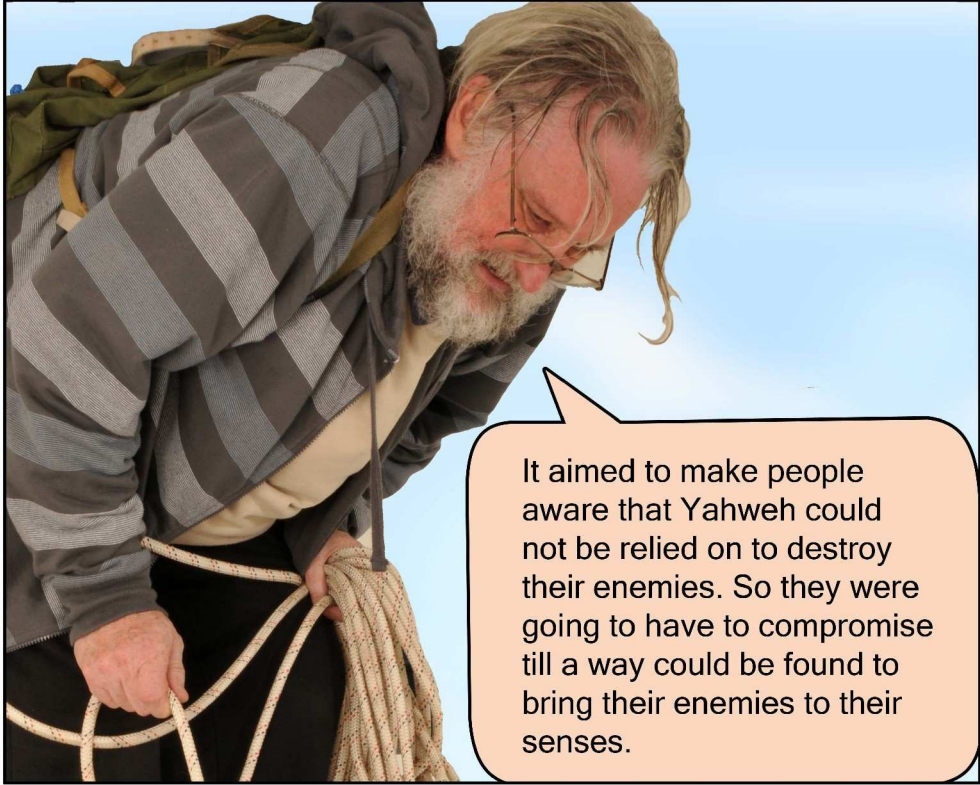
How can you say
such a thing!



Well there was no
rainbow or covenant
in the original story
which closed at the
end of Chapter 8.
You had noticed
the two endings
hadn't you? The
second one in
Chapter 9 is quite
clearly editorial.

A close-up profile of an older man with a flat cap, looking upwards with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a red and black plaid shirt. The background is a blurred, rocky or cave-like interior.

Supposing you're right. What then was the point of the original story in Chapter 8?

A man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a grey and white striped jacket, is looking down at a coiled rope. He has a green backpack on. The background is a clear blue sky.

It aimed to make people aware that Yahweh could not be relied on to destroy their enemies. So they were going to have to compromise till a way could be found to bring their enemies to their senses.

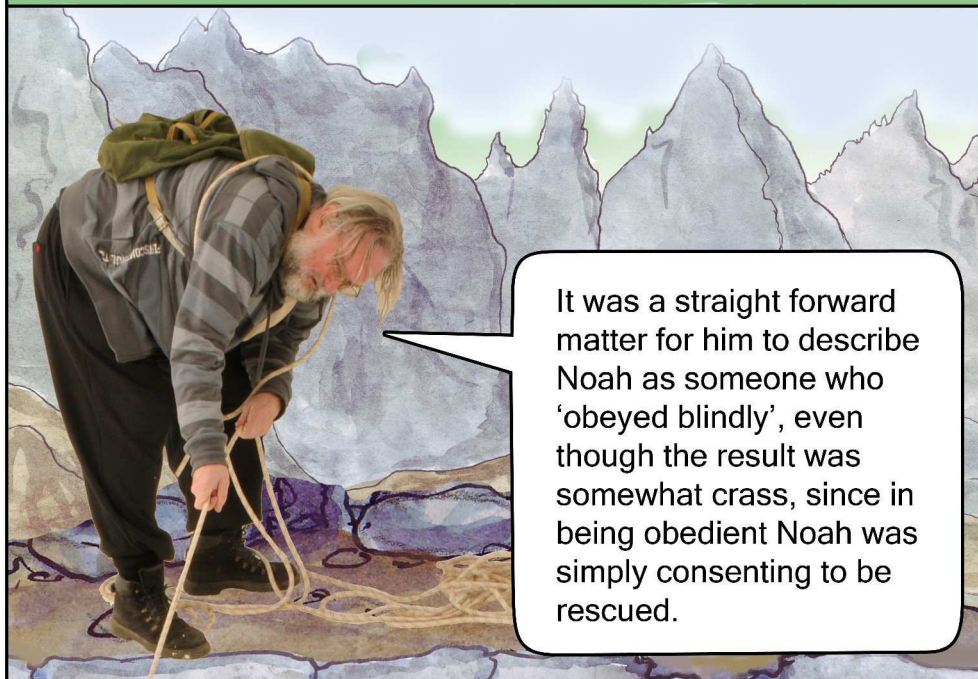
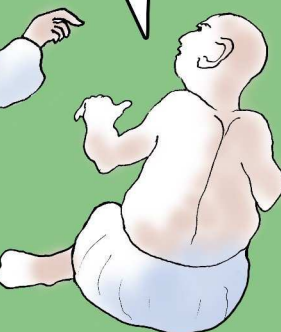


Well, it was the priestly editor who did that. He naturally couldn't stomach a story that argued against his own authoritarian ideas.

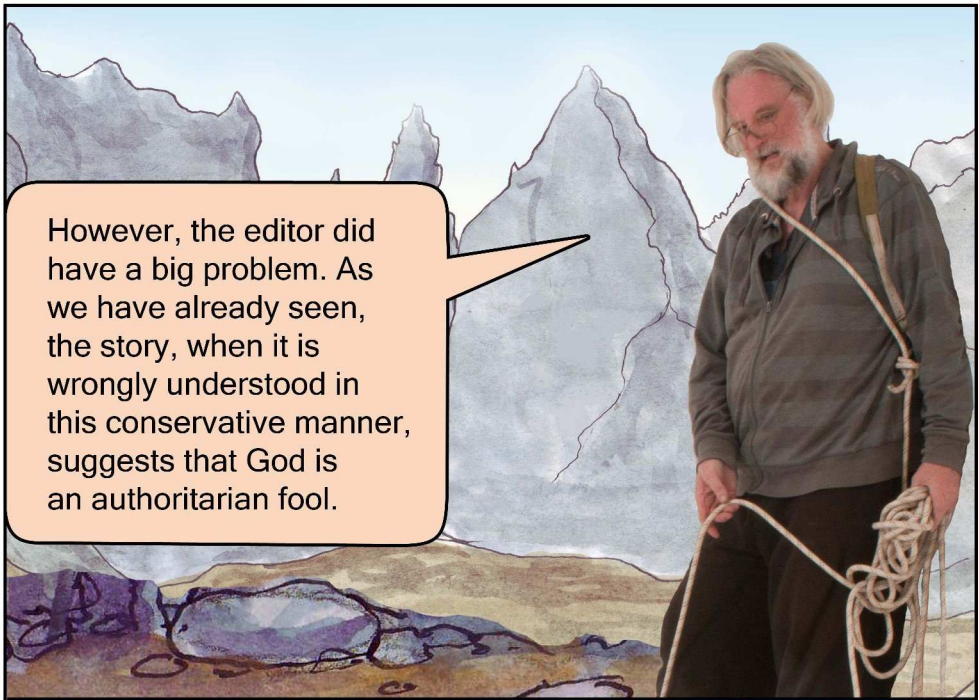
We need to get rid of this Hebrew revolutionary crap!



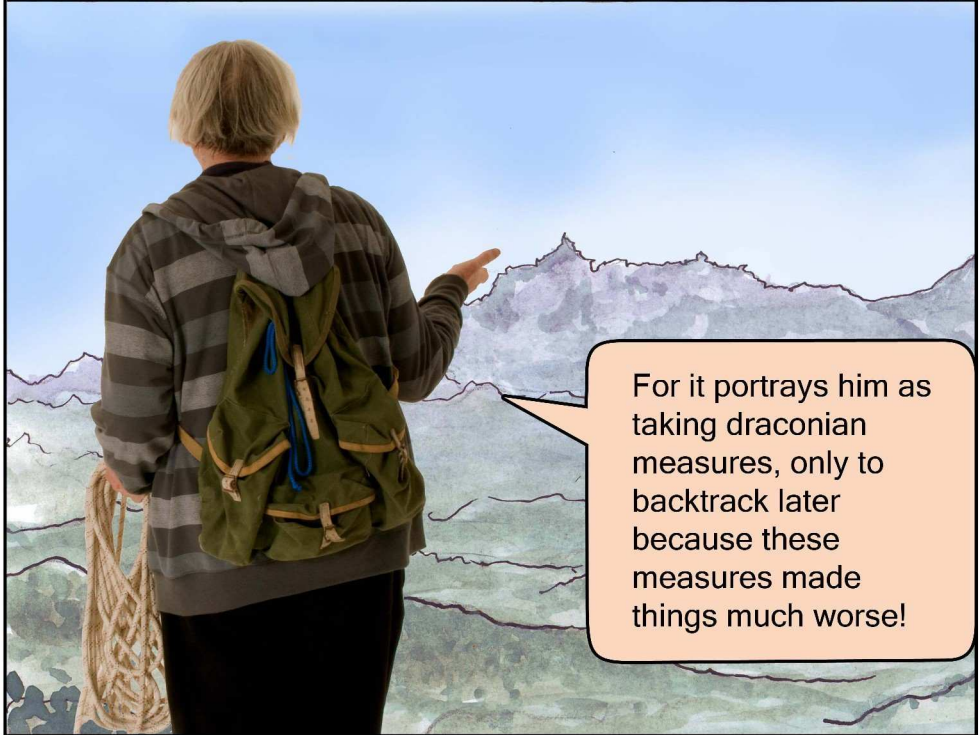
Yes what we are looking for is blind obedience!



It was a straight forward matter for him to describe Noah as someone who 'obeyed blindly', even though the result was somewhat crass, since in being obedient Noah was simply consenting to be rescued.



However, the editor did have a big problem. As we have already seen, the story, when it is wrongly understood in this conservative manner, suggests that God is an authoritarian fool.



For it portrays him as taking draconian measures, only to backtrack later because these measures made things much worse!

Understandably the priestly editor wanted to change this so as to strengthen the story. So he grandly talks about a 'gracious covenant' but this is just eyewash and makes no sense!



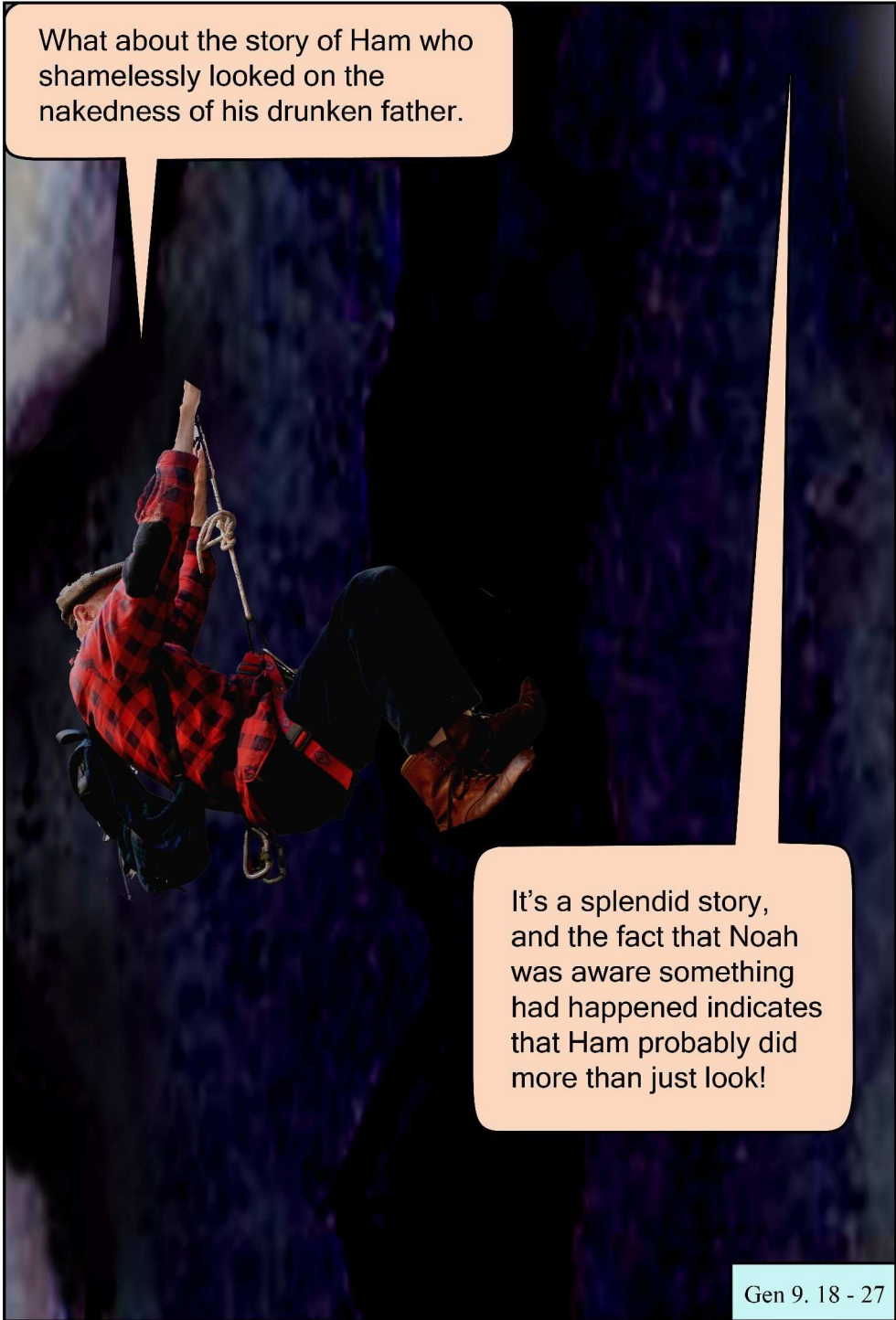
How can this
be a covenant?
There's no
agreement!

Don't fuss.
No one will
notice!



8

The Sons of Noah and The Tower of Babel

A person is rappelling down a dark, textured rock face. They are wearing a red and black plaid shirt, dark pants, and brown boots. A rope is attached to their harness and a carabiner. The background is a dark, craggy rock wall.

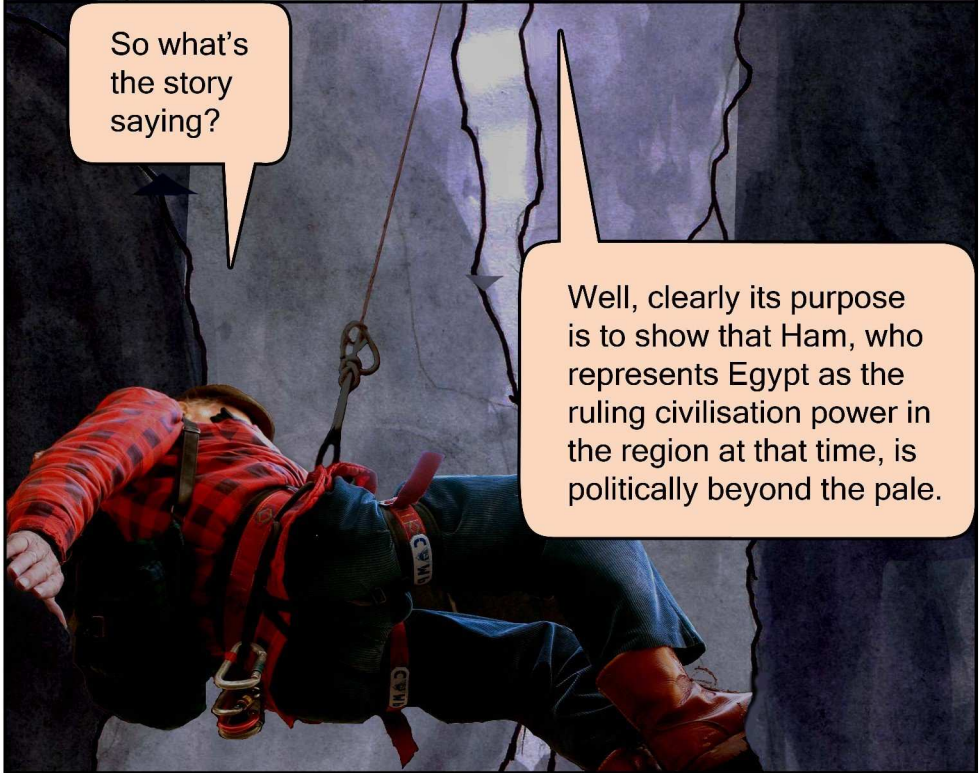
What about the story of Ham who shamelessly looked on the nakedness of his drunken father.

It's a splendid story, and the fact that Noah was aware something had happened indicates that Ham probably did more than just look!

Gen 9. 18 - 27

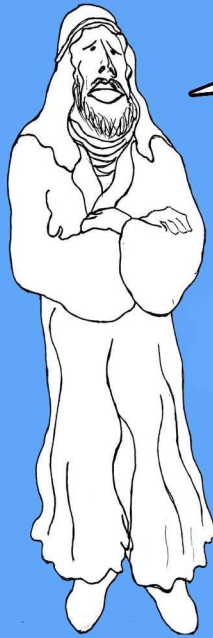


You're right. The Hebrew writer certainly knew how to make his point where sex is concerned.



Well, clearly its purpose is to show that Ham, who represents Egypt as the ruling civilisation power in the region at that time, is politically beyond the pale.

There are indications that in the original story there were two sons not three: Canaan, who represented the local Egyptian vassal states and Eber, who stood for the 'Hebrew' Israelites.



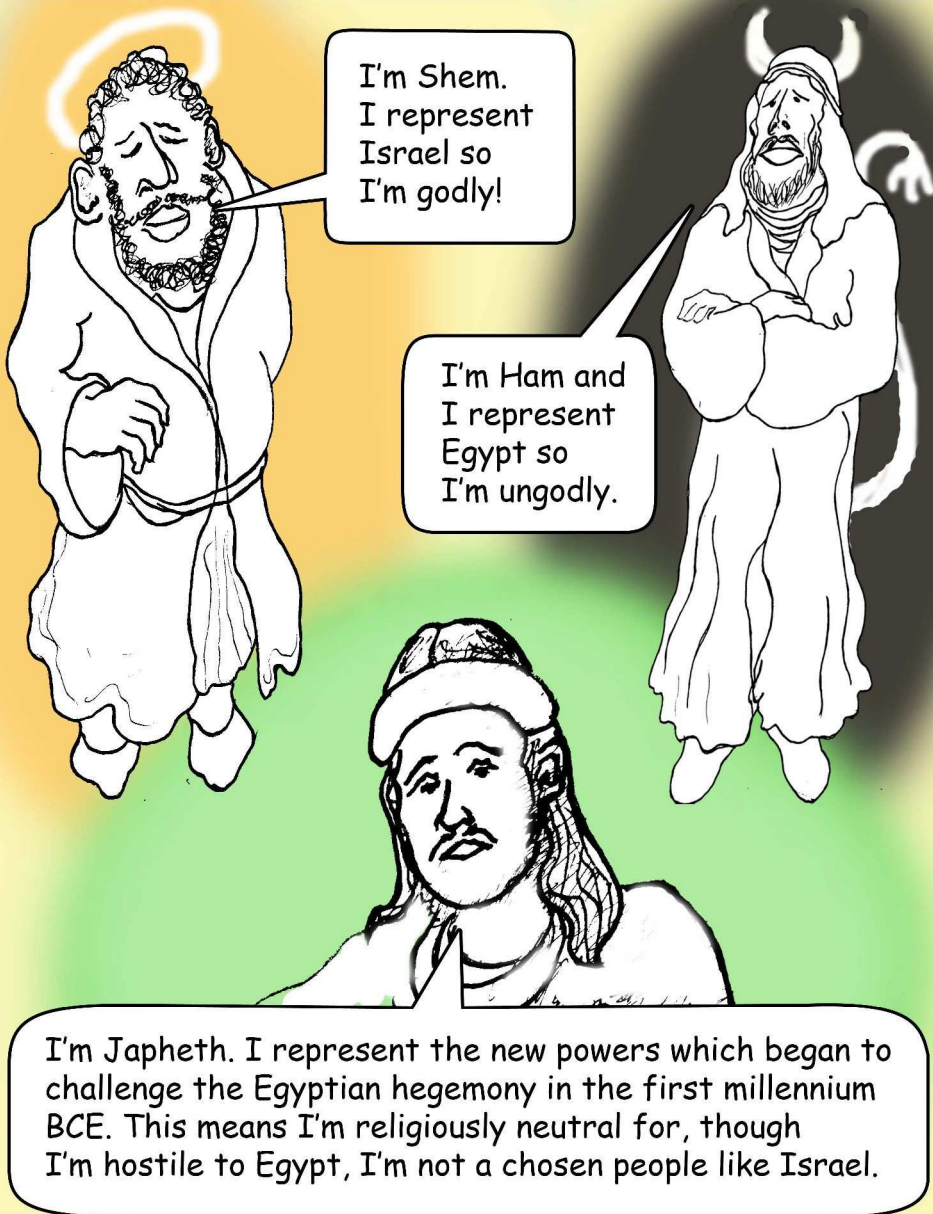
I'm Canaan

And I'm Eber



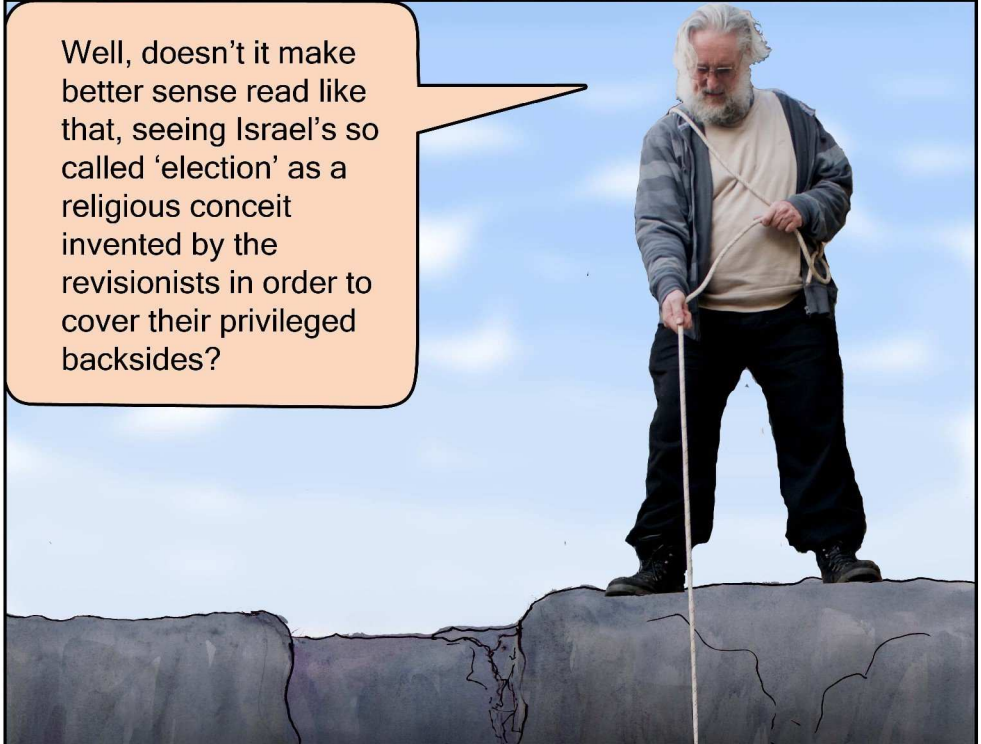
In this scenario the division is clearly between the ideological perspective of the ruling, conservative, regional power and the worldview of the new, revolutionary, marginal community, Israel.

Presumably a later writer introduced the third son into the story to reflect the more complicated situation pertaining in his day. He also gave the story a bogus religious interpretation in which Israel's destiny is to prosper and Egypt's destiny is to decline.

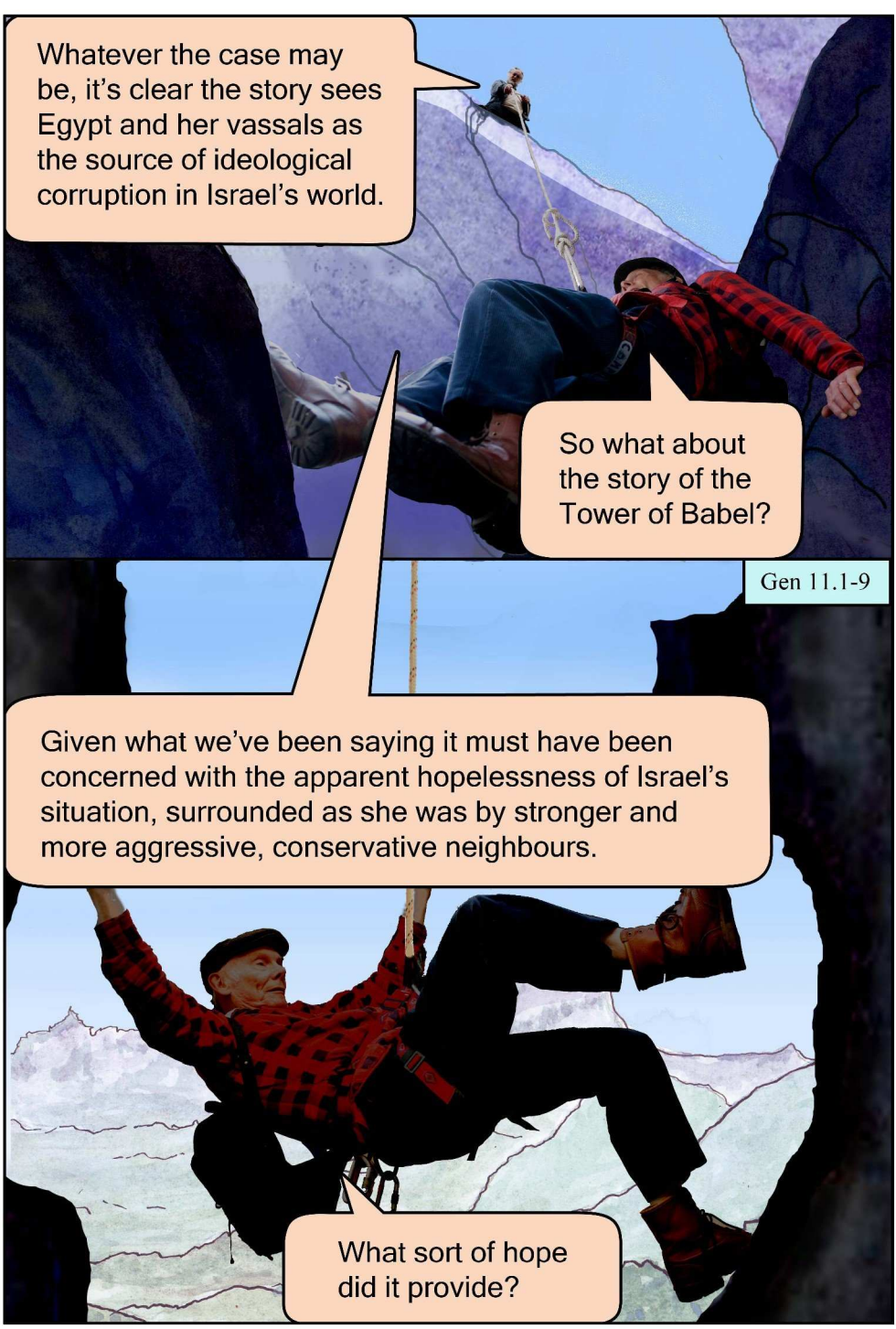




So you're saying this story too has been edited so as to soften its originally unbearable marginal demands?



Well, doesn't it make better sense read like that, seeing Israel's so called 'election' as a religious conceit invented by the revisionists in order to cover their privileged backsides?



Whatever the case may be, it's clear the story sees Egypt and her vassals as the source of ideological corruption in Israel's world.

So what about the story of the Tower of Babel?

Gen 11.1-9

Given what we've been saying it must have been concerned with the apparent hopelessness of Israel's situation, surrounded as she was by stronger and more aggressive, conservative neighbours.

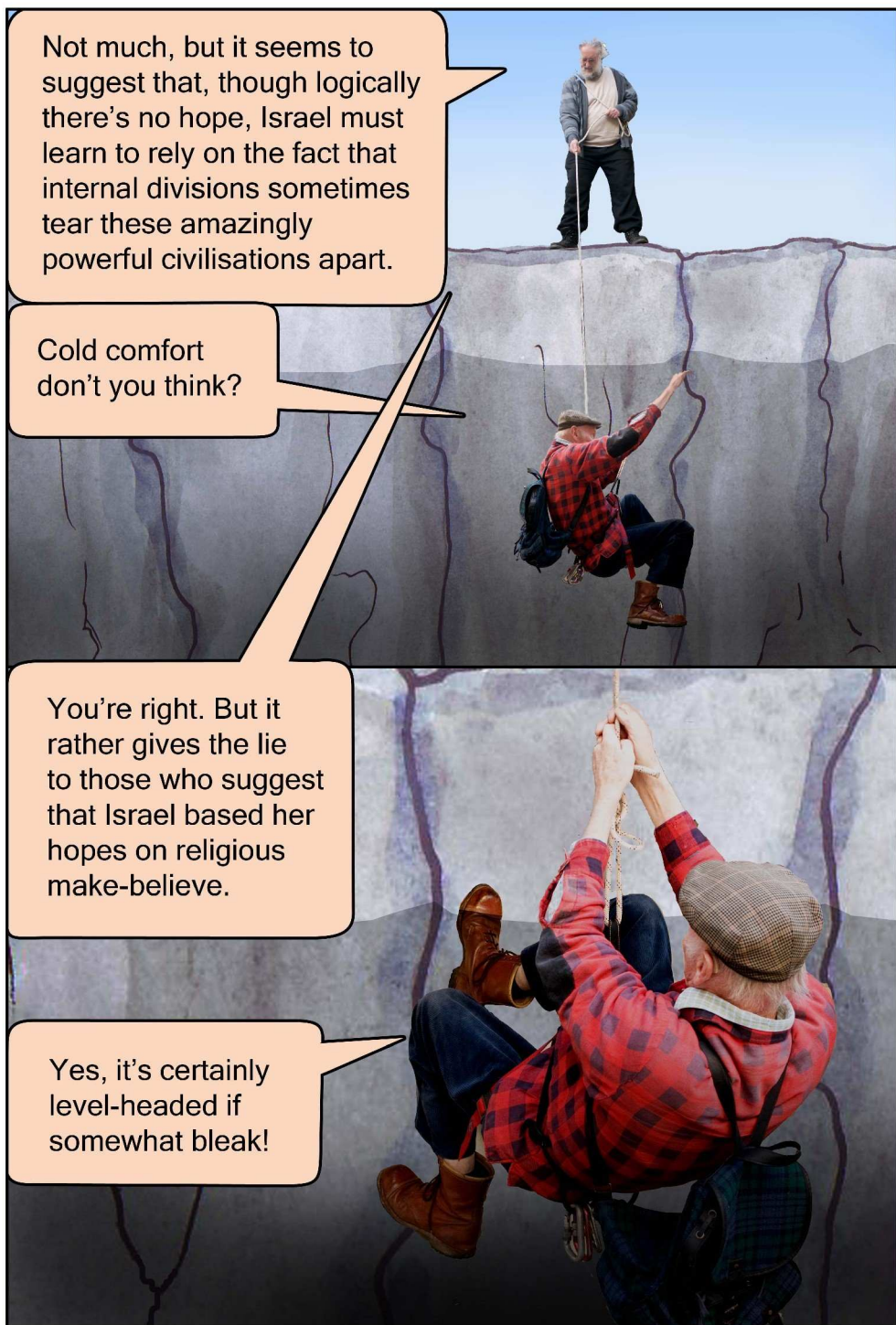
What sort of hope did it provide?

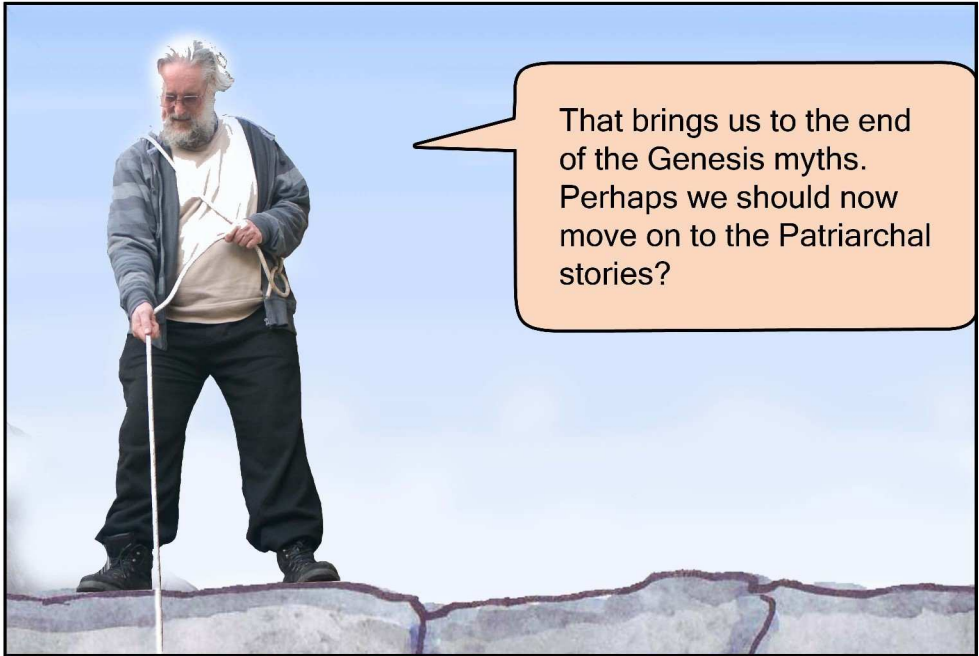
Not much, but it seems to suggest that, though logically there's no hope, Israel must learn to rely on the fact that internal divisions sometimes tear these amazingly powerful civilisations apart.

Cold comfort don't you think?

You're right. But it rather gives the lie to those who suggest that Israel based her hopes on religious make-believe.

Yes, it's certainly level-headed if somewhat bleak!

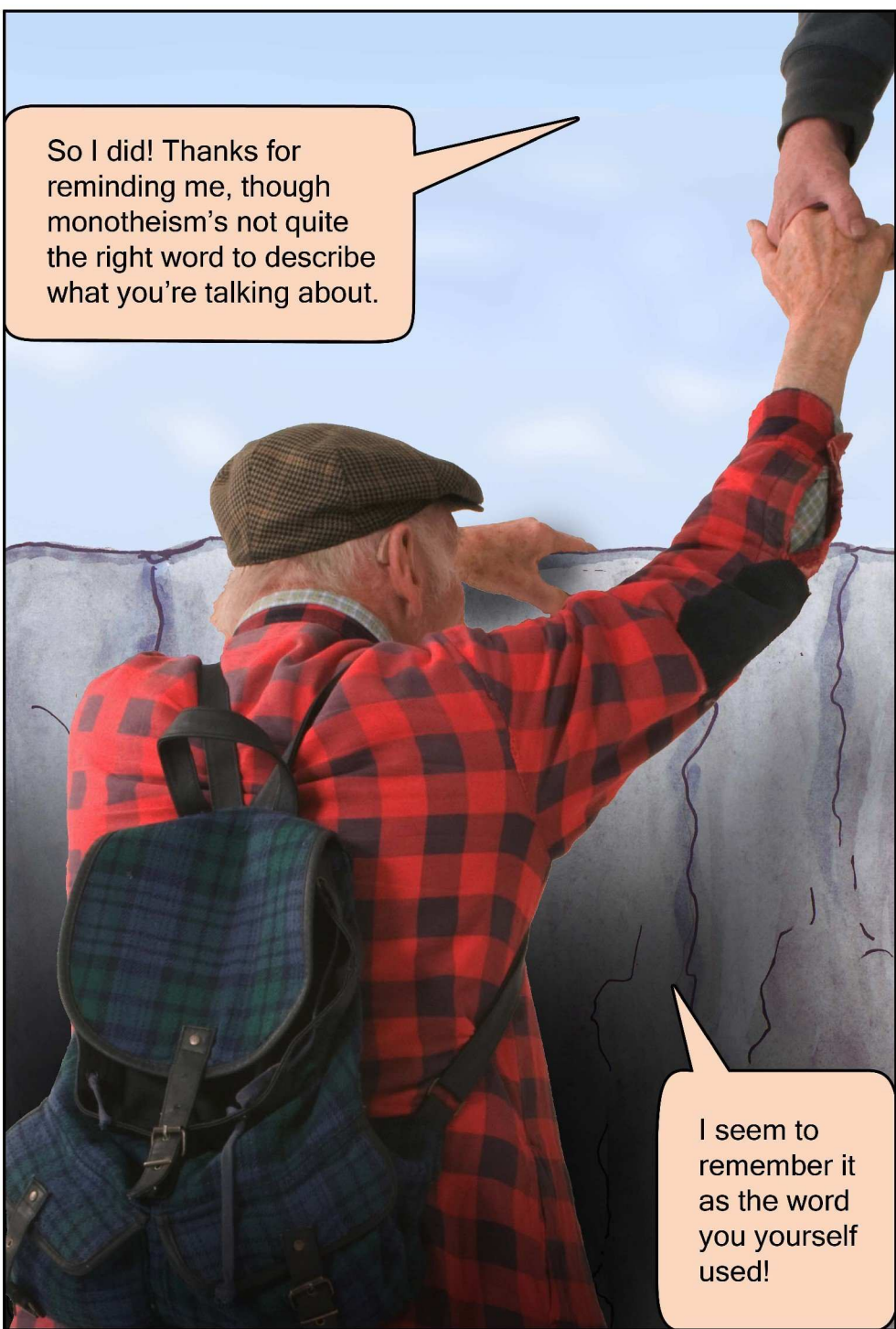




That brings us to the end of the Genesis myths. Perhaps we should now move on to the Patriarchal stories?



You're forgetting you promised to explain why all these myths describe the dealings of a monotheistic god, a religious feature you seem to find embarrassing!



So I did! Thanks for reminding me, though monotheism's not quite the right word to describe what you're talking about.

I seem to remember it as the word you yourself used!

9

Monotheism and The Metacosmic God

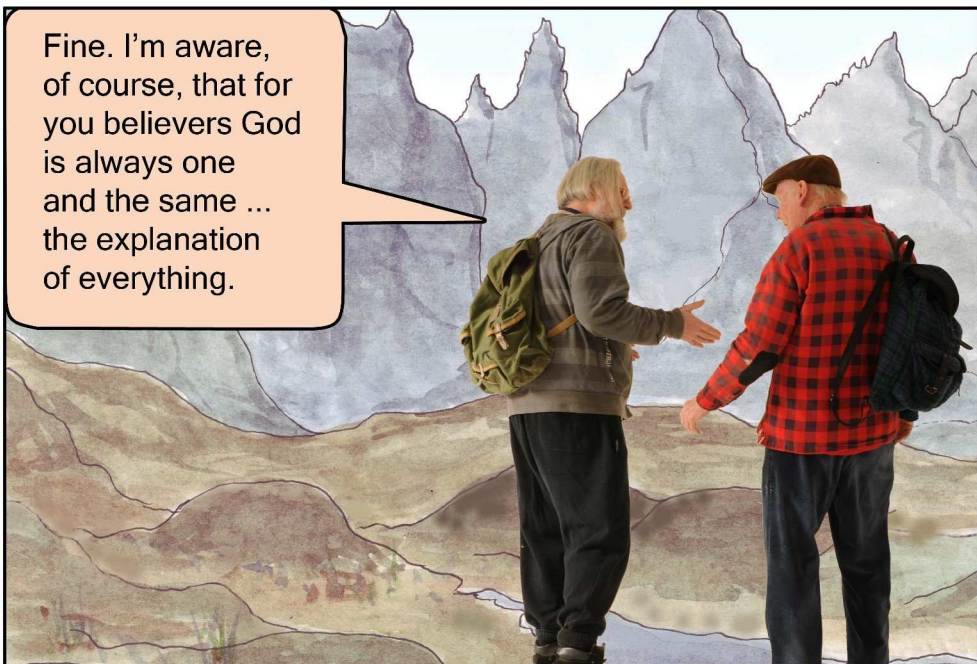
Right. To start, could you provide us with a thumb-nail sketch of the monotheistic God you say you find in the Bible?

Very well. Three things have to be said about him.

First, he's the main character in the book and he is always the same on every page.



Fine. I'm aware,
of course, that for
you believers God
is always one
and the same ...
the explanation
of everything.

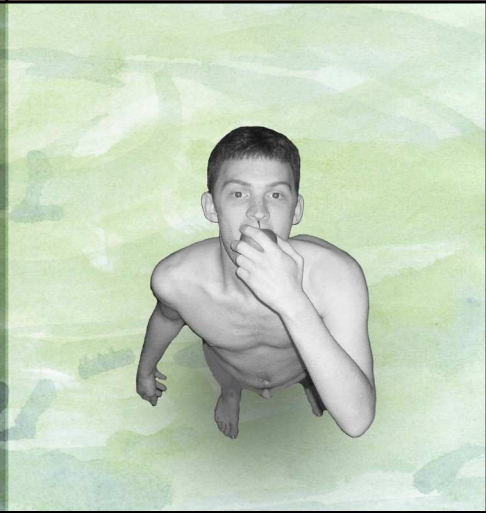


However, I'm interested to find out whether all the biblical
writers shared these suppositions or are we being misled,
once again, by the priestly writer and his revisionist mates?

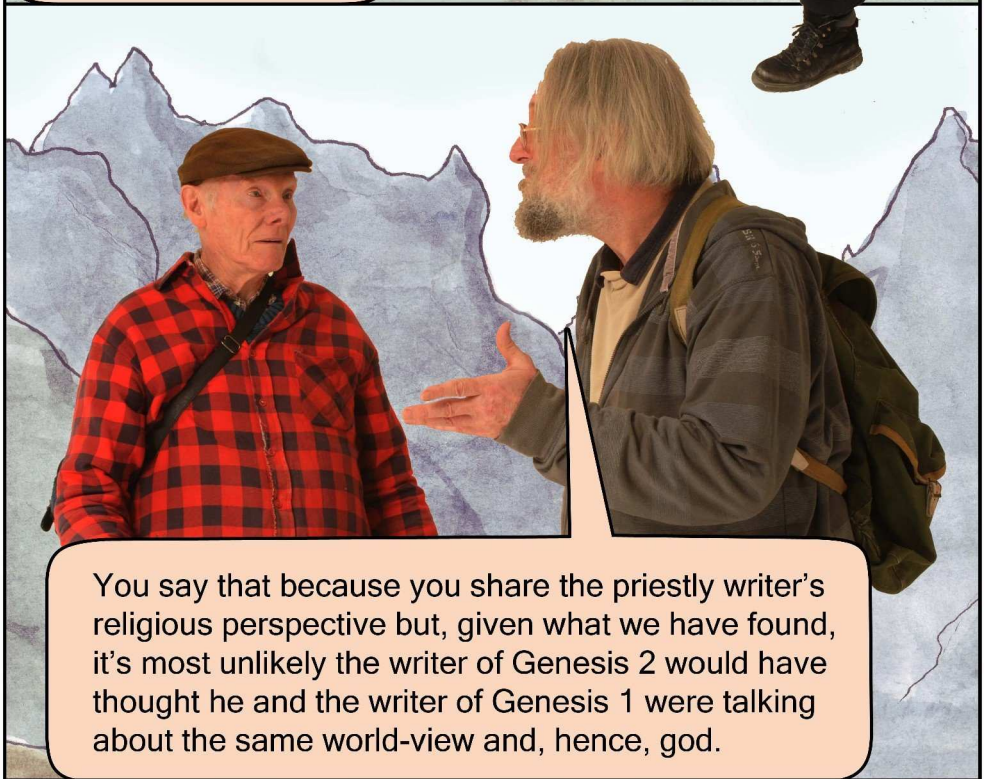
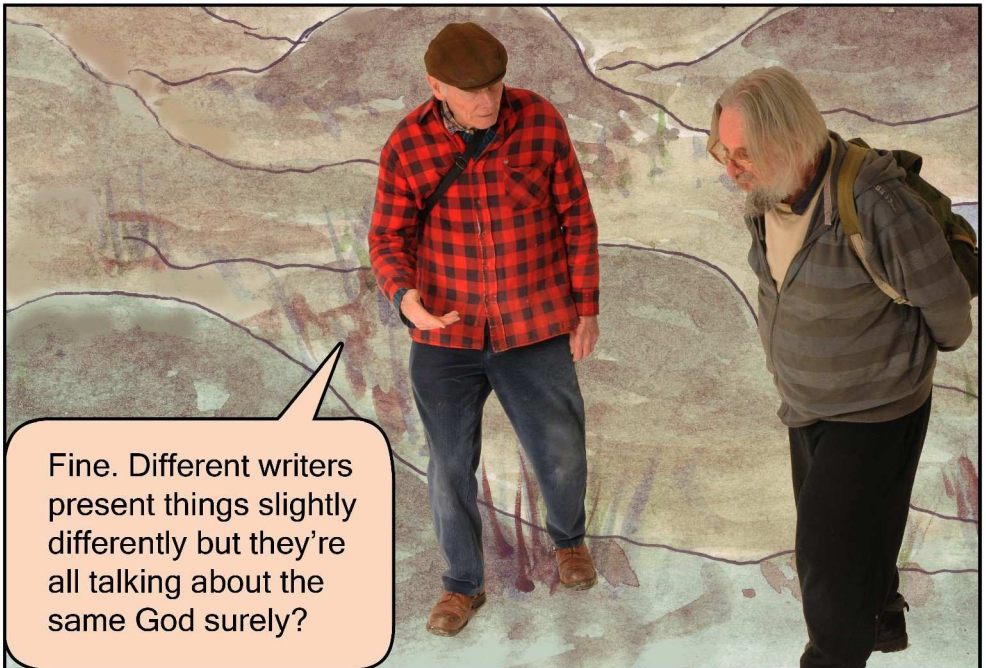


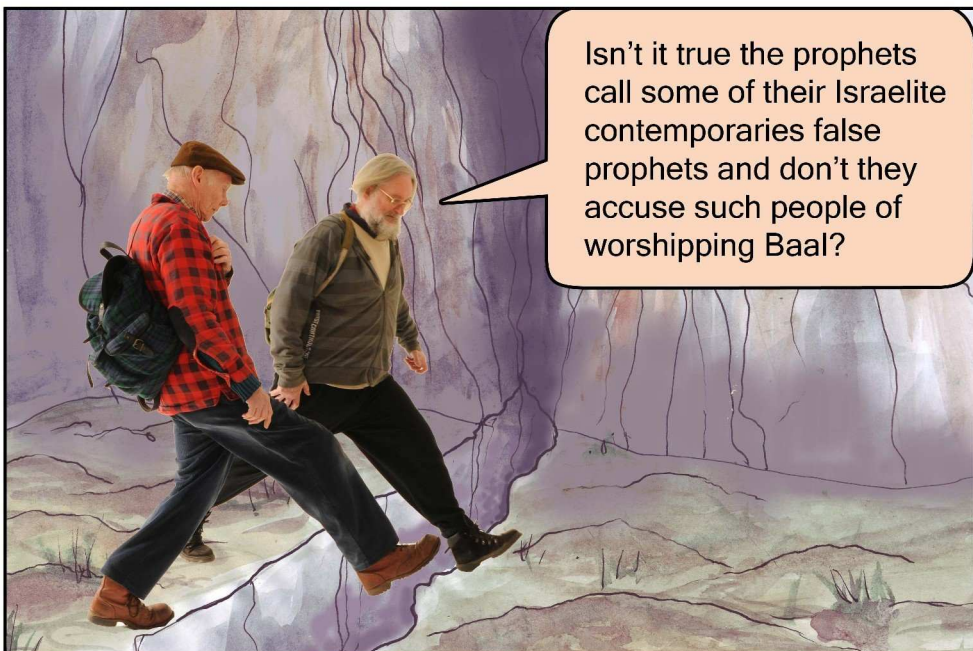
We mustn't forget that God
is authoritarian in Genesis 1

... but not in Genesis 2

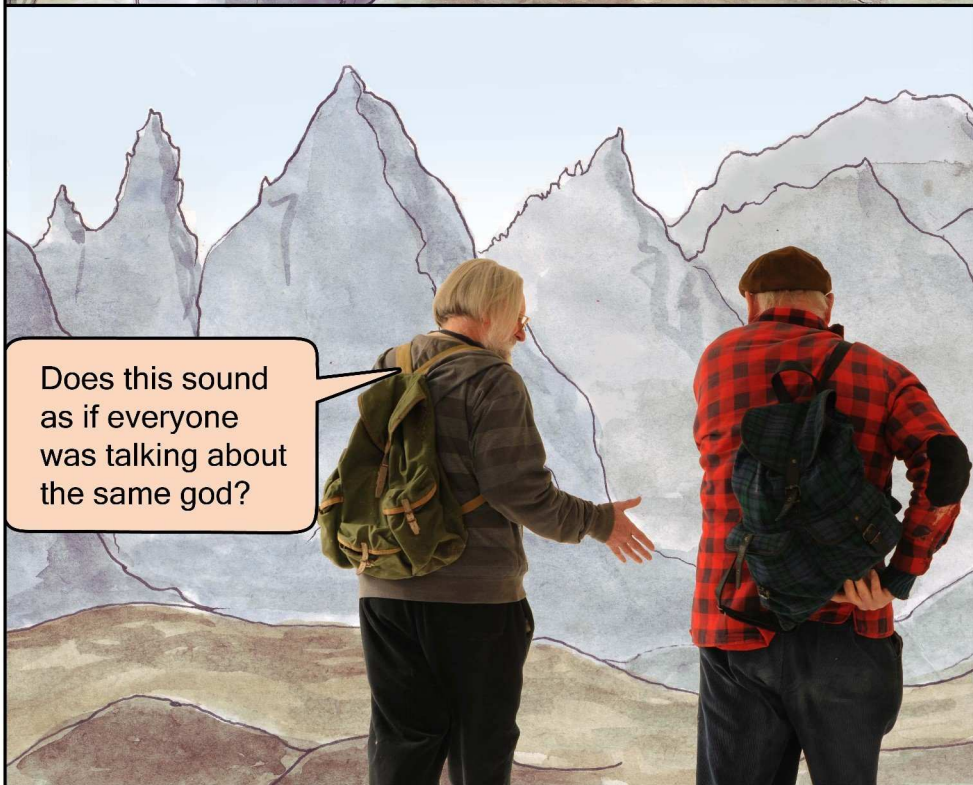


Doesn't this suggest
biblical writers don't, in
fact, share the same god
any more than they share
political perspectives.

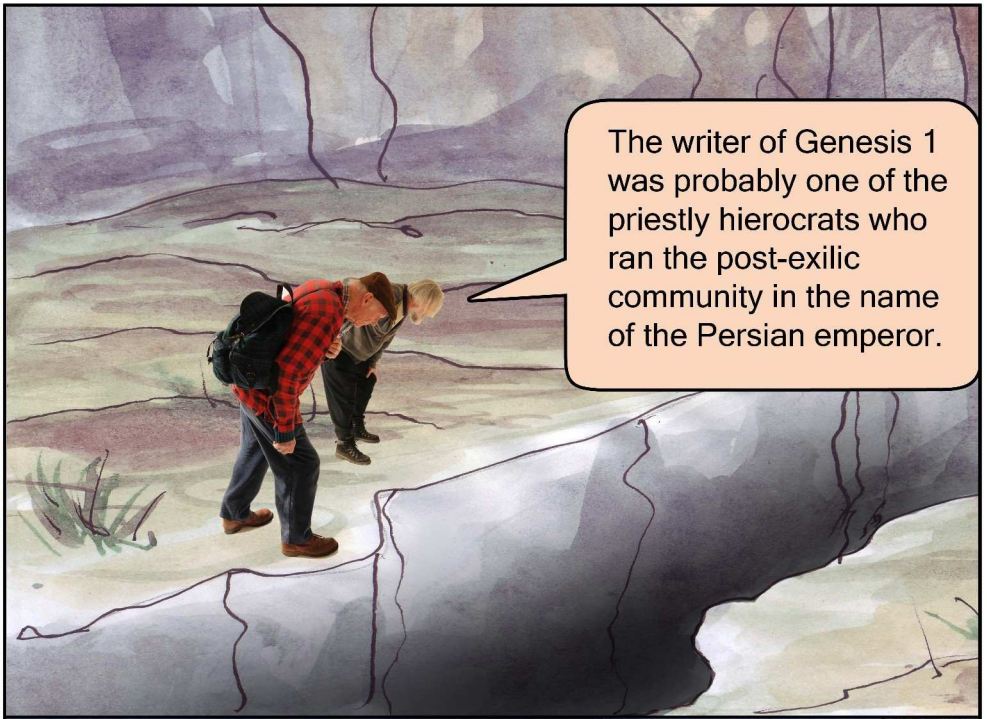




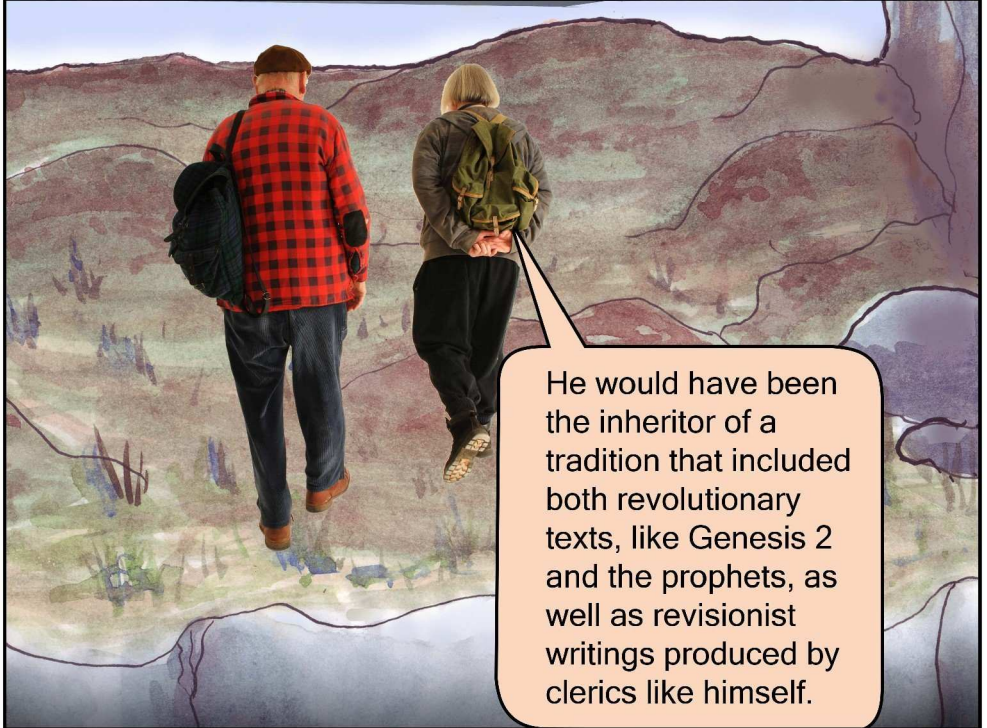
Isn't it true the prophets call some of their Israelite contemporaries false prophets and don't they accuse such people of worshipping Baal?



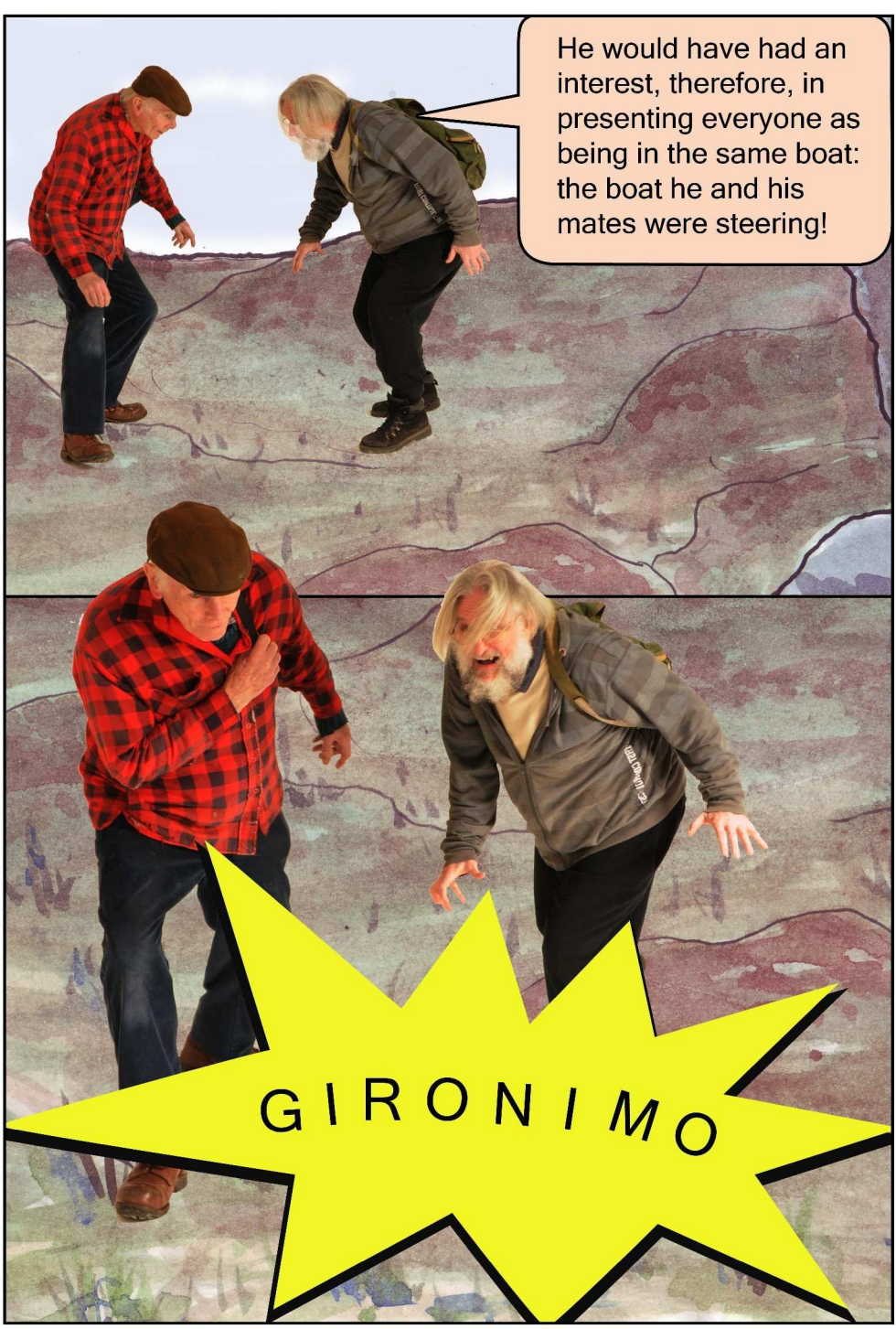
Does this sound as if everyone was talking about the same god?



The writer of Genesis 1 was probably one of the priestly hierocrats who ran the post-exilic community in the name of the Persian emperor.



He would have been the inheritor of a tradition that included both revolutionary texts, like Genesis 2 and the prophets, as well as revisionist writings produced by clerics like himself.

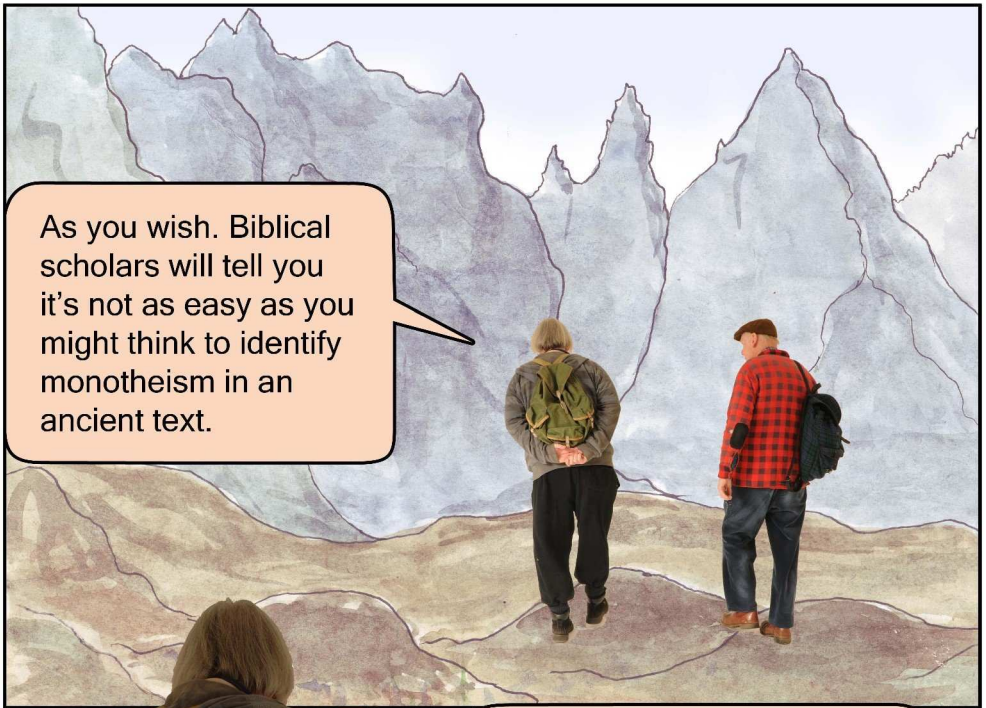


He would have had an interest, therefore, in presenting everyone as being in the same boat: the boat he and his mates were steering!

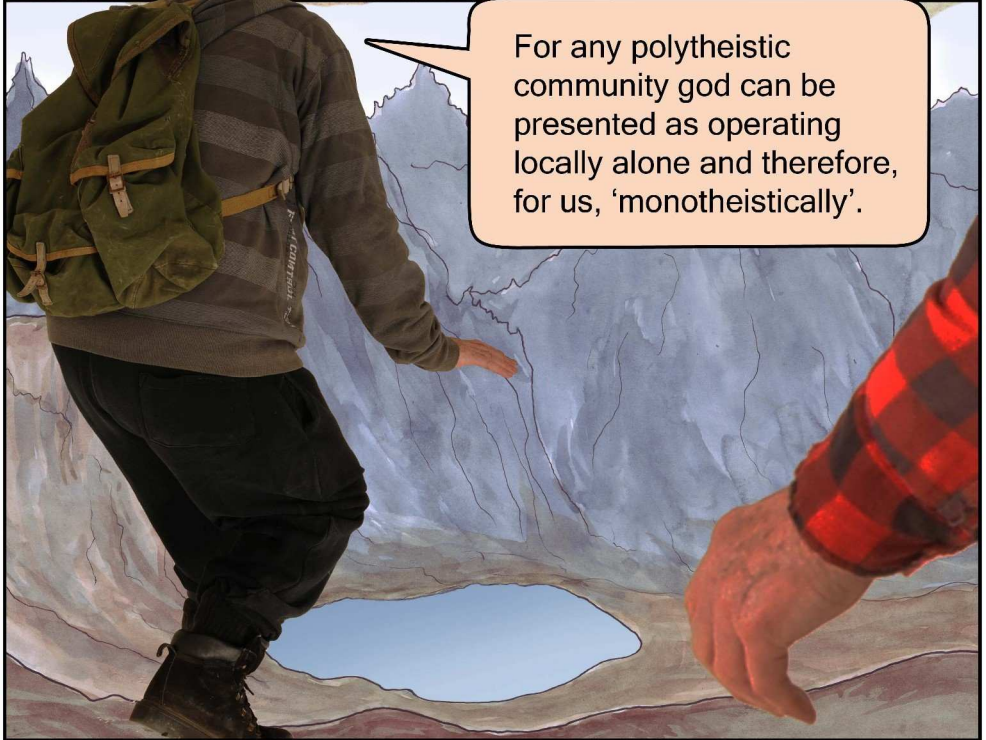
GIRONIMO







As you wish. Biblical scholars will tell you it's not as easy as you might think to identify monotheism in an ancient text.



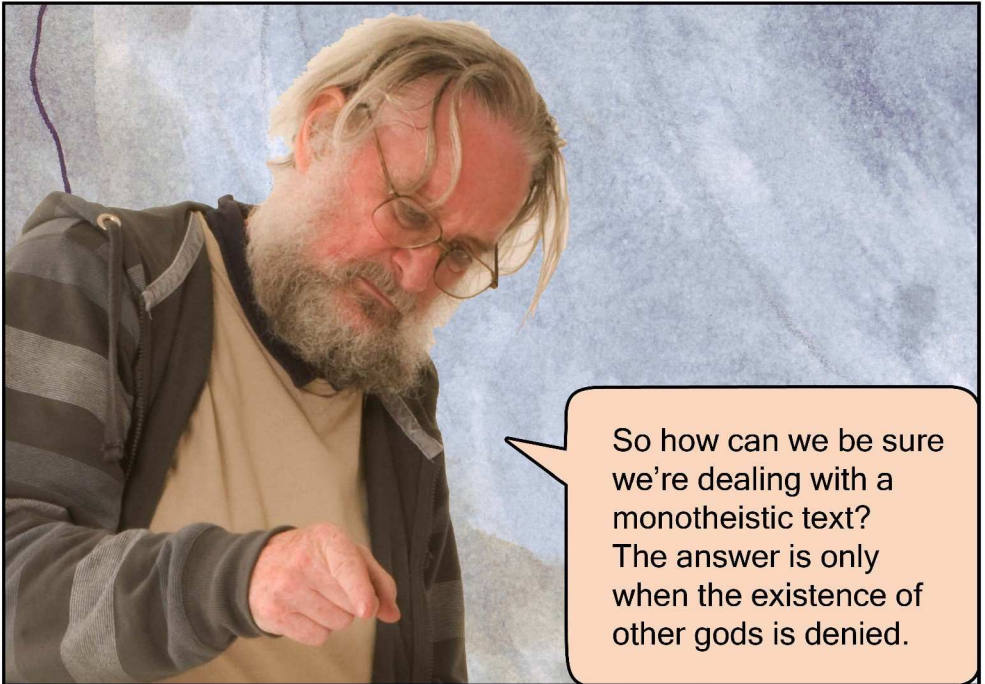
For any polytheistic community god can be presented as operating locally alone and therefore, for us, 'monotheistically'.

Take the text on this beautiful four-foot-high black basalt stela called the Moabite Stone which now resides in the Louvre Museum in Paris.



Moab was a community very similar to early Israel. Its god Kemosh is spoken about in this text as acting alone, in exactly the same way as Yahweh does in the Bible. However, no-one believes the Moabites were monotheists.

*I am Mesha king of Moab, the son of Kemosh ...
Kemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel."
and I went in the night and fought against it from
daybreak until midday, and I took it and I slew
the whole population ... For I had devoted them
to destruction for Kemosh.*



So how can we be sure we're dealing with a monotheistic text? The answer is only when the existence of other gods is denied.

Using this criteria there are texts in the Old Testament which can safely be classified as monotheistic, but they are all late, which is to say exilic or post exilic:

I am he.

*Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.*

Is 43.10

*I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God.*

Is 44.6

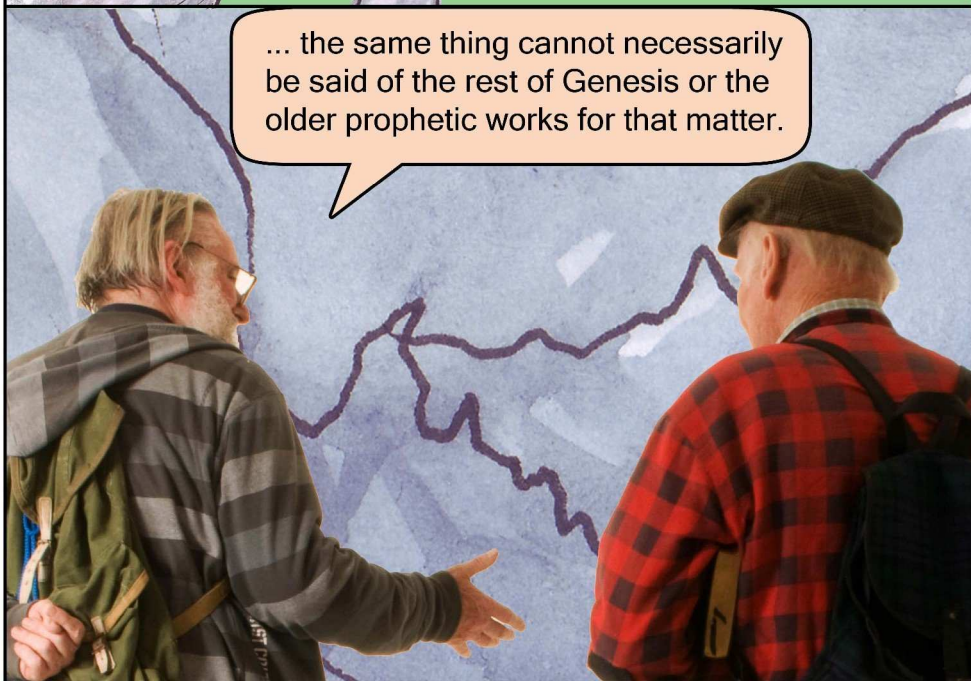
*I am the LORD, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God.*

Is 45.5

So while it is fair to say that Genesis 1 is monotheistic, since its author, the priestly writer, was working in the post exilic period...

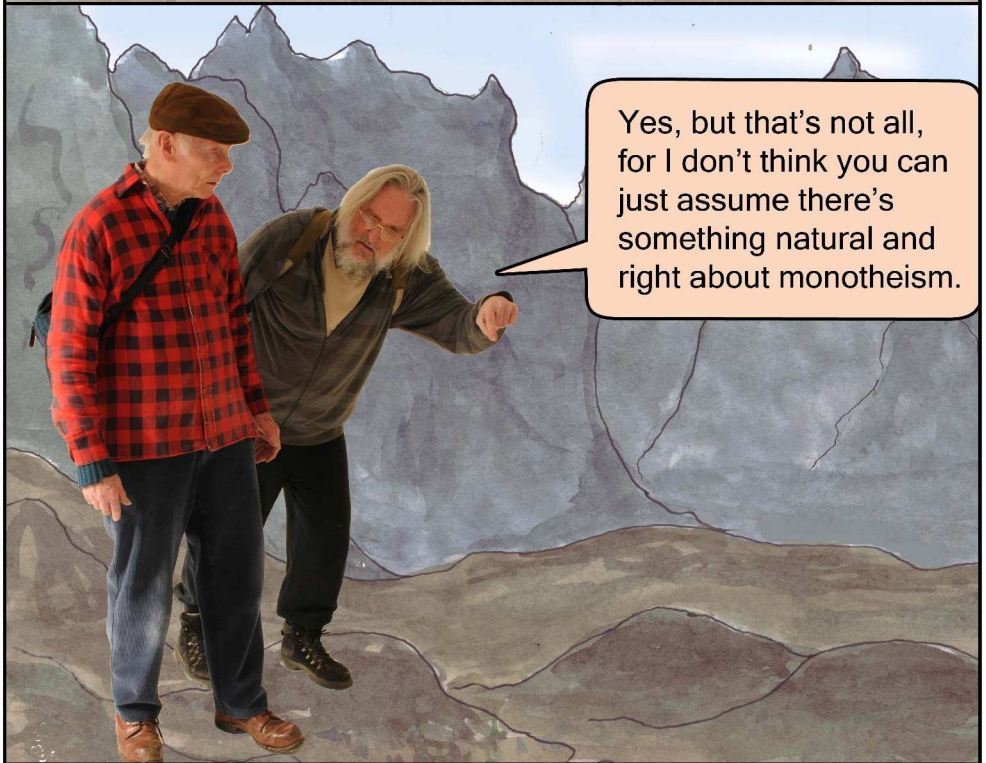


... the same thing cannot necessarily be said of the rest of Genesis or the older prophetic works for that matter.





So you're telling me again that I read monotheism into Genesis 2 because of Genesis 1?



Yes, but that's not all, for I don't think you can just assume there's something natural and right about monotheism.

Remember our conversation with Ancient Man about his **myth language**. He described it as 'genius' or 'desperation' since it was the only way he could talk at all about the world!

See *Thinking About the Bible*: Part 1 page 138.



Then there were all the other natural forces.

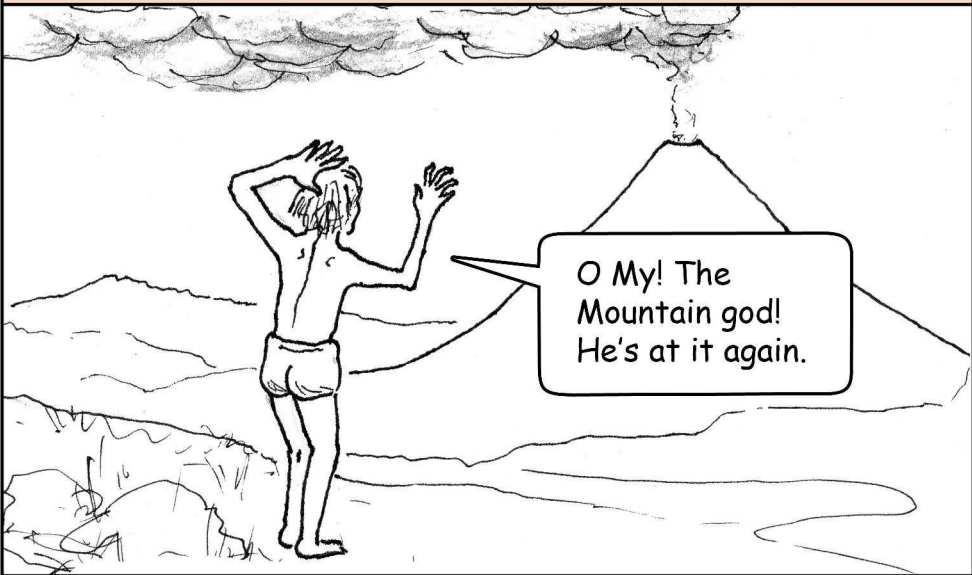
I could only communicate INDIRECTLY about what I saw and experienced, using a representational language I specially invented for the purpose.



You now call this language myth. I called it 'Harrumph, meaning 'genius' or 'desperation'!



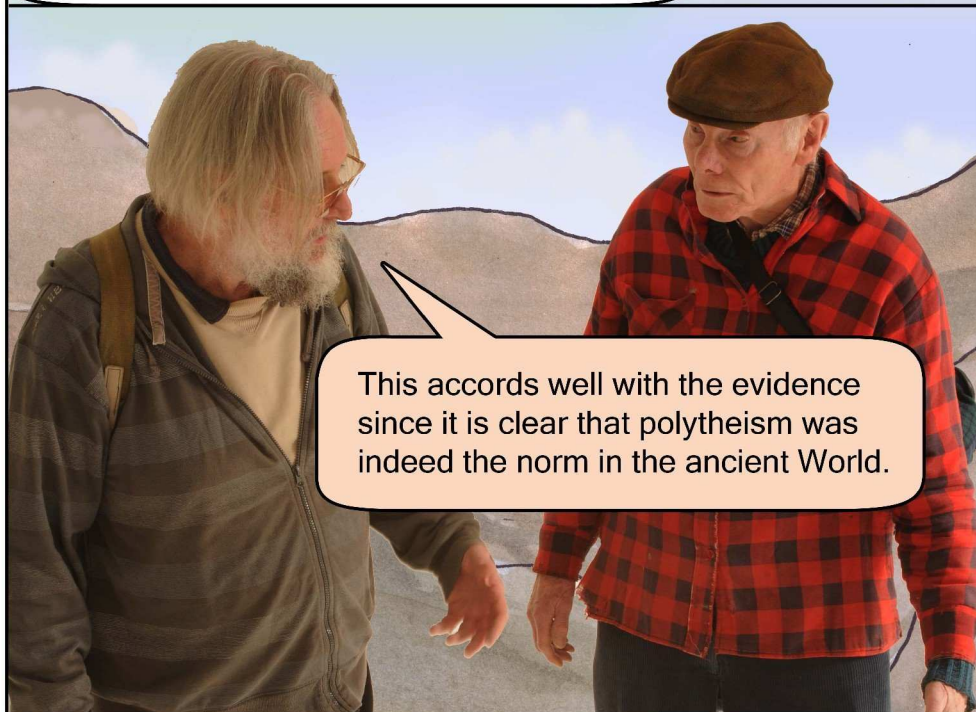
As he explained, using this technology, the powers which humans experience in the universe are personalised so as to make it possible to think about them and discuss them.



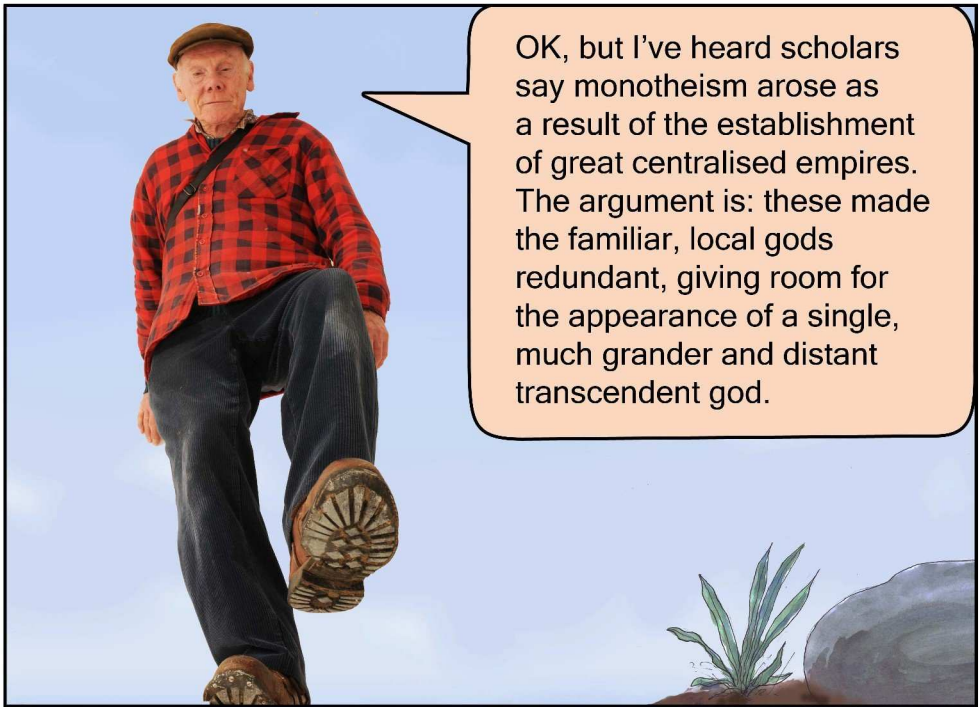
This being the case you would have expected polytheism rather than monotheism to develop since humans experience many powers influencing their lives.

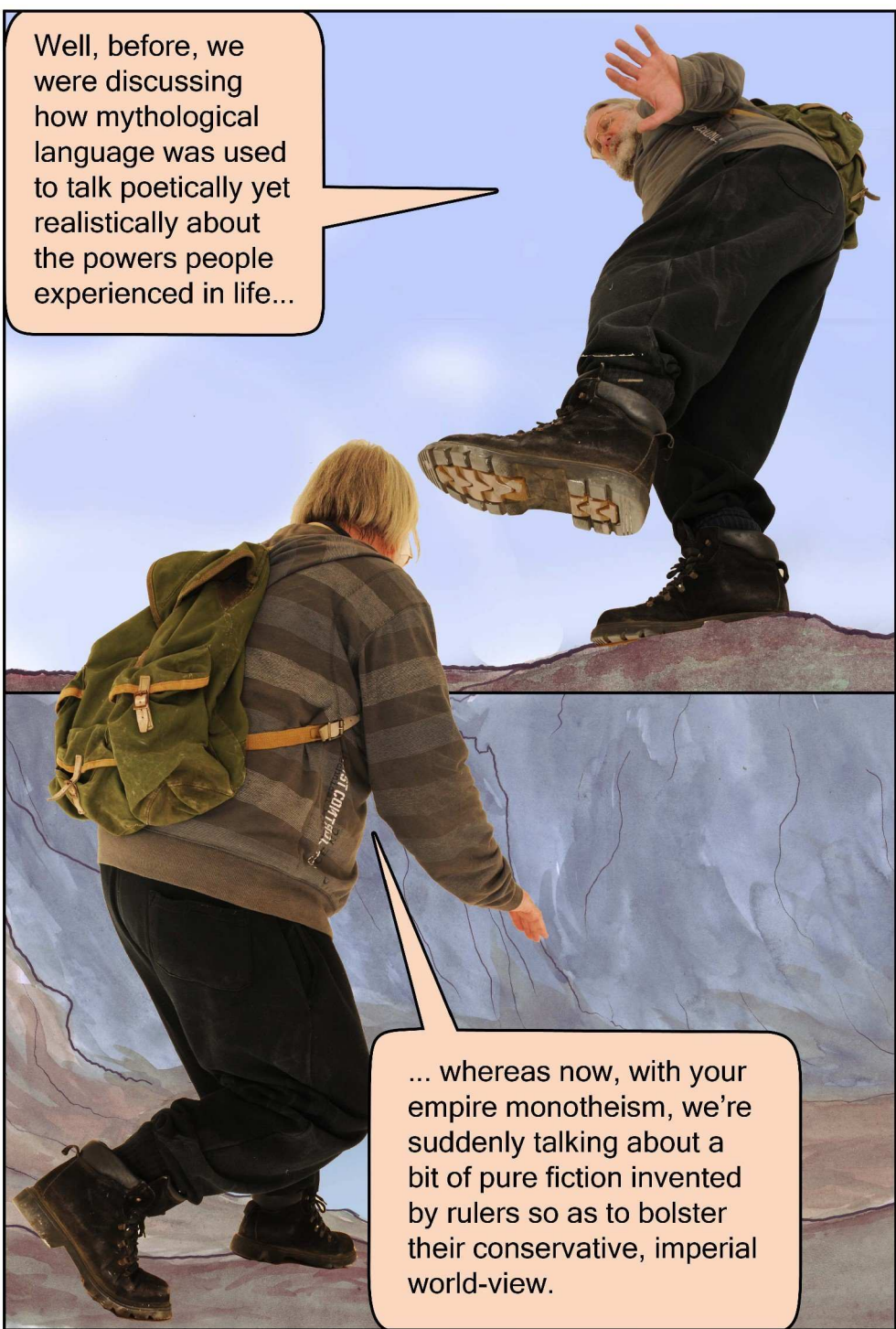


Did the rain god take you by surprise or was it the river goddess who waylaid you?



This accords well with the evidence since it is clear that polytheism was indeed the norm in the ancient World.





Well, before, we were discussing how mythological language was used to talk poetically yet realistically about the powers people experienced in life...

... whereas now, with your empire monotheism, we're suddenly talking about a bit of pure fiction invented by rulers so as to bolster their conservative, imperial world-view.

10

**Monotheism
in
The Ancient Near East**



So you see monotheism as a retreat from reality?

It's not monotheism that's a retreat from reality. It's the use of religion to bolster world-views.

Perhaps we should look at an actual example.

OK. We know of two monotheisms which predate the Bible. One was in Egypt. It didn't appear out of the blue but was preceded by just the sort of centralising movement you say scholars have described.

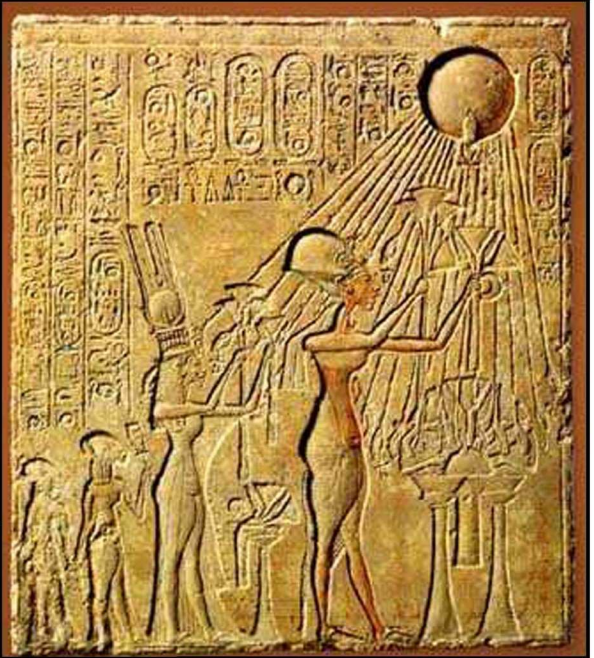
This movement took the form of a struggle for power between the Pharaohs, whose influence had waned, and their rivals, the priests of the ruling god in the Egyptian pantheon: Amon-Re.



The Pharaoh Akhenaten brought matters to a head. He abolished all the cults, including that of Amon-Re and closed all the temples, sacking all the priests.

Then, taking the revenues from the disbanded cults, he used these to further his own rival cult of Aten - the Solar Disc - speaking of him monotheistically as a jealous god who brooked no rivals.

Pharaoh Akhenaten and his family adoring Aten.



However, clearly all of this was far too drastic, for after his death all trace of Akhenaten and what he had done was removed and it was as if he had never existed!

Frieze depicting Akhenaten and his god Aten, defaced after his death.



We can't be certain but all the signs are that Zoroaster was a priest who objected to making the customary sacrifices to gods who represented forces inimical to human wellbeing.



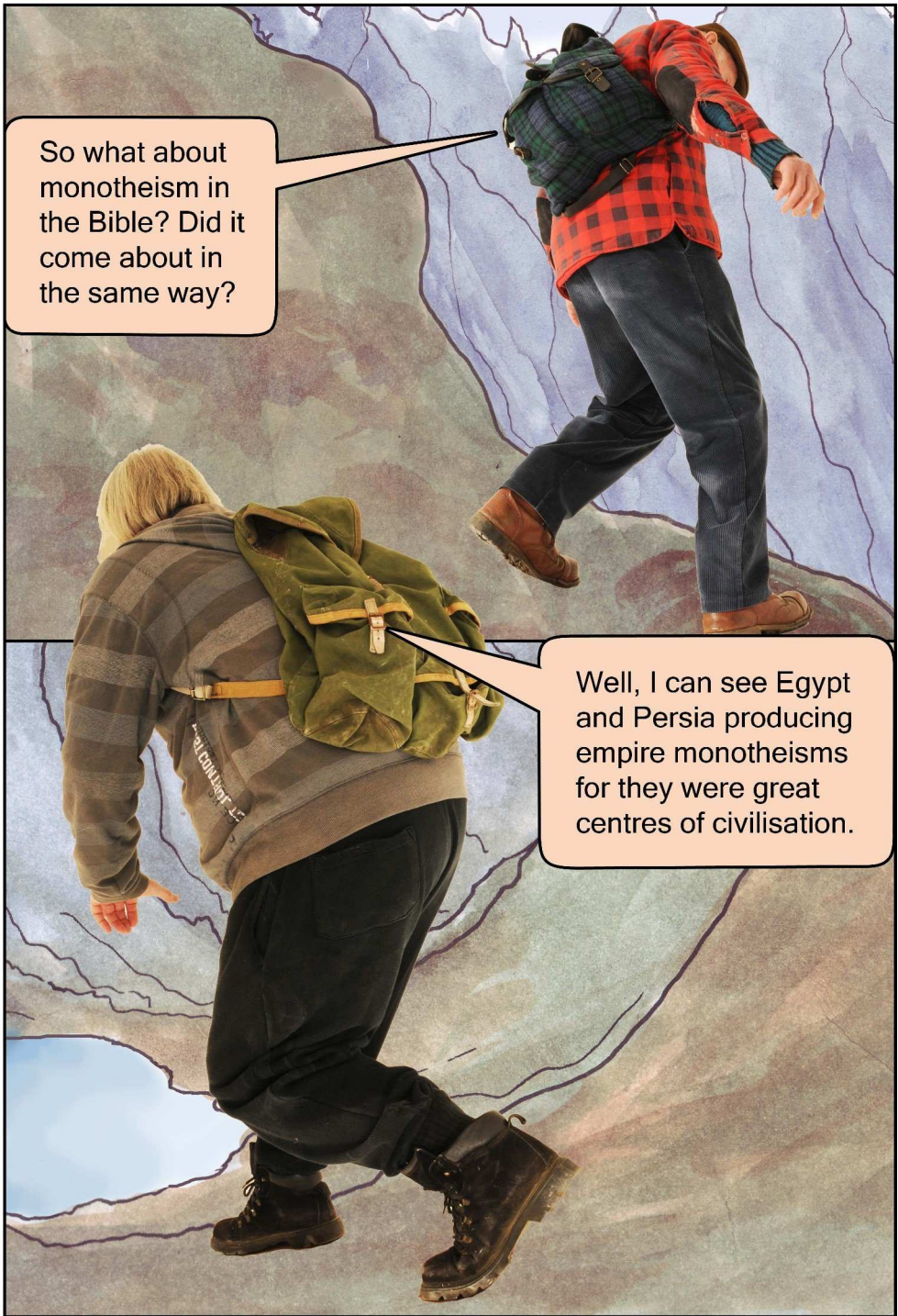
Since he couldn't deny evil existed he produced a religion in which the bountiful creator, Ahura Mazda, is seen as calling upon those he has made to help in struggling against Angra Mainyu, his evil negation, so as to rid the world of this shadow.



Ahura Mazda
5th century BCE
Louvre Museum

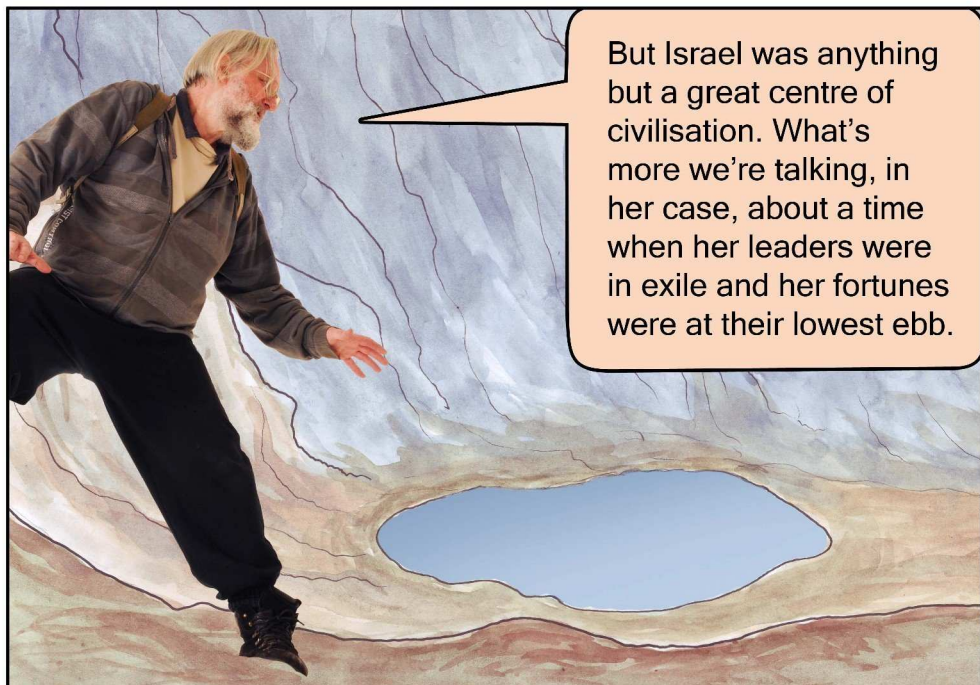
What we seem to have here is a moral reform quite unlike what happened in Egypt. That said it does seem to fit quite well with the 'civilisation development' understanding of how monotheism came about.



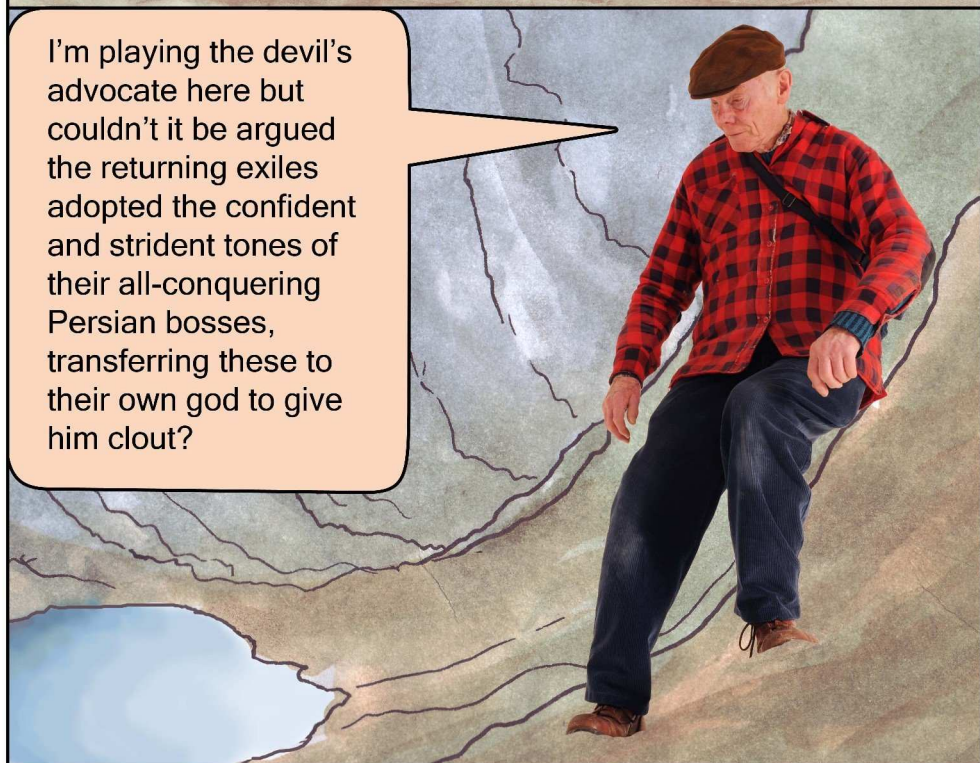


So what about monotheism in the Bible? Did it come about in the same way?

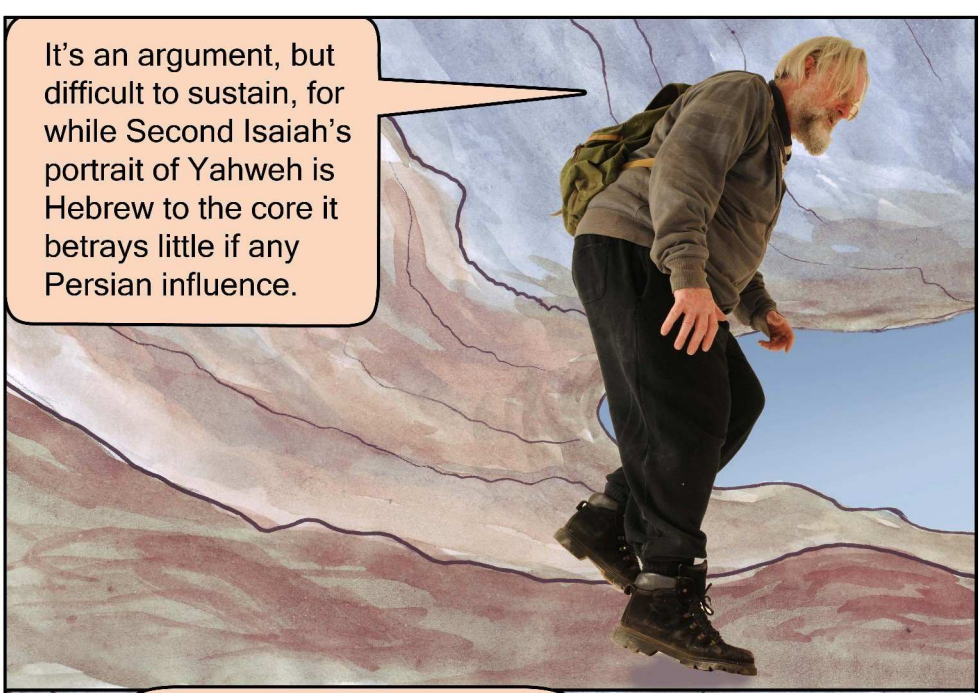
Well, I can see Egypt and Persia producing empire monotheisms for they were great centres of civilisation.




But Israel was anything but a great centre of civilisation. What's more we're talking, in her case, about a time when her leaders were in exile and her fortunes were at their lowest ebb.



I'm playing the devil's advocate here but couldn't it be argued the returning exiles adopted the confident and strident tones of their all-conquering Persian bosses, transferring these to their own god to give him clout?




It's an argument, but difficult to sustain, for while Second Isaiah's portrait of Yahweh is Hebrew to the core it betrays little if any Persian influence.



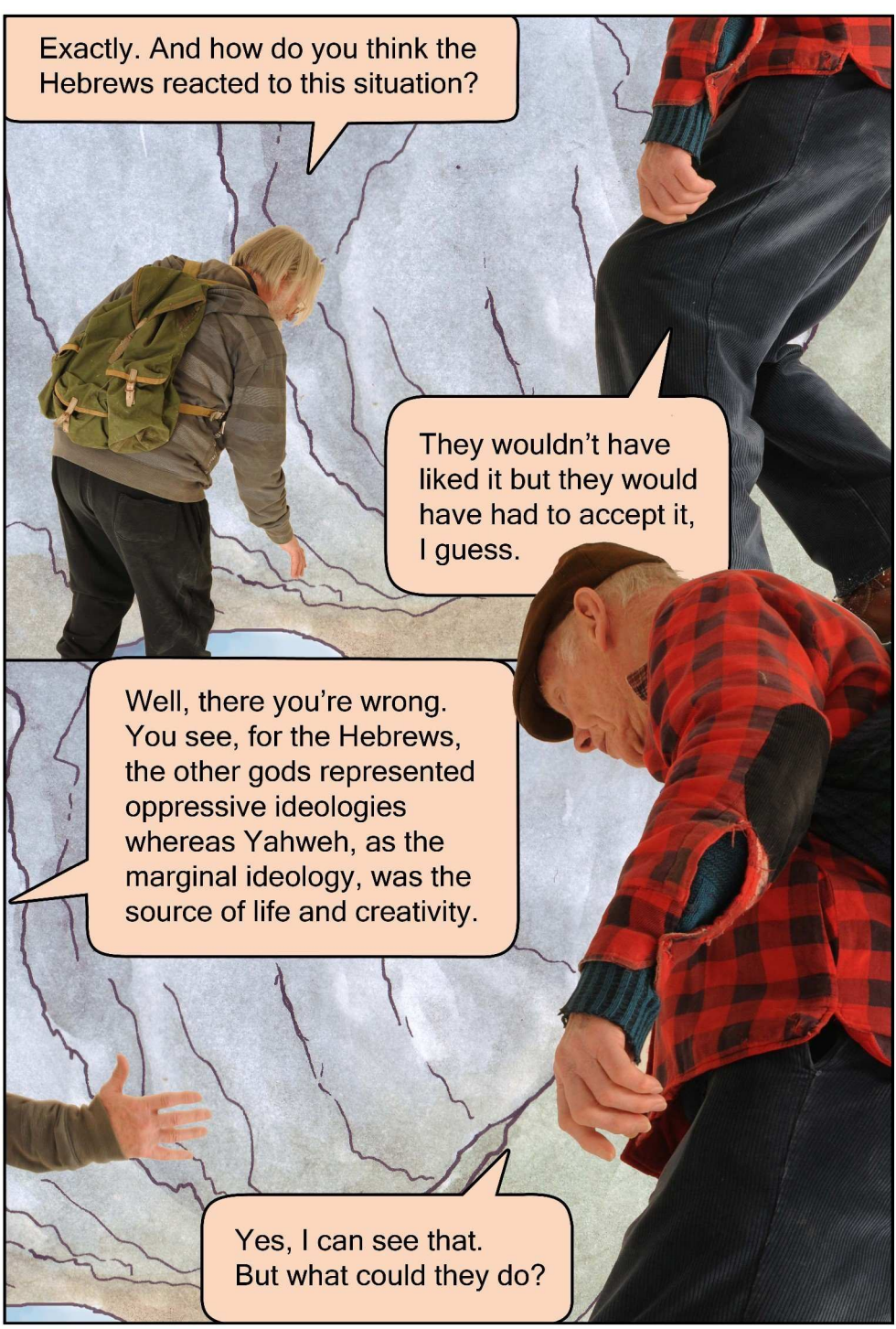
So shouldn't we be looking for a way of understanding biblical monotheism within this Hebrew context?

I take your point.
Please proceed!



OK, given that Yahweh is the god of the marginals what does this imply about his position amongst the other gods?

I suppose it means he's the weakest and most insignificant amongst them.

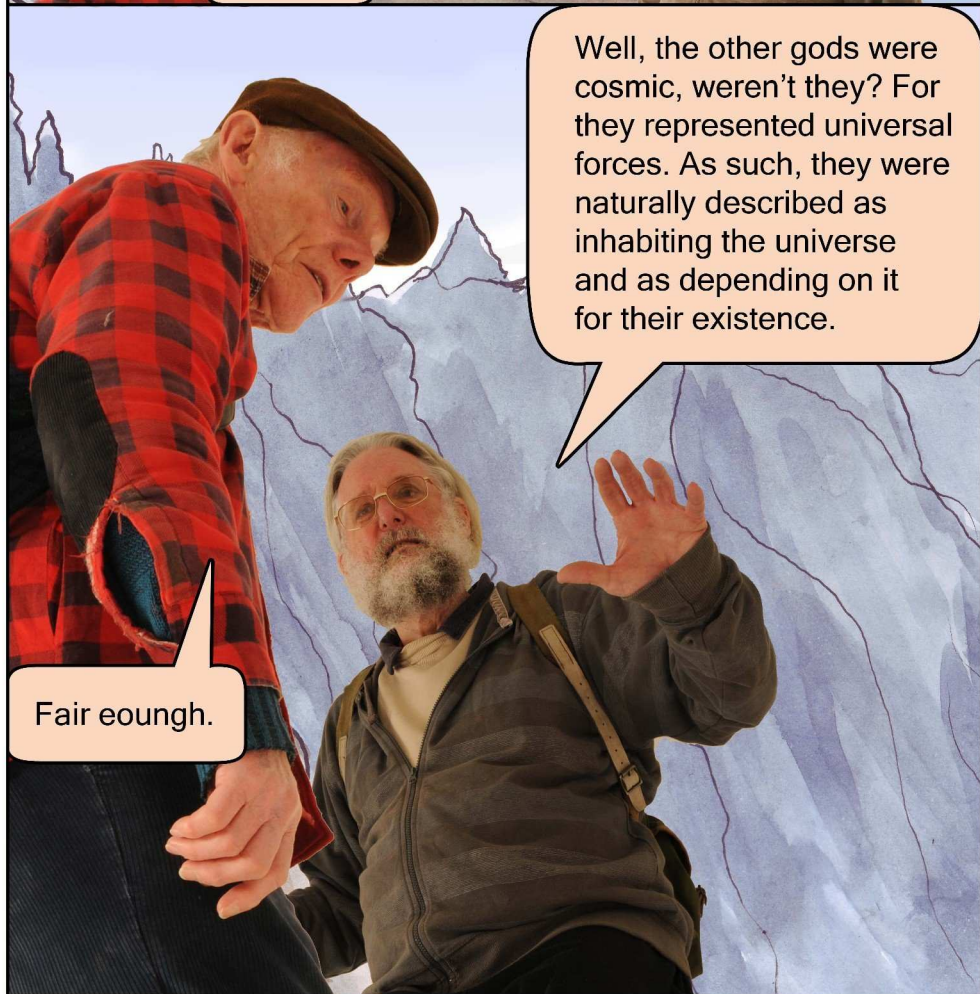
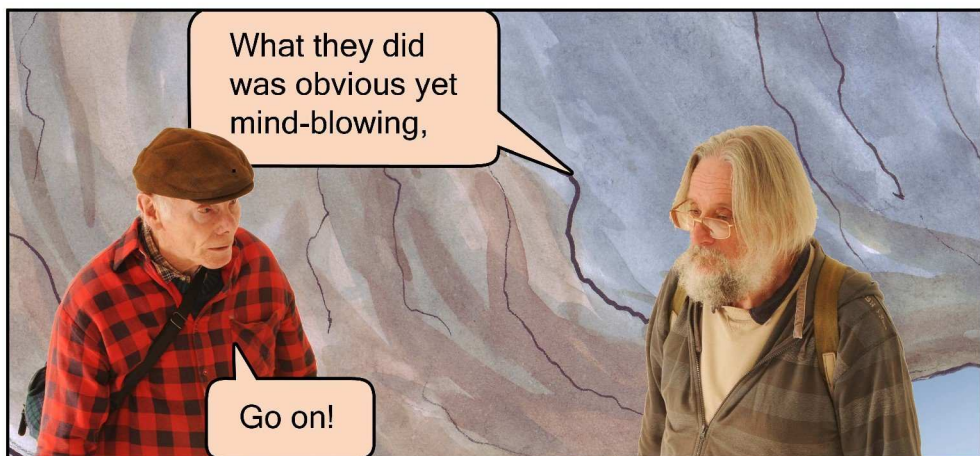



Exactly. And how do you think the Hebrews reacted to this situation?

They wouldn't have liked it but they would have had to accept it, I guess.

Well, there you're wrong. You see, for the Hebrews, the other gods represented oppressive ideologies whereas Yahweh, as the marginal ideology, was the source of life and creativity.

Yes, I can see that. But what could they do?



A comic-style illustration featuring two men standing in front of a large, textured map. The man on the left is older, with a flat cap, a red and black plaid shirt, and dark trousers. The man on the right has a long grey beard, glasses, a grey zip-up jacket over a white shirt, and a backpack. They are both looking at each other and gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is a large map with purple and blue lines on a light greenish-grey surface.

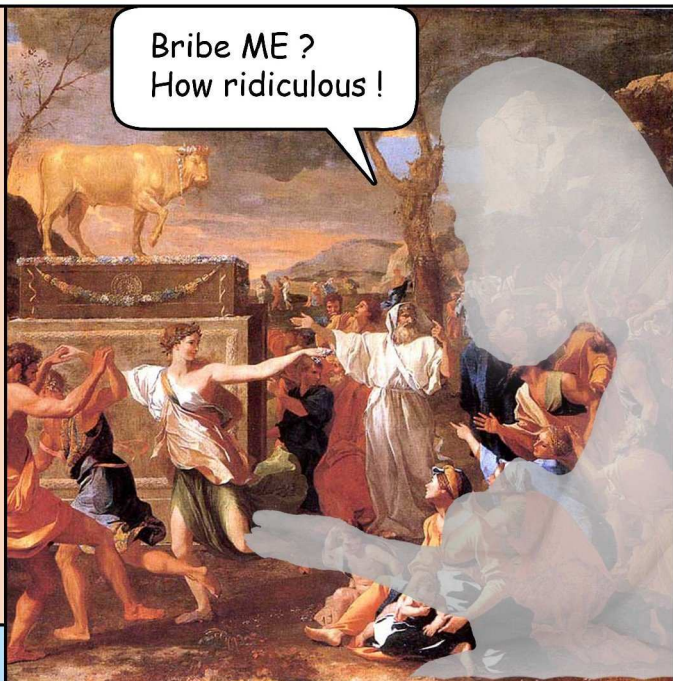
So to avoid the trap of being lumbered with the weakest god, the Hebrews simply said that Yahweh wasn't cosmic like the other gods were.

But they said no such thing. They never used the word cosmic!

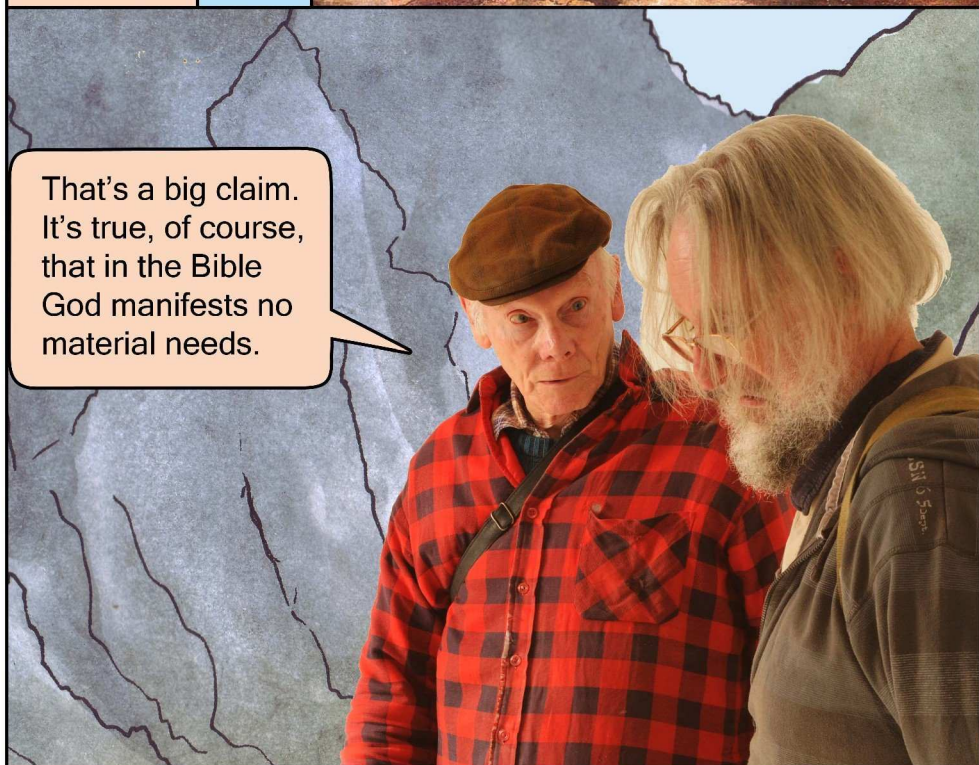
You're right. Most communities made clear their gods were cosmic by describing them as having appetites and needs, This meant that such gods could be bribed with offerings.

So naturally, the Hebrews expressed their idea of a non-cosmic Yahweh by portraying him as beyond needs and appetites and, so also, bribes.

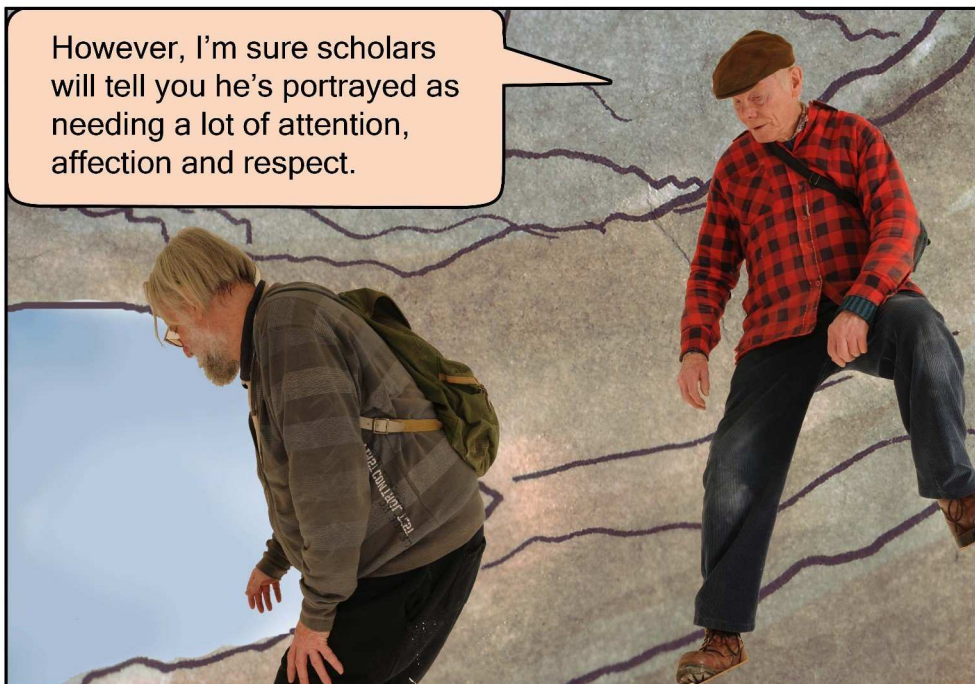
Ex 32



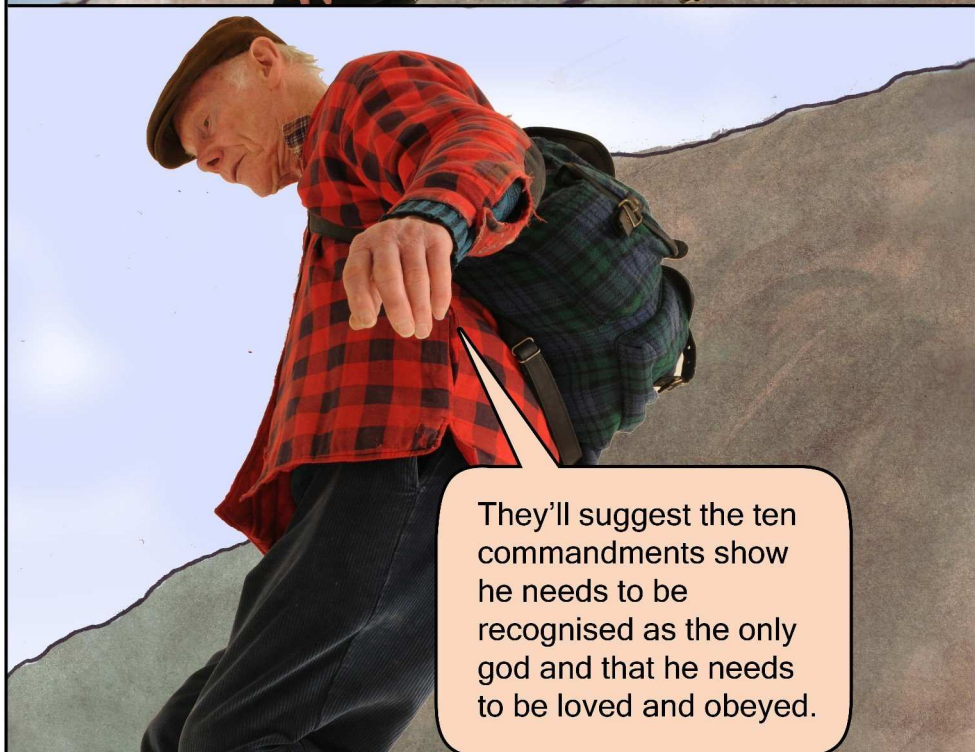
That's a big claim. It's true, of course, that in the Bible God manifests no material needs.

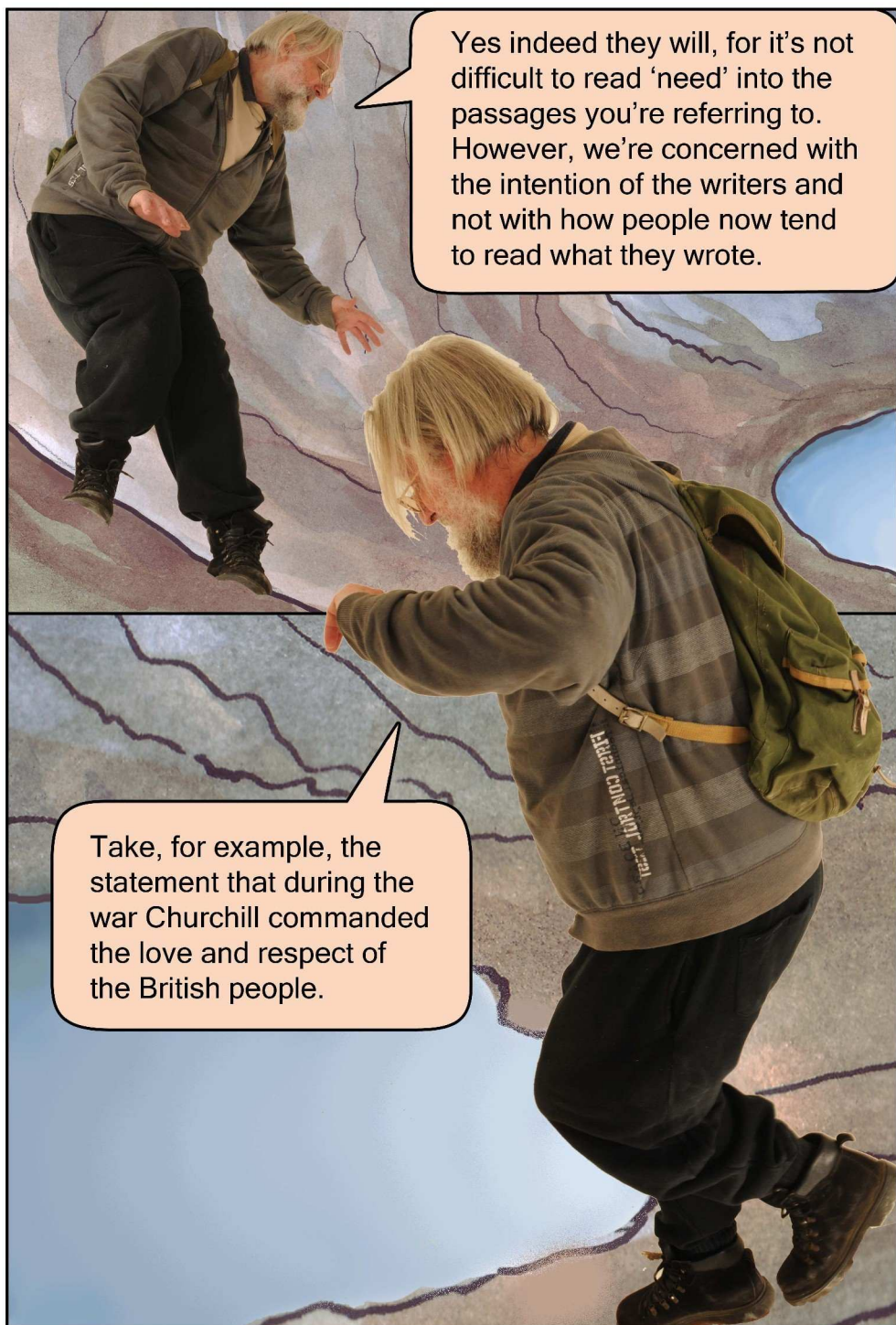


However, I'm sure scholars will tell you he's portrayed as needing a lot of attention, affection and respect.



They'll suggest the ten commandments show he needs to be recognised as the only god and that he needs to be loved and obeyed.

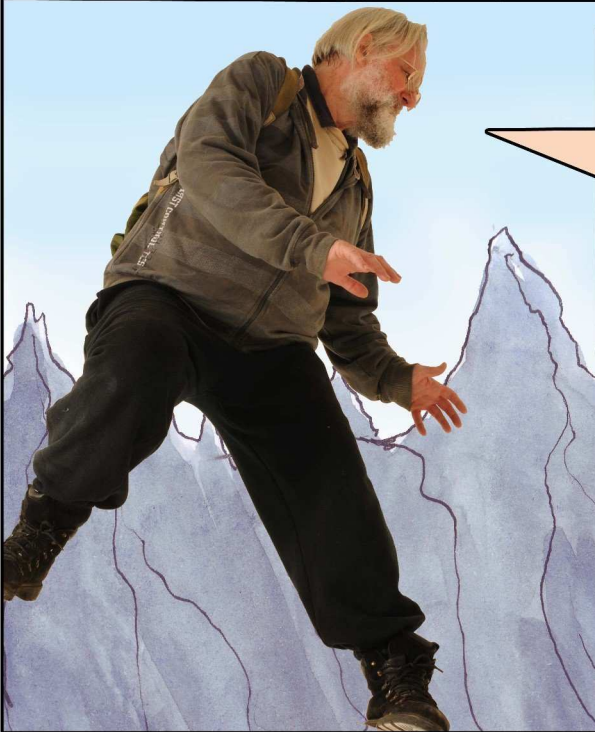




Yes indeed they will, for it's not difficult to read 'need' into the passages you're referring to. However, we're concerned with the intention of the writers and not with how people now tend to read what they wrote.

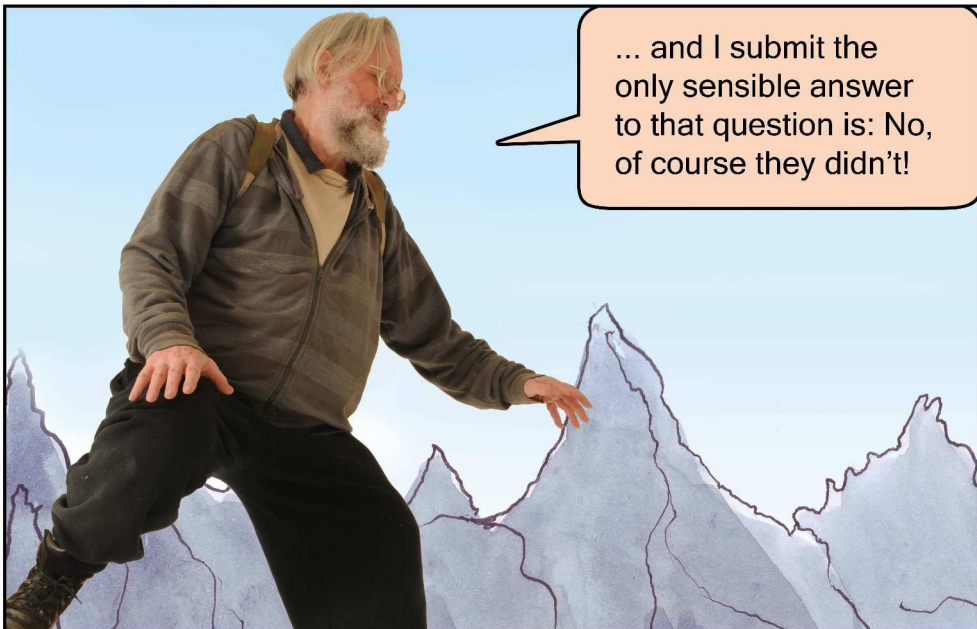
Take, for example, the statement that during the war Churchill commanded the love and respect of the British people.

In a thousand years time that statement may well be taken as meaning Churchill used his position to enforce obedience in the country but, if it is, that will be a mistake for we all know it is not what the phrase means.



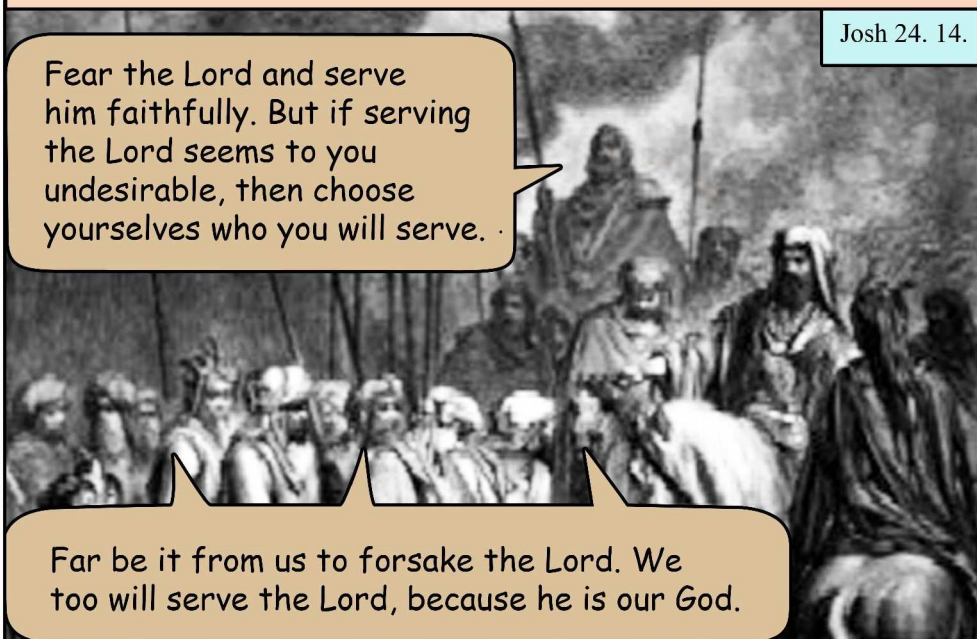
So we have to ask ourselves if the biblical writers intended to portray Yahweh as having needs when they said things like 'You must love the Lord your God'.

Deut 6.5



... and I submit the only sensible answer to that question is: No, of course they didn't!

For, in saying such things, all they were doing was making clear that this covenant agreement with Yahweh was a life or death commitment to be embraced wholeheartedly or not at all.



Josh 24. 14.

Fear the Lord and serve him faithfully. But if serving the Lord seems to you undesirable, then choose yourselves who you will serve.

Far be it from us to forsake the Lord. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.

But surely it will be said that, in your own scheme, Yahweh needs marginals to stand up for themselves if his salvation plan is to work.

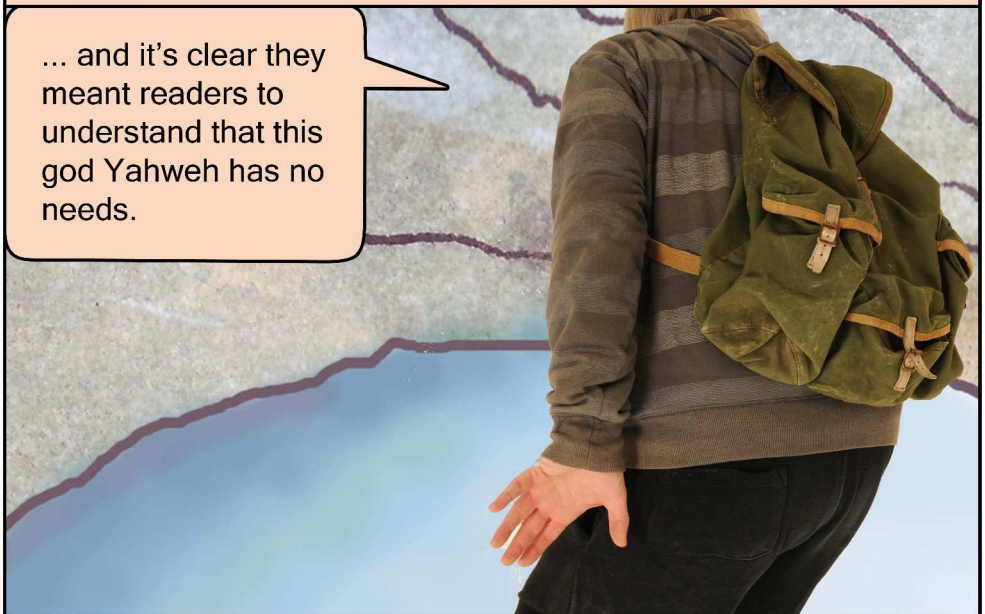


Good point. However, whereas Zoroastrian texts make it clear that Ahura Mazda needs to be rid of his evil shadow, the Bible never suggests, for a moment, Yahweh needs his salvation plan to work.

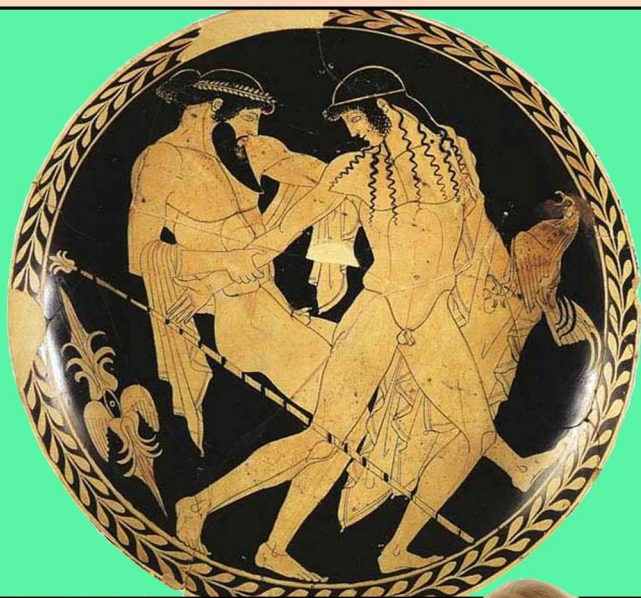
It's true, in a sense, that his proposed covenant partnership with Israel could only work if Moses went back to Egypt but one never gets the impression this tied his hands.



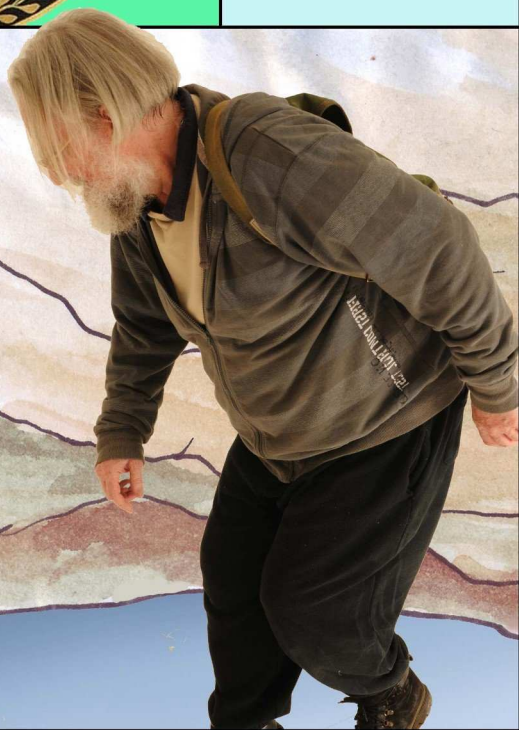
Of course, it's not difficult for us to read need back into the text but, as I said, that's not the point. Our aim is only to discover what the biblical writers meant to convey...



This is not true of pagan writers. They had no qualms about portraying their gods as needful. Indeed, they gloried in doing so.



Zeus
and
Ganymede



And this is true even of the Zoroastrian texts, which are not shy about portraying Ahura Mazda as asking for human aid to vanquish his evil shadow Angra Mainyu.

So we're faced with a truly remarkable situation: for while there's not a single biblical text which deliberately portrays Yahweh as needful there's not a single pagan god who is not deliberately described in such a cosmic manner.

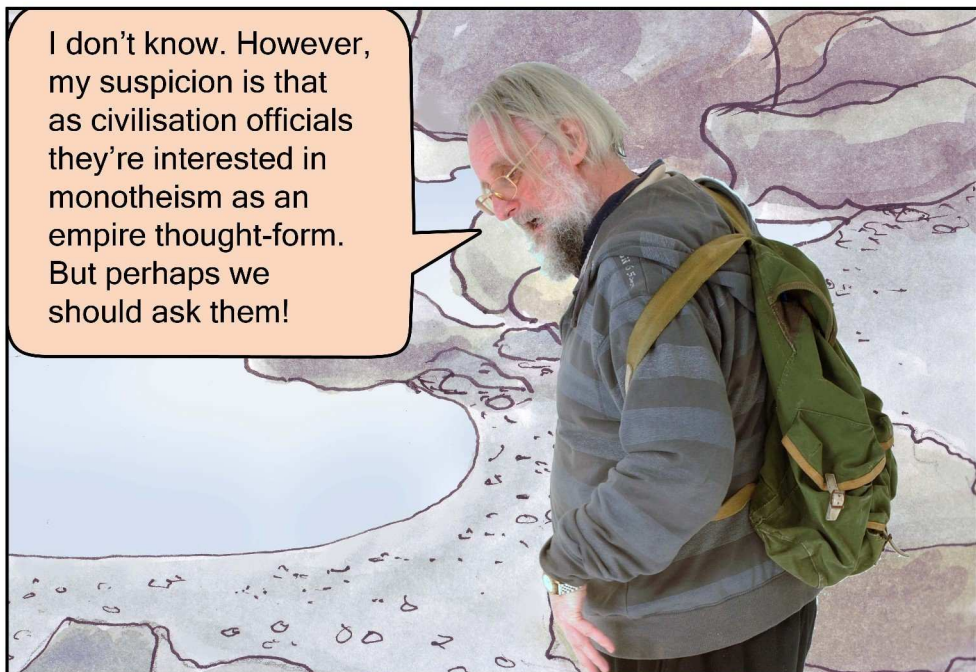


Atlas
2nd C. B.C.
Naples
Museum

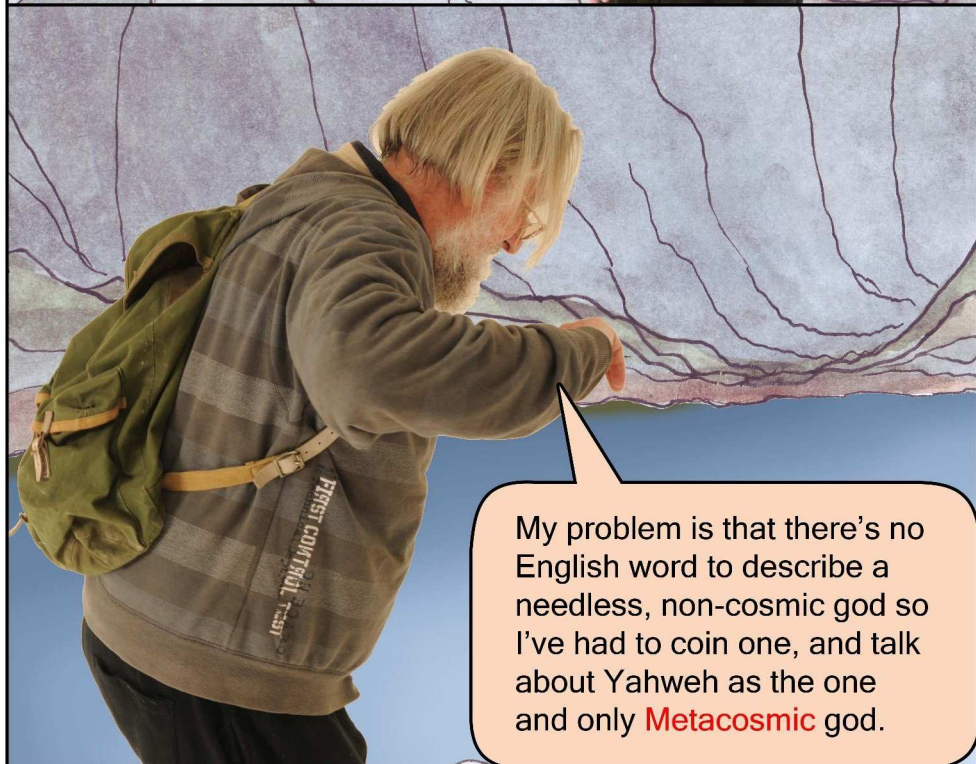
So how come biblical scholars never talk about it? How come they talk all the time about monotheism instead?



I don't know. However, my suspicion is that as civilisation officials they're interested in monotheism as an empire thought-form. But perhaps we should ask them!

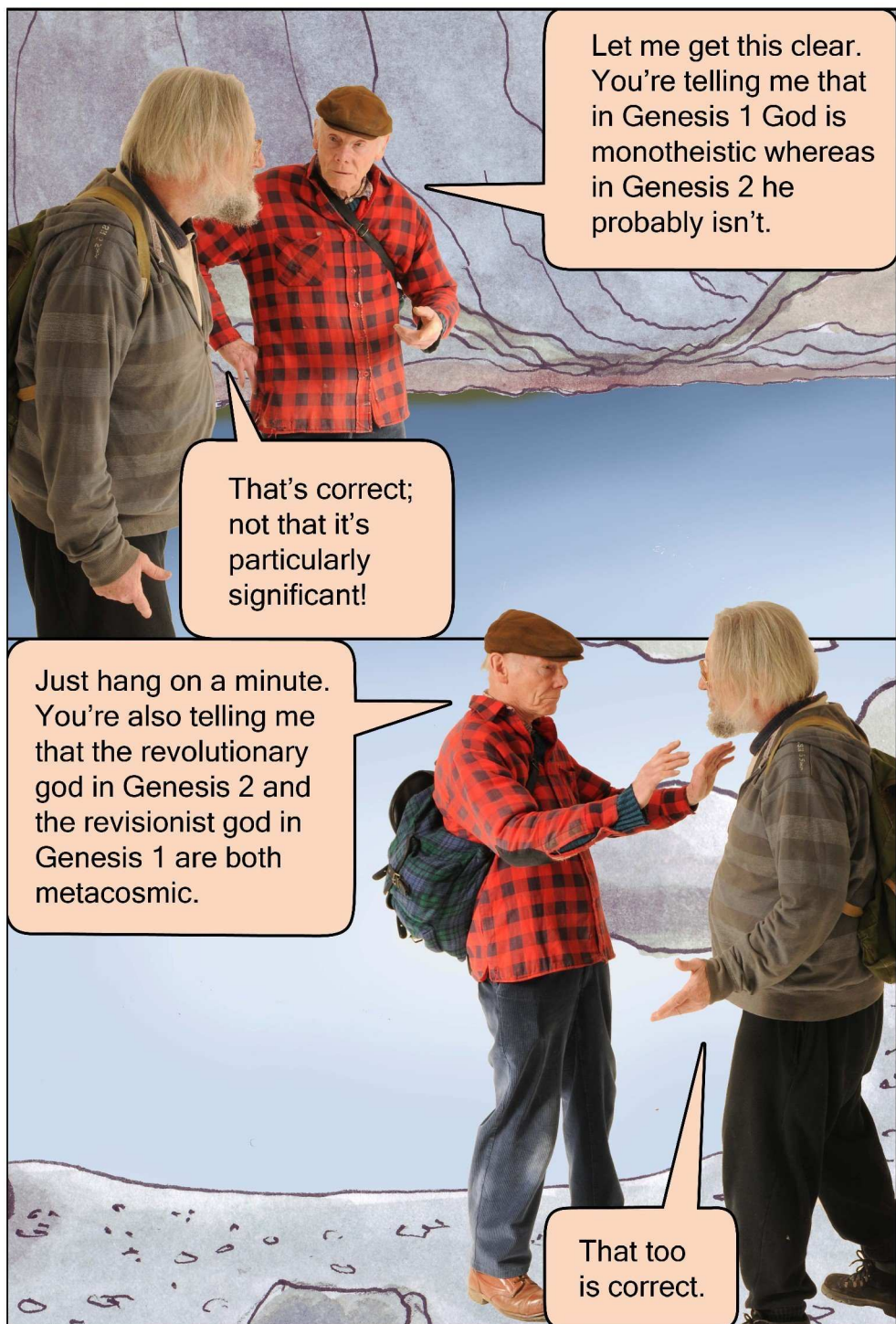


My problem is that there's no English word to describe a needless, non-cosmic god so I've had to coin one, and talk about Yahweh as the one and only **Metacosmic** god.



11

The Metacosmic God and Monotheism in Genesis 1 and 2



Doesn't the fact that in Genesis 1 God is both monotheistic and metacosmic make its portrait superior to the one found in Genesis 2?



Well, that all depends on how you rate a deeply conservative and religious world-view.





This meant that, if people began speaking about their community god in monotheistic terms, they risked ignoring the limits of their world-view, just as others do in similar circumstances today.

Multi-Faith Conference



You see, I'm lucky. I serve the Lord, which means that unlike the rest of you I see the whole picture.

This was never the case with polytheism, for however much one community's world-view dominated it always remained clear it was just one perspective among many.



I'm not forgetting all of you see things rather differently. However, don't forget I'm the boss!

What about
2nd Isaiah's
monotheism?

Well clearly he was a Hebrew revolutionary,
for he was responsible for redefining the
shaming strategy as Israel's duty to act as
God's light, thus enabling others to see.



This being the case, it's absurd to claim his statements about
Yahweh reflect a new-style, empire perspective since, for obvious
reasons, shaming strategies and imperial ideologies don't mix.

We convert people
by banging their
heads together.

We do it by showing
them how to live,
hoping this will fill
them with shame.



Proactive
Strategy

Reactive
Strategy

Indeed, his ringing claims concerning Yahweh's unique status only make sense when seen in the light of the marginals' hope-against-hope* that the shaming strategy would eventually work.

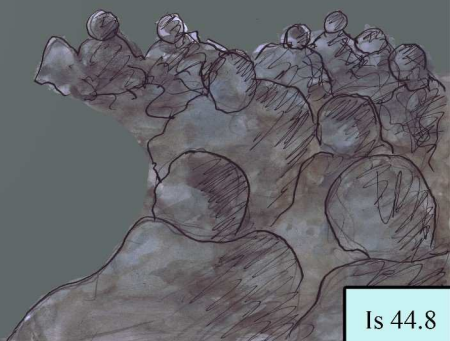


* This is Paul's phrase.

They constitute cries of defiance against the civilised order and witness to the truth only marginals are in a position to see.



Don't despair. Hear what Yahweh says:
"Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one."

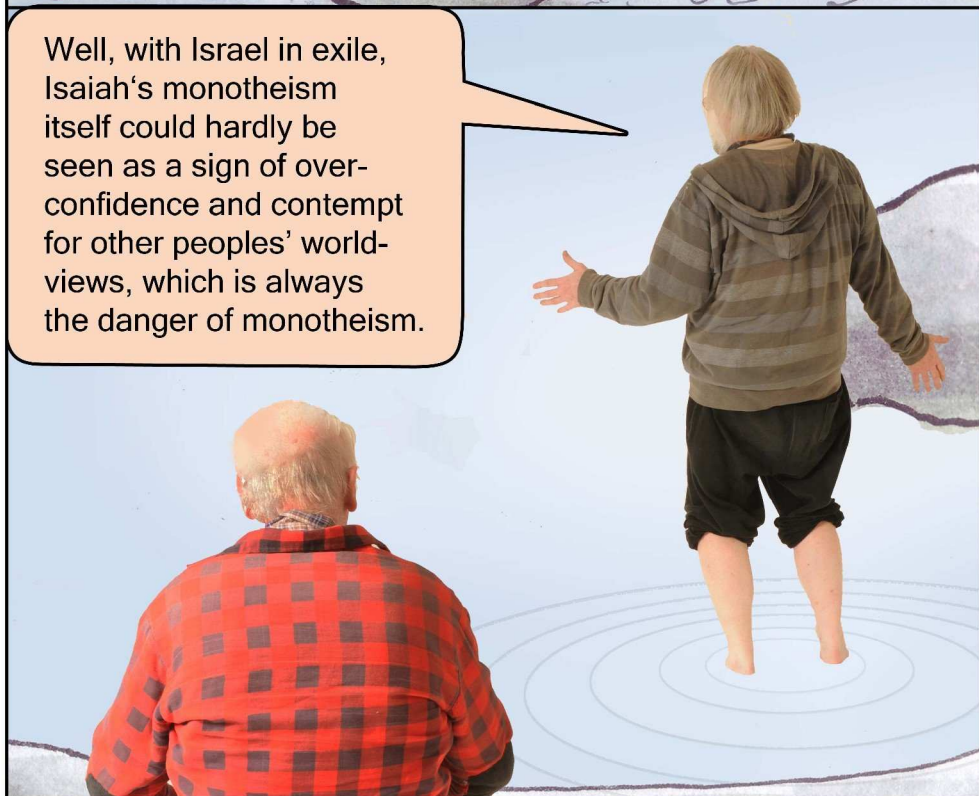


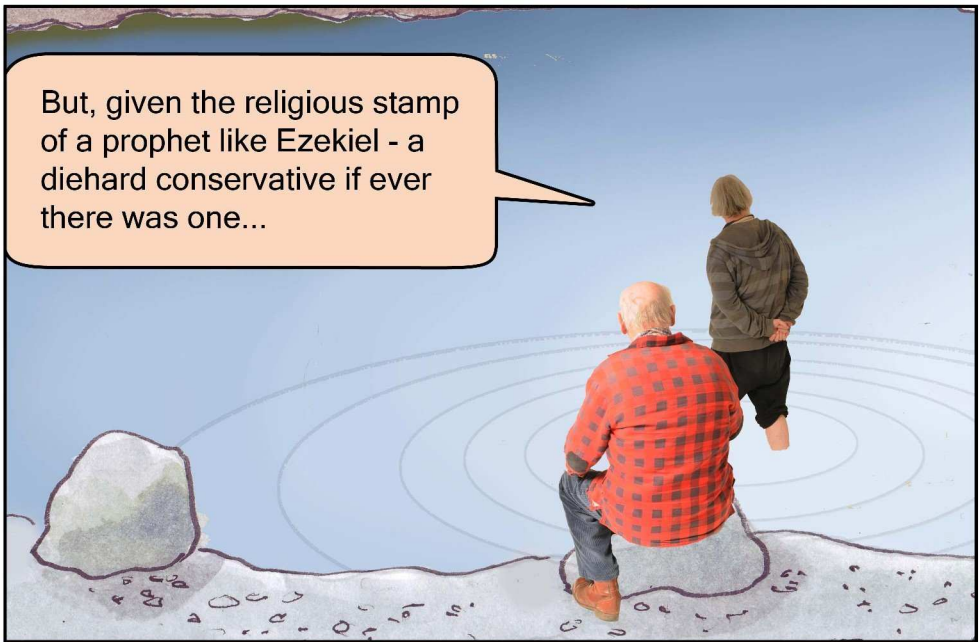
Is 44.8

So how come
you say Isaiah's
monotheism
is dangerous?



Well, with Israel in exile,
Isaiah's monotheism
itself could hardly be
seen as a sign of over-
confidence and contempt
for other peoples' world-
views, which is always
the danger of monotheism.



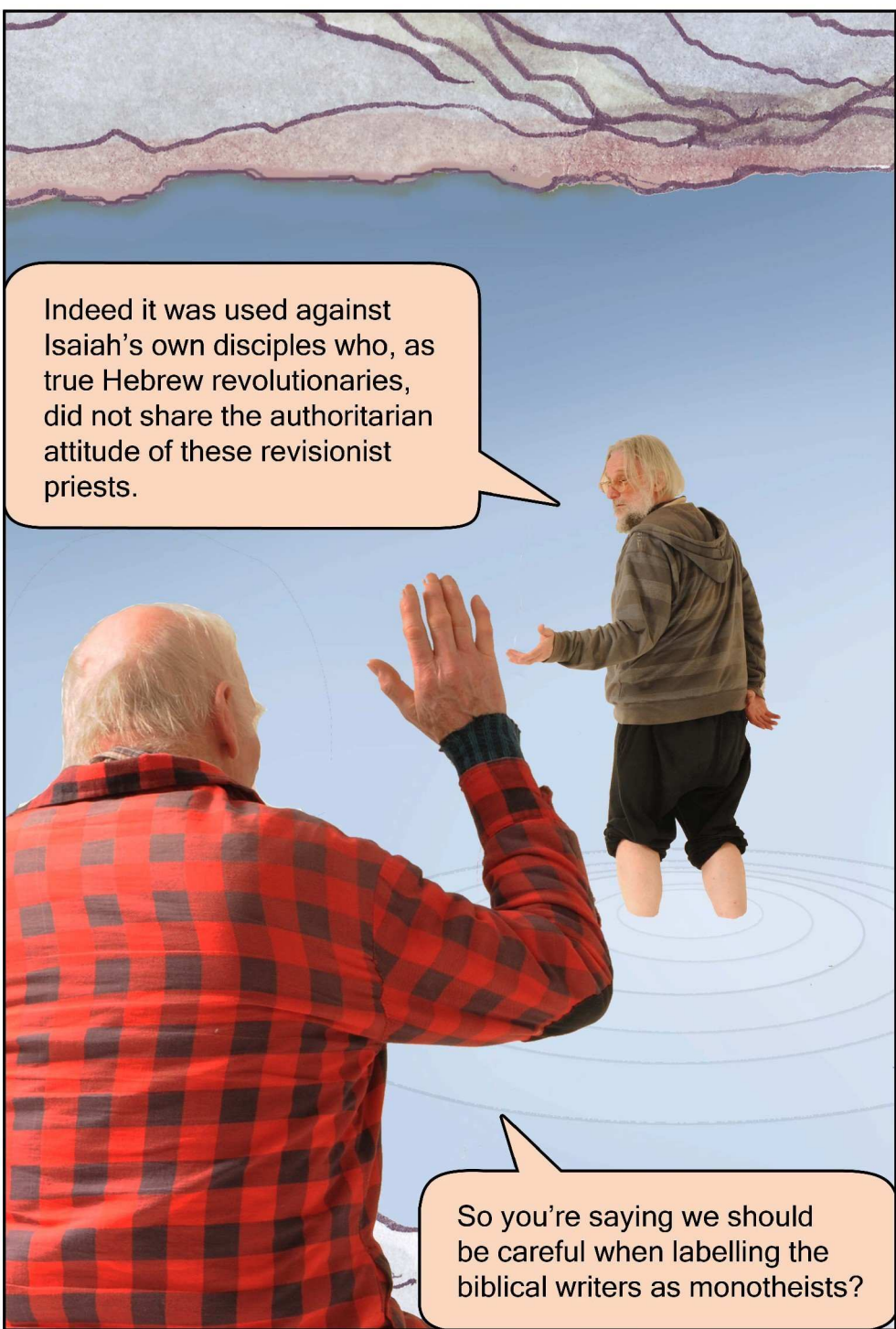


But, given the religious stamp of a prophet like Ezekiel - a diehard conservative if ever there was one...

... this same monotheism most certainly did become an oppressive weapon of contempt, especially in the hands of his followers - the priestly hierocrats in the post-exilic community.



Is he still there with his stupid criticisms? Why doesn't he just go away!



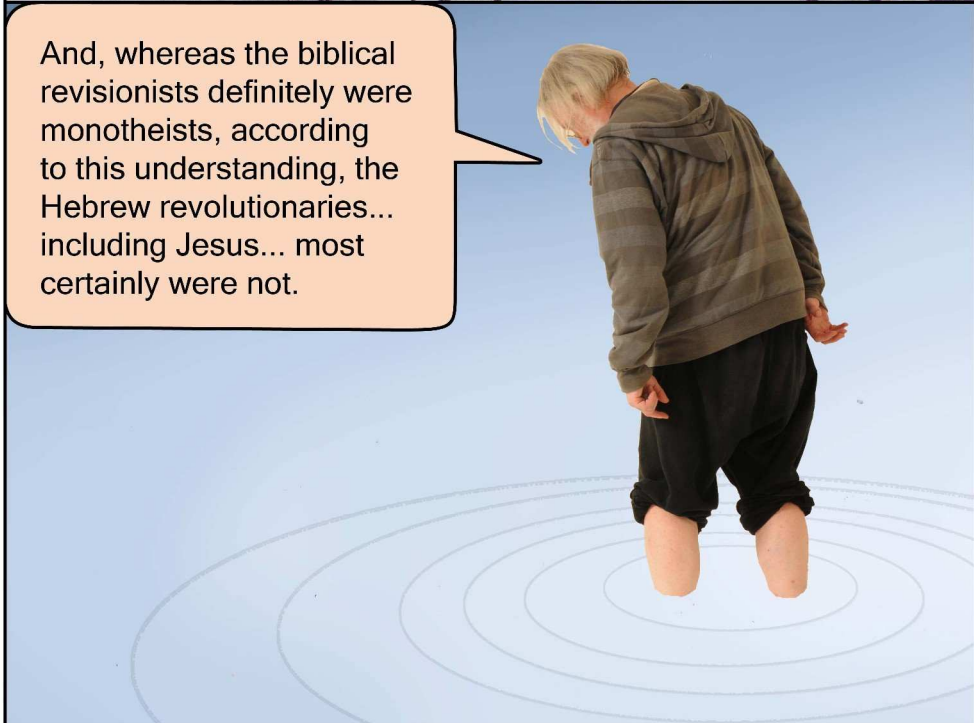
Indeed it was used against
Isaiah's own disciples who, as
true Hebrew revolutionaries,
did not share the authoritarian
attitude of these revisionist
priests.

So you're saying we should
be careful when labelling the
biblical writers as monotheists?

Yes indeed. For monotheism is generally understood as an empire term indicating a belief in **transcendent authority**.



And, whereas the biblical revisionists definitely were monotheists, according to this understanding, the Hebrew revolutionaries... including Jesus... most certainly were not.



That is the end of Part 1.

In Part 2, in climbing to the top of an Alpine needle, John and I will next be discussing the second cycle of stories in Genesis - the Patriarchal Cycle - as well as the great Exodus stories.

For me all of these stories constitute the Bible's foundation texts. The Myth Cycle, just studied, establishes the Hebrew revolutionary ideology whereas the Patriarchal Cycle and Exodus stories spell out the even more fascinating Hebrew strategy for the world's transformation.

So we hope to see you there!

John, Andrew and Adrian

The Bible-in-Cartoons Project

It all began as just an idea back in 2008 with John and I trying to put some flesh on it using a couple of stitched-together old sheets in John's back garden.



However, problems with shadows and time exposures made it very laborious so we moved indoors. Then we had a real stroke of luck when our photographer Adrian joined us.



He asked if we would like to use his studio and things finally began to take off.



As for models we have relied, so far, mostly on my own children and their friends and John and I would like to thank them all as well as everyone else who has helped to make things possible.





