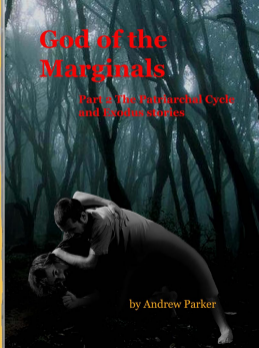


God of the Marginals

Part 2 The Patriarchal Cycle
and Exodus stories

by Andrew Parker



GOD of the MARGINALS



Part 2. The Patriarchal Cycle and Exodus Stories

God of the Marginals is the second volume in the Bible in Cartoons series. Volume 1, which is an introduction to the Bible, can also be found on this website.

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

CONTENTS

Introduction	2
1 Yahweh's Promise	7
2 Abraham the Marginal	21
3 The Abraham in Egypt Story	35
4 Abraham's Covenant with Yahweh	57
5 The Story of Ishmael	75
6 Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac	96
7 Abraham and Lot	113
8 Jacob and Esau. 1 The Problem	156
9 Jacob and Laban. 2 The Analysis	207
10 Jacob and Esau. 3 The Problem Resolved	219
11 Shechem's Rape of Dinah	241
12 The Exodus Story	263
13 Moses the Revolutionary Hero	279
14 Moses and the Law	293
15 The Golden Calf	309
16 Moses Civilisation Loser	333

INTRODUCTION

This book is from my 'Bible in Cartoons' series. It is the second part of volume 2 which is entitled 'God of the Marginals'.

The first volume in this series* - 'Thinking about the Bible' - shows that the mythical texts from the ancient Near East, though couched in religious language, are in fact political works designed to sell the world views of their conservative authors.

In part 1 of 'God of the Marginals' my friend John and I examined the Genesis and Exodus stories from a political point of view. We found them to be revolutionary texts putting forward the world view of the Hebrew marginals. However, we also unfortunately discovered that these revolutionary texts have been edited by later conservative priests who have done their best to cover up this unsettling Hebrew/marginal picture of the world.

In this book we now turn to the great Patriarchal and Exodus stories which take this marginal perspective for granted and attempt to work out a strategy for changing the world in order to bring it to its senses.

*Thinking about the Bible' can be found on my website at:

<http://bibleincartoons.co.uk/chapter1/cgi-bin/index.cgi?1>

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 Volume 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 present them as representations and not as real live people who actually existed long ago.

The Hike Continues

1

Yahweh's Promise





You have to remember that having little abstract vocabulary it was impossibly difficult for the ancients to think about and accurately describe how human communities operated.

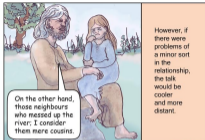


However, using this new corporate-personality technology, they managed to talk about the political dealings between communities as relationships between individuals.



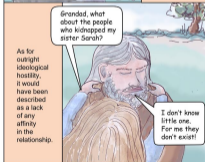
In this way, where contacts were friendly, the relationship between two communities would quite naturally be described as fraternal.





On the other hand, those neighbours who messed up the river; I consider them mere cousins.

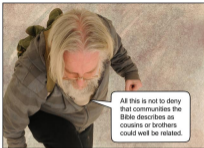
However, if there were problems of a minor sort in the relationship, the talk would be cooler and more distant.



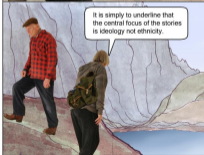
Grandad, what about the people who kidnapped my sister Sarah?

As for outright ideological hostility, it would have been described as a lack of any affinity in the relationship.

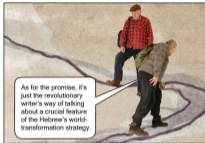
I don't know little one. For me they don't exist!



All this is not to deny that communities the Bible describes as cousins or brothers could well be related.



It is simply to underline that the central focus of the stories is ideology not ethnicity.



As for the promise, it's just the revolutionary writer's way of talking about a crucial feature of the Hebrew's world-transformation strategy.

As marginals the Hebrews had no hope of changing society by force. They therefore had to rely on shaming civilisation.



Giving food to total strangers! Have you lost your senses?



He's a silly old fool. I'm not sure he'll ever learn.

Thank you. Thank you.

Yahweh's promise is that when the time comes he will see to it that the strategy does indeed work. This constitutes the basis, whether real or imaginary, of the revolutionary writer's faith.



The situation is not complicated. You have to stand up for yourselves and I have to make the exercise work!

Yes, you've explained it to us already.

Of course, as I have pointed out the Hebrews possessed no political vocabulary. So they were unable to talk directly about a strategy designed to shame the world to its senses, as I do.



Instead they spoke about a covenant agreement which obliged them to stand up for themselves, confident that Yahweh, for his part, would fulfil his promise and soften Gentile hearts.



These marginals could not have foreseen that later revisionist priests would deliberately obscure what they had said by presenting their stories in a way that suggested revolutionary change was unnecessary.



They would have been dumbstruck had they known their stories were going to be used to teach that Israel could get along very well under enlightened conservative leadership, leaving Yahweh to do the rest magically!



Note: Moses is shown here in colour since the Bible presents him as an historical individual.



2

Abraham

the

Marginal

In the beginning we find Abraham living with his father Terah and his nephew Lot in the famous Mesopotamian city of Ur.

Note: The characters in the following stories are shown in black and white since the Bible presents them as representations not as historical individuals.



Gen 11:27 - 12:5

However, clearly something happens, for suddenly Terah decides to uproot his family and move to the back of beyond in Canaan, a move no one would voluntarily contemplate.



Though the text does not actually call Terah a Hebrew the implication is clear. For some unspecified reason his enterprise has failed and he has no choice but to leave Ur and civilisation.



However, strangely, Terah never gets to Canaan. Instead he settles in the city of Haran where, eventually, he dies. Now it is Abraham's turn to fail and become a marginal.



The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."

"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This is a crucial text, expressing the marginals' revolutionary objective: **BLESSEDNESS** which will come about **WORLD WIDE** as a result of peoples' **FREE DECISION** to change their attitudes and behaviour.

Of course the revisionists couldn't accept this. As right-wing nationalists they dreamed of a Davidic world empire imposed by force, with themselves as its administrators,

Make way! Make way for the chief Administrator!



They therefore edited the text to try and persuade people that this universal blessing promised by Yahweh would be a PAX DAVIDICA ... a precursor of the PAX ROMANA,

It's hard having to carry the world's problems on your shoulders!



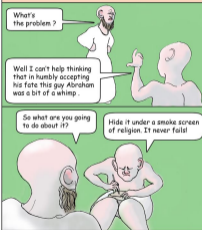
But if you know what they were up to it is not difficult to see through their duplicity since there is nothing of a Sargon - a right wing hard man on the make - in the Bible's portrait of Abraham.

What's the problem?

Well I can't help thinking that in humbly accepting his fate this guy Abraham was a bit of a whimp.

So what are you going to do about it?

Hide it under a smoke screen of religion. It never fails!



As it stands the text appears to 'explain' Abraham's decision to uproot his family as the result of a religious calling but this again is just revisionist eyewash.

I'm sorry, but labelling Abraham's call 'revisionist eyewash' is not an argument. You may not like it but a religious call is in the text.



It may be in the text but its purpose is only to **CHANGE** the sense.

Why do you say that?



Well, think about it. What we have in this speech from Yahweh is covenantal 'promise' language which works along the lines that if **YOU** do **THIS** then I promise to do **THAT**.

As previously noted, in its original revolutionary form the covenant was an agreement between the Hebrew marginals and the god of the marginals who represented their interests.



The situation is not complicated. You have to stand and I exercise.

Here we go Again!

In this revolutionary context the idea of Yahweh's promise acted as a spur to urge on the marginals to revolutionary endeavour.

It's no good. It'll never work!



Don't forget Yahweh has promised!

However, the priestly editor cleverly got rid of all of this by saying Yahweh spoke to Abraham BEFORE he became obliged by circumstances to leave.



In this new scenario there's no question of Abraham becoming a marginal. Moreover, Yahweh's promise is the opposite of a spur to endeavour. It's a demand that the community should give its conservative leaders a blank cheque by blindly obeying them.



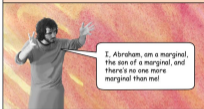
In the priestly writer's post-exilic context this meant all initiative was to be placed in the hands of Israel's new leadership, to which he himself belonged.



You can tell a mischievous editor has altered the story by the loose ends he has left behind. If the point was Abraham's religious calling why write about Terah leaving Ur, or are we supposed to infer he too was called?



In fact, of course, the revolutionary Hebrew writer, in speaking about Terah, only wanted to establish Abraham's credentials as a marginal by explaining that his father had been one too.



That is why he describes Terah as leaving Ur only to stop him in his tracks, for no apparent reason, at Haran. That way he can go on to describe Abraham too as being marginalised in his turn!



As for the priestly editor, see how clever he was. He managed to get rid of the god of the marginals simply by suggesting Yahweh spoke to Abraham BEFORE he failed and became a marginal



Of course the conservative construct thereby created - the religious calling - was superstitious clap-trap but that didn't matter, for human beings have always been gullible!



3

The Abraham-in-Egypt
Story



OK. So Yahweh's promise is designed to spur Israel on to marginal revolutionary endeavour. But how does this promise connect with the patriarchal stories?



Well, the stories were built on the basis of this Hebrew strategy for changing the world and Yahweh's promise to vindicate it.



News of the arrival of the beautiful Hebrew woman soon reaches the palace and Pharaoh orders her to be taken into his harem.

At the same time Abraham is lavished with gifts and does very well for himself.



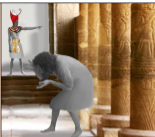
But Yahweh inflicts serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abraham's wife.



When Pharaoh realises what's going on he orders Abraham to explain himself.



Pharaoh orders Abraham to pack his bags, take Sarah and leave before Yahweh has time to do any more damage.



So how do you read this story!

Well, for me it's all about how Yahweh uses his magic to rescue his servant; however, I realise you're not going to go along with that!

Too right! For ...

That's how the priestly writer wanted people to read it!

OK. Go On. Tell me how you think the story should be read!

Fine, but first I want you to admit it's nothing but a fairytale the way you read it.



That's true but I've always accepted it because it's scripture!



Tell me where is Yahweh's promise in this story?

I suppose Sarah represents it since without her Abraham can have no legitimate offspring.



And how does Abraham treat this promise, would you say?

Rather shabbily, though his fears proved well founded.

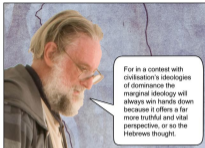


So isn't the story about the danger Egypt represents? That, as a result of the Hebrews' justified fears in dealing with this civilisation super-power, they always risk renegeing on their ideological commitments?

Fair enough, but what do you make of the magic in the story?

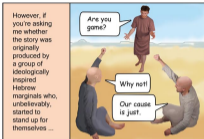


Here the point being made is that though Egypt constitutes a terrible danger for the revolutionary marginals it presents no kind of danger for the marginal ideology itself.





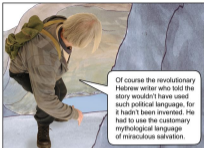
If you're suggesting the story was originally about a magical power which altered the natural course of events, so defying universal laws, then I'd have to say the evidence is against it.



However, if you're asking me whether the story was originally produced by a group of ideologically inspired Hebrew marginals who, unbelievably, started to stand up for themselves ...



...which against all the odds was successful ... thanks almost entirely to their ideological stiffening ...



But we shouldn't take this as implying he was speaking religiously, for the chances always are that he wasn't.



It's much more likely it was a revisionist editor who later sought to present the story as conservative religion because he wanted to bury the objectionable things the Hebrew writer had said.

Is he *STILL* there telling lies about us!



That's an awful lot to swallow!



Not really. You see I'm not proposing changes to the story. I'm simply pointing out it makes far better sense when read using marginal rather than conservative spectacles.

So you're suggesting this story in Genesis depends on the later one in Exodus?



Yes the similarities are hard to ignore, wouldn't you say?

Because of drought the Hebrews are forced to take refuge in Egypt.

There they are enslaved and refused permission to leave.

However, Yahweh rescues them by sending plagues against the Egyptians

Before we leave the story I would like to note one thing further: it's short and cold. The Egyptians are not spoken of as brothers or cousins and the hostility within the relationship is thinly veiled.



It's as if the Hebrew writer was letting his readers know that, apart from the danger entailed, there was nothing for Israelites to learn from their relationship with the Egyptian enemy.



For though the final objective had been to change the world*, by softening Pharaoh's Egyptian heart, this had not happened.

* The writer's world: the ancient Near East.



D'you think we hit them?

What does it matter. The dogs escaped!

And in any case it was a process in which the Egyptians themselves would have played no part.

Good riddance!



Yes there's no shortage of their kind!

4

Abraham's Covenant

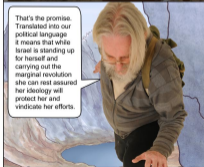
with

Yahweh





Don't be afraid, Abram,
I am your shield, your
very great reward.



That's the promise.
Translated into our
political language
it means that while
Israel is standing up
for herself and
carrying out the
marginal revolution
she can rest assured
her ideology will
protect her and
vindicate her efforts.



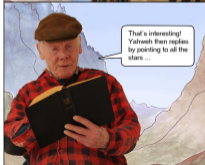
If you say so!
Abraham then
expresses his
anxiety about
Yahweh's
promise:



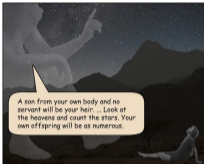
Yahweh, what can you give me
since I remain childless? You
have given me no children: so
a servant in my household will
be my heir.



That's Israel expressing a general anxiety about the marginal revolution. A promise of vindication is all very well; however, it doesn't appear on the surface to have any basis in reality!



That's interesting!
Yahweh then replies by pointing to all the stars ...



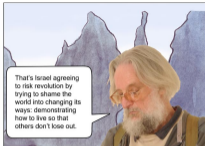
A son from your own body and no servant will be your heir. ... Look at the heavens and count the stars. Your own offspring will be as numerous.



That's an assurance that the shaming process involves no make-believe. Clear-cut, unambiguous vindication will accompany Israel's revolutionary efforts, or so the writer says.



*Abram believed Yahweh,
and he credited it to him
as righteousness.*



... the same scenario being repeated, only in different terms. Here the promise is of a homeland rather than protection.



When Abraham again expresses doubts it's Yahweh this time who makes the commitment. He gets Abraham to set up a covenant ceremony using twin altars... but then performs it all by himself.



When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day **YAHWEH** made a covenant with Abram.

Scholars say this is a literary device commonly found in the Old Testament where the same thing is repeated in different terms for emphasis.



However, there's more than emphasis at stake here. A crucial point is being made in this skewed repetition where Yahweh, not Abraham, makes the commitment the second time round.



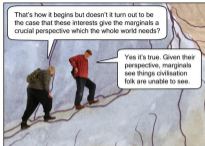


Yes, but my problem is that I can't see how Yahweh as the marginal ideology can commit himself. What does it mean for an ideology to commit itself?



Good question. Let's think about it. First, what is this marginal ideology Yahweh stands for?

It's the rationalisation of the marginals' interests as seen from their perspective.



That's how it begins but doesn't it turn out to be the case that these interests give the marginals a crucial perspective which the whole world needs?

Yes it's true. Given their perspective, marginals see things civilisation folk are unable to see.



So when we say Yahweh represents the marginal ideology what we are really saying is that he embodies this crucial truth civilisation needs, that only marginals clearly see.

Yes, that would certainly follow.

However, my point remains:
in what way can this crucial
truth be said to commit itself?



After all a marginal shaming
exercise may not even work,
as seems to have been the
case in Egypt? Where was
God's commitment there?

Fair enough ...



... but isn't it true that when any shaming exercise does in fact
work, as for example when Gandhi shamed the British empire ...



Gandhi talks
to with
Mountbatten.

...that
afterwards
it seems
somehow
inevitable
that it did
work.



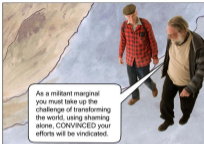
Gandhi illegally
mines salt.

Because, once revealed, the truth becomes somehow irresistible even though the process of change is very painful and often takes a considerable time?



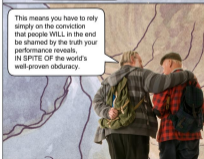
Gandhi
after his
assassination.

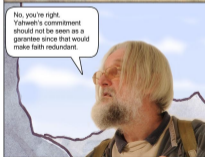
This is what
Yahweh's
commitment
is all about, so
it seems to me.



As a militant marginal
you must take up the
challenge of transforming
the world, using shaming
alone, **CONVINCED** your
efforts will be vindicated.

This means you have to rely
simply on the conviction
that people **WILL** in the end
be shamed by the truth your
performance reveals,
IN SPITE OF the world's
well-proven obduracy.





5

The Story of

Ishmael



Sarah has difficulty in conceiving and, knowing how important it is for Abraham to have an heir, she tells him to take Hagar, her Egyptian slave-girl, and have a child by her.



Abraham, always one to take the path of least resistance, agrees and Hagar becomes pregnant. Sarah then becomes terribly jealous, suspecting Hagar of looking down on her.



As usual she takes out her frustration on Abraham.



Abraham counters in his usual weak manner.



So Sarah is at liberty to deal with Hagar harshly ...



The result is that Hagar runs away, so becoming a marginal.



Naturally Yahweh, the god of the marginals, finds her. He tells her to go back and submit to her mistress for he has plans.



He promises to make her son the father of a great nation.



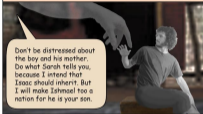
So Abraham's first son Ishmael is born; however, when he is just thirteen Sarah herself becomes pregnant, as Yahweh had promised, and Ishmael gains a half-brother, Isaac.



When Isaac is weaned Abraham holds a feast but Sarah is furious when she sees Ishmael playing with her son and, as usual, she goes and complains to Abraham.



However, this time Abraham is not prepared to give in to his hectoring wife so easily since his own son is involved. But, surprisingly, Yahweh tells him not to worry!



This is a mighty curious speech when you remember that for Yahweh marginalising people is the unforgivable sin. There's something going on here we must look into.



Early the next morning Abraham takes some food and a skin of water and gives them to Hagar. He sets them on her shoulders and sends her off with the boy.



Hagar wanders with Ishmael in the desert of Beersheba.



When the water in the skin is gone, she puts the boy under one of the bushes.



Then she goes off and sits down nearby, about a bowshot away, and begins to sob.



But of course Yahweh, the god of the marginals, hears the boy crying, and calls out to Hagar:

What's the matter?
Don't be afraid,
Lift him up for I've
got plans for him.



Then he opens her eyes and she sees a well of water.
So she goes and fills the skin and gives the boy a drink.

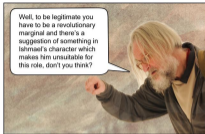
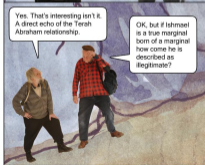


Yahweh is with the boy as he grows up and he becomes a hunter.



He lives in the Desert of Paran and his mother gets him a wife
from the land of Egypt, her own country.







The first is Israel's bad conscience as regards the Ishmaelites, who in some senses are more truly marginal than herself...



The second is her realization that since the Ishmaelites are no revolutionaries she is the one who has to take responsibility for carrying out the marginal revolution.

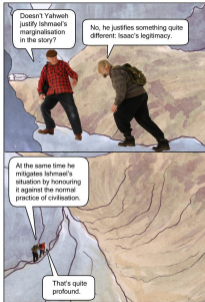
Now they're all gone I suppose it's up to us to carry the can!





However, if you try to read it as a story everything becomes completely unbelievable when Yahweh tells Abraham to go ahead and marginalise Ishmael and Hagar.





6

Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac



OK, One day, out of the blue, Yahweh surprised Abraham with a strange command:



Abraham did as he was told. He took some wood and placed it on Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife.



As the two of them went on their way Isaac said to his father...



God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.



When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.



Then he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.



Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.



But Yahweh called out to him from heaven

Do not lay a hand on the boy.
Now I know that you fear God,
because you have not withheld
from me your son, your only son.



Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns.



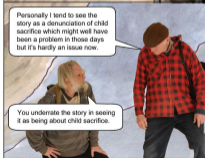
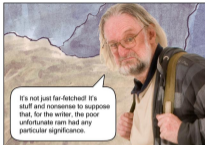
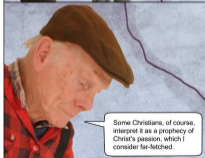
He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

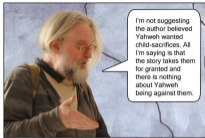
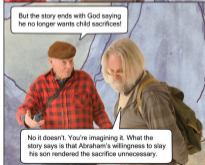


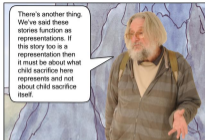
Then Yahweh called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said,

Because you have done this I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. They will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

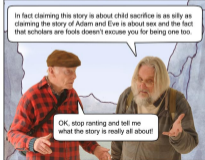






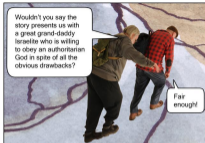


There's another thing. We've said these stories function as representations. If this story too is a representation then it must be about what child sacrifice here represents and not about child sacrifice itself.



In fact claiming this story is about child sacrifice is as silly as claiming the story of Adam and Eve is about sex and the fact that scholars are fools doesn't excuse you for being one too.

OK, stop ranting and tell me what the story is really all about!



Wouldn't you say the story presents us with a great grand-daddy Israelite who is willing to obey an authoritarian God in spite of all the obvious drawbacks?

Fair enough!



However, we shouldn't be fooled by that, not simply because it's conservative, religious garbage which ruins the story, but also because it has the priestly editors' dirty fingerprints all over it!

OK. So tell me what the original story was about!



This means that true Israelites, as marginal revolutionaries, have to operate quite differently from religious martyrs whose beliefs **GUARANTEE** their vindication.



We see this excruciating scenario played out by Jesus on the cross and expressed in his cry of demilition.

My God! My God!
Why have you
forsaken me?



So, just as Jesus fulfills this revolutionary Hebrew strategy, so this story of the sacrifice of Isaac sets out what Jesus later fulfilled, making it for me one of the greatest ever told.




Abraham and Lot

(Father of Moab and Ammon)




Perhaps we should
move on now.



The next story is about Abraham's
nephew Lot. It's a bit fragmented but
I shall try to piece it together.

Gen 13, 1-13
& Gen 19

Lot had journeyed to Canaan with Abraham but their flocks and herds now became so numerous that quarrels broke out between their herdsmen. It therefore became necessary to split up.

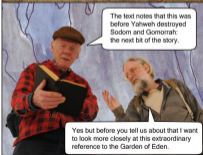


Let's part company. You choose. If you
go to the left, I'll go to the right.

Lot sees that the whole plain of the Jordan is well watered, like the garden of the Lord and like the land of Egypt. So he chooses to go that way and pitches his tents near Sodom.



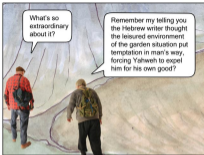
The text notes that this was before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah: the next bit of the story.



Yes but before you tell us about that I want to look more closely at this extraordinary reference to the Garden of Eden.

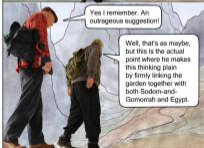
What's so extraordinary about it?

Remember my telling you the Hebrew writer thought the leisureed environment of the garden situation put temptation in man's way, forcing Yahweh to expel him for his own good?



Yes I remember. An outrageous suggestion!

Well, that's as maybe, but this is the actual point where he makes this thinking plain by firmly linking the garden together with both Sodom-and-Gomorrah and Egypt.





Indeed it makes me think he intends readers to see Lot as subconsciously wanting to return to the garden just as the rescued Hebrews were always clamouring to return to Egypt.



On hearing bad reports of Sodom and Gomorrah God sends two angels to see if any righteous people can be found there. They arrive in the evening at the city gate where Lot is sitting.



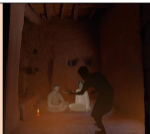
Immediately Lot invites them to stay the night but they demur.



However, he urges them to stay and eventually they agree.



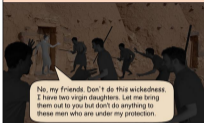
Back in his house Lot prepares a meal, baking flat bread for his guests, and they have supper together.



However, before they have time to go to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom – both young and old – surround the house and start banging on the door.

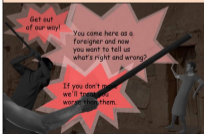


Lot goes out to remonstrate with them, carefully shutting the door behind him.



No, my friends. Don't do this wickedness. I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you but don't do anything to these men who are under my protection.

However, his efforts to appease them fail.



Get out of our way!

You come here as a foreigner and now you want to tell us what's right and wrong?

If you don't move, we'll treat you worse than them.



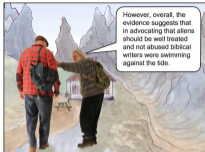
Ok. So what's this all about?

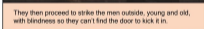
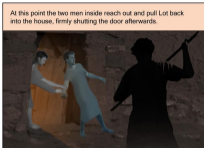
Isn't it about the importance of hospitality in the ancient world?



There are similar stories in Greek literature where people offer hospitality to vagrants who turn out to be gods in disguise.

That's certainly a possibility





Finally they have a few hasty words with Lot himself.



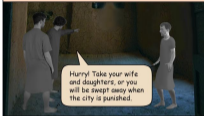
So Lot ventures out to warn the two young men who are pledged to marry his daughters.



But the young men think he's joking.



Next morning at the crack of dawn the angels urge Lot to leave while he still can.



Hurry! Take your wife and daughters, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.

But Lot continues to hesitate so they grasp his hand and drag him away by force.

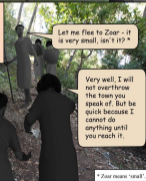


Having led Lot and his wife and daughters out of the city the angels give them instructions.



“Fly for your lives! Don’t look back. Don’t stop anywhere till you reach the mountains or you will be swept away!”

But Lot is not happy about going into the mountains and he continues to stall.



Let me flee to Zoar - it is very small, isn't it? *

Very well, I will not overthrow the town you speak of. But be quick because I cannot do anything until you reach it.

* Zoar means 'small'.

When eventually the family reaches Zoar Yahweh rains down burning sulphur on the cities and the entire plain, killing everyone and destroying the vegetation.



So Lot is saved ... however, his wife disobeys the angels by looking back and is turned into a pillar of salt.



Being afraid now to stay in Zoar, Lot and his daughters retreat to the dreaded mountains where they live in a cave.



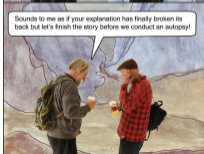
OK, given your thesis that this is a story about honouring hospitality can you tell me why it portrays Lot as hyper-reluctant to leave Sodom and why it deprives him of his wife in such strange circumstances?





Well I have to admit I can't explain these things. The story seems to go off here at a complete tangent, becoming strangely preoccupied with the continuance of Lot's family.

Sounds to me as if your explanation has finally broken its back but let's finish the story before we conduct an autopsy!



Lot and his two daughters are now safe in their mountain cave but there's a problem for there are no men to provide them with children.



Our father is old, and there is no man around here to lie with us. So let's lie with him so as to preserve our family line.

Lot's daughters ply him with wine till he becomes blind drunk.



Then the elder daughter lies down and has sex with her father who is completely oblivious to what is happening.



The next night the two daughters follow the same procedure...



... only this time it's the younger daughter who takes her turn.



In this way both daughters have sons by their father. The older, Moab, becomes the father of the Moabites and the younger, Ben-Ammi, becomes the father of the Ammonites.





Well, in indicating that Lot represents Moab and Ammon the writer makes clear he's not recounting a story but rather is telling us something about the nature of these communities.



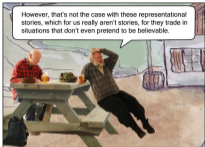
We take it for granted that all stories, including fairytales, tell us about things that actually happened, listeners being free to choose to believe, or not, as they wish.

So the handsome prince killed the fearsome dragon and took Matilda back with him to his castle.

Daddy, did that actually happen?

No of course not. Silly!

However, that's not the case with these representational stories, which for us really aren't stories, for they trade in situations that don't even pretend to be believable.



Stories that aren't really stories!
You baffle me completely!



Can't you see that as representations these tales don't aspire to be believable in the way stories generally do.



'I say, God, Sarah wants rid of my son! 'Don't worry Abraham, just kick him out as she says!'

Hallo God! What's happening today?
Hallo Abraham. Today you're going to sacrifice your son.

'O dear there aren't any men here!
'Don't fret, we're just going to have to go to bed with Daddy!'

Yes I kind of see what you mean!



It reinforces this view by using the honouring of hospitality to represent the Moabites' and Ammonites' marginal perspective which contrasts so sharply with the civilisational perspective of the Sodomites who see foreigners as fair game, just as we do.



You should also note the way in which the story protects Lot's marginal honour by shielding him from blame for the incestuous way in which his family line is maintained.



As is the case in the Abraham story it's the women relations who demonstrate lack of political faith, not the patriarch himself.

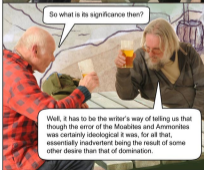


Is this simply a by-product of the writer's patriarchal male chauvinism?



It's easy to explain it away like that these days but it can't be the full story. For we are dealing here with sex which is far too important a matter for this writer.

So what is its significance then?



Well, it has to be the writer's way of telling us that though the error of the Moabites and Ammonites was certainly ideological it was, for all that, essentially inadvertent being the result of some other desire than that of domination.



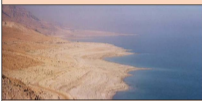
This theme of Lot's choice to live in the comfort of a city is not confined to this reference to Eden and Egypt. It runs right through the story, reappearing first in his great reluctance to quit Sodom...



... and then, again, in his plea to be allowed to flee to the small town of Zoar so as to avoid the dreaded mountains.



Moreover what's interesting is that these cities in the Jordan valley never in fact existed. For the terrain bordering the Dead Sea in the south was far too salty for vegetation to grow ...



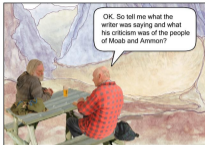
... whereas in the north the land was a malaria-filled swamp which only became usable in modern time as a result of advanced drainage-technology.



The Hebrew writer shows he was aware of this reality for he alludes to the salty barrenness of the Jordan plain and correctly places Moab and Ammon in the trans-Jordanian highlands. This can only mean that his story was pure fiction...



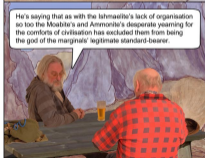
This bothered me at first till I realised it wouldn't have bothered him. For he was naturally well aware he was making a political comment and not recording the history of Moab and Ammon.



OK. So tell me what the writer was saying and what his criticism was of the people of Moab and Ammon?

It can only be that they were politically naive. Craving civilised comforts they assimilated too easily with the existent urban population, so compromising their ideological inheritance.







8

Jacob and Esau

(Father of the Edomites)

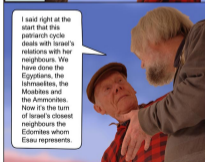
1. The Problem



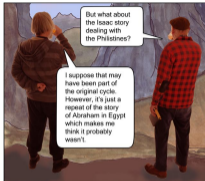
Gen 26, 24-34
& Gen 27

Next on our list
is the story of
Jacob and Esau.

Hang on a minute!
What about Isaac
and his stories?



I said right at the
start that this
patriarch cycle
deals with Israel's
relations with her
neighbours. We
have done the
Egyptians, the
Ishmaelites, the
Moabites and
the Ammonites.
Now it's the turn
of Israel's closest
neighbours the
Edomites whom
Esau represents.



But what about the Isaac story dealing with the Philistines?

I suppose that may have been part of the original cycle. However, it's just a repeat of the story of Abraham in Egypt which makes me think it probably wasn't.



Isn't the repetition just the writer's way of saying there was no difference between the Philistines and their Egyptian overlords?

Absolutely.

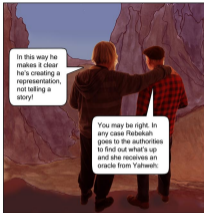


However, if you look you will see that all the Isaac stories are pale reflections of those found elsewhere which makes me think they are the work of a later editor. But I take your point.



The story of Jacob and Esau starts with the writer telling us they were twins.





In this way he makes it clear he's creating a representation, not telling a story!

You may be right. In any case Rebekah goes to the authorities to find out what's up and she receives an oracle from Yahweh:

*"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."*



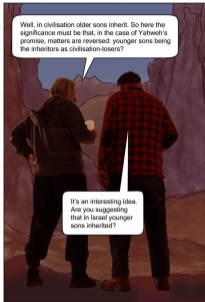
Proves my point wouldn't you say?

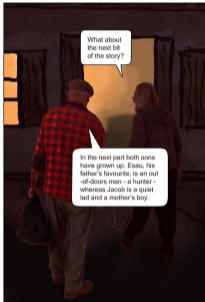
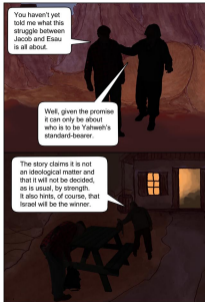
Hmmm ... Finally she gives birth ...

... Esau, who is covered in red hair, comes out first, immediately followed by Jacob clinging to his heel.









Esau comes in from hunting one day absolutely famished to find Jacob cooking a delicious red stew.



He asks his brother if he can have some and Jacob readily assents but only in exchange for Esau's birthright.



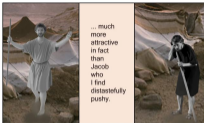
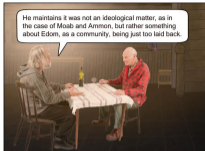
Seeing his present need as more important than some hypothetical future advantage, Esau agrees the exchange, thankfully tucking into Jacob's reviving stew.



In this way, as the text says, "Esau despised his birthright" ... and Jacob revealed a highly ambitious nature, one might add.







To stand up to the world's collective privilege-seeking and hypocrisy you need to be as pushy as a Stalin ... without being violent, of course, as, unfortunately, he was.



That's a dangerous comparison!



So it is but you have to run risks opening peoples' eyes.

For hundreds of years the authorities have found it convenient to dumb down the Bible by pretending it's a religious work; their objective being to hide the scary, marginal, political insights it contains.



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

People have been happy to go along with this for though they may not have had many privileges they have had some, which they have not been prepared to share with those with none at all.



As a result they have not wanted to be reminded how shabby their attitude is, preferring to go along with their eyes tight shut like everyone else, the authorities included.



So if I now manage, with the aid of the Bible, to open their eyes it will inevitably be a shock to them, don't you think?

Perhaps we should continue the story!



Isaac, now a blind old man, decides it's time to settle his affairs before he dies. So he calls his favourite first-born son Esau and gives him instructions:

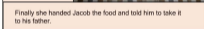
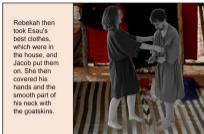


Get your gear and go hunt some game. Then prepare and bring me some of the tasty food I love and I will bless you before I die.

Rebekah, however, overhears this conversation and hurriedly tells her favourite son Jacob all about it.



Go out to the flock and bring me two fine young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father. That way he will give you his blessing rather than Esau.





I am Esau your first son. I have done as you asked. Sit up and eat my food. Then you can give me your blessing.

How did you manage to find game so quickly, son?



Yahweh made my hunt successful.

Come near so I can touch you to make certain you are Esau.



The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Embrace me son!



Ah, my son's smell is of a field which the LORD has blessed.

*May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness,
an abundance of grain and new wine.
May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.*

Soon afterwards Esau came in from hunting. He too made his father some of his favourite food and brought it to him to eat.



Father sit up and eat some of this venison I have cooked for you so that you can bless me.

Isaac, of course is horrified.



Who was it that just brought me venison and received my blessing?

When he heard this Esau cried out in anguish:



No! No! that can't be true. Father please, please bless me as well!

Son what can I do? Your brother came and craftily stole your blessing!



He is well named treacherous dog.* That's the second time he has done me down. Can't you bless me as well?

* The name Jacob means Supplanter

Sen, I have made him your master, What can I do?

Do you only have one blessing?
For God's sake bless me as well!

Your dwelling will be far from the earth's richness, far from the dew of heaven above. You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But a time will come when you grow restive and break loose, and you will cast his yoke from off your neck.


Because of what had happened Esau hated Jacob and he vowed to get his revenge after the days of mourning for his father were over.

I'll get him.
Just wait!

But Rebekah warned Jacob, telling him to flee to her brother Laban's house until Esau had got over being ticked for a second time by his brother.

Don't argue. Just get your stuff and go before it's too late





Your insinuation that the story-teller was a superstitious old fool gets more and more blatant! But tell me, if he did think you could steal a blessing do you think he believed Yahweh would let Jacob get away with it?

Yes, I see now that I have dug myself into a hole. For if this is a story, as I have always in the past believed, then either Yahweh countenanced the theft or else his hands were somehow tied by what had happened; and neither of these suppositions holds water. So perhaps you are right. Perhaps this is a representation after all.



I'm glad you recognise the text makes little sense when read as a story. I was going to ask you next whether Isaac would have been fooled by the goat-skins Rebekah somehow managed to fix to the back of Jacob's hands but now I won't have to!



No, as you say, when you consider it carefully the whole thing's highly improbable.

OK. So let's now see how things stand when we view the text as a god-of-the-marginals representation.



You say that as a representation the text affirms no ideological disagreement between Israel and Edom. But if that is so how do you explain the rivalry?

That's a good question. No one asks it as a rule because the text is taken to be a story and in stories rivalries are common and demand no explanation. However, in a representation you have to know what a rivalry represents, especially when it is so curiously one-sided.



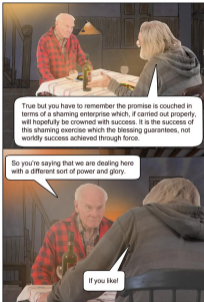
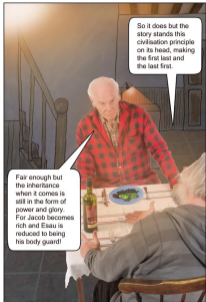
In stories rivalry is usually about a thirst for power but this doesn't appear to be the case here.

Isn't the whole question of the first born to do with inherited power?

Generally speaking, but not in this story where the inheritance is but a promise and the inheritor is the 'younger son', a title which as we have already said designates civilisation-losers.



But the story works on the principle that the older son should inherit!





Well, the rivalry has to do with who was to be Yahweh's true servant, destined to bring about his revolution. Consequently on Jacob's side it is the result of his overwhelming desire to gain this coveted position.



But why couldn't both brothers share the position as fellow revolutionaries?

Another good question and for us civilisation folk it is not easy to answer!

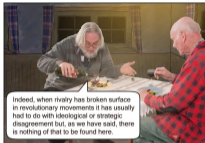


Why do you say that?

Well, the only political revolutions we really know about were class-based. As such they resulted from a gathering together of the various forces which made up the oppressed majority at that time.

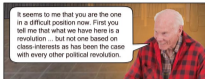


This means that though rivalries certainly existed in such revolutionary movements their basic momentum always stemmed from the creation of a brotherhood.

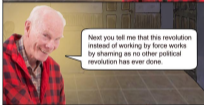


Indeed, when rivalry has broken surface in revolutionary movements it has usually had to do with ideological or strategic disagreement but, as we have said, there is nothing of that to be found here.

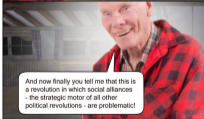
In fact what we are presented with here is altogether strange: A revolutionary movement which, far from seeking brotherhood, finds it an embarrassment!



It seems to me that you are the one in a difficult position now. First you tell me that what we have here is a revolution ... but not one based on class-interests as has been the case with every other political revolution.



Next you tell me that this revolution instead of working by force works by shaming as no other political revolution has ever done.



And now finally you tell me that this is a revolution in which social alliances - the strategic motor of all other political revolutions - are problematic!



Yes, taken individually all of these features apparently present my thesis with insurmountable problems. However, taken together they confirm it splendidly.



For isn't it obvious that if we're talking about a marginal revolution proactive force is out of the question?



Then again, if we rule out proactive force, doesn't shaming become the only visible alternative?



And, if shaming by demonstration is the order of the day, doesn't this exclude brotherhood which, after all, is simply proactive force in disguise?





Once again you could write this off as a typical bit of patriarchal male-chauvinism but it would be a great mistake, for a very important point is being made.

What point is that?

That even though Israel is consumed by guilt she is not really responsible for Edom's unhappy situation which stems solely from Israel's laudable desire to be the god of the marginal's 'standard-bearer.

Fair enough!



So there you have it. Read in the normal manner, as a religious story, this text makes little sense being full of improbabilities and unanswerable questions. However, read politically, as a representation, every bit of it makes the best of sense and I know of no other way of achieving this objective.

Perhaps we should now move on to the next bit of the Jacob and Esau story.

9

Jacob
and
Laban

2. The Analysis



The next bit of the story is very drawn out and involved so perhaps you could just give us the gist.

Very well.

Gen 29-31

Jacob left his home in Canaan and travelled east to his uncle's house in Haran where he fell in love with his cousin Rachel.



Jacob offered to work for his uncle for seven years if Laban would then give him Rachel's hand in marriage



Laban readily agreed but he tricked Jacob for when the time came he gave him Leah, Rachel's older sister, as a bride.



So Jacob had to work for his uncle seven more years. Finally, having at last achieved his goal by marrying Rachel, he decided to tell Laban he wanted to return home with his family.



But because of his acquired skills Jacob had become a great asset to Laban who was loathe therefore to let him go.



Jacob agreed to stay but he didn't want wages.

If I stay I want half of the profit I make, the other half being yours.

It's a deal!

However, aware that his own propensity for success was likely to arouse jealousy Jacob further proposed a clear way of determining what was his and what belonged to his uncle.

What are you up to now?

I'm trying to think of a foolproof way to distinguish between my animals and those belonging to your Dad.

He suggested to Laban that all the animals born into his flock that turned out with black marks he himself should keep, his uncle having all of the pure white stock.



Once again Laban was happy to agree. However, in handing over to Jacob his designated flock he slyly included only animals with no trace of black in their coats.



But this did not hamper Jacob for he too had a genetic trick up his sleeve.



You're not going to tell me you take this genetic engineering business seriously are you?



So you agree this too is a representation not a story

Of course. Of course!

Go on!

As a result of this exchange of underhand dealings the very situation Jacob had dreaded and tried so hard to avoid came about with Laban becoming terribly jealous.



Realising this, Jacob decided that now he simply had to return home with his family.



The story continues with an account of the difficulties caused by Laban's jealousy. For Laban saw Jacob as grabbing everything precious.





Jacob and Esau

3. The Problem Resolved

Jacob is on his way home but he is scared since there is no way of knowing whether his brother Esau is still angry with him. So he sends a messenger to find out.



Say to my brother that I am his humble servant. Tell him I have been living with uncle Laban and have done well for myself. Find out if I am in his good books and whether he is willing to see me.

Gen 32-33

Later



What did he say?

He's coming to meet you with 400 men.

Oh my God!

Jacob is so frightened he divides his family into two groups so that if Esau massacres one of them the other half of the family will have a chance to escape.



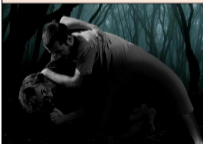
He then gets his herdsmen to create three big droves containing a variety of animals, as presents for his brother.



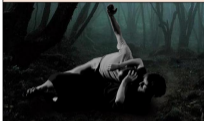
As evening fell they came to the river Jabbok. Jacob saw everyone across the ford, he alone not crossing.



The story recounts that during that night Jacob wrestled with a man right up until daybreak...



However, seeing that he did not prevail the man eventually broke Jacob's hold by dislocating his thigh.



Let me go, for it is daybreak.

I will only let you go if you bless me.



What is your name?

Jacob



Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,* because you have struggled with God and with man and have overcome.



*Meaning: He who strives with God

Jacob asked the man his name but he would not give it, however, he did give Jacob his blessing.



So Jacob called the place Peniel, meaning 'God's face', for, as he said, 'I saw God face to face but did not die!'

So what do you think of that?



Well, it's a powerful story, containing interesting symbols like a river crossing and change of name.



It also introduces striking ideas like the notion of prevailing successfully not only against men but also God!



However, putting it all together and making overall sense of it is another matter and I have to confess that is something I have never quite managed to do.



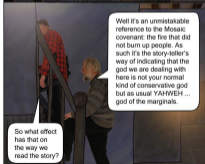
That's maybe because you've overlooked the most important piece in the puzzle.

What's that?



That bit at the end where Jacob in astonishment says he has seen God face to face yet lived to tell the tale.

What's special about that?



Well it's an unmistakable reference to the Mosaic covenant: the fire that did not burn up people. As such it's the story-teller's way of indicating that the god we are dealing with here is not your normal kind of conservative god but as usual YAHWEH ... god of the marginals.

So what effect has that on the way we read the story?



Well, let's take it gently. The crossing of the river tells us we are about to deal with a completely new situation and the change in name tells us that this new situation will be brought about by an important change in Jacob's character.



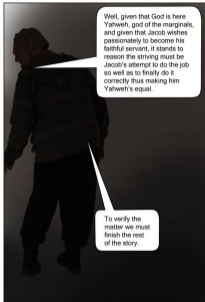
So far so good! What about the wrestling which concludes in Jacob being named as the one who prevails with both men and God himself?



Well, we've already discussed Jacob's problems with men: The competitiveness of the surrounding Hebrew societies which envy Israel her success, thereby putting pressure on her to be competitive too.

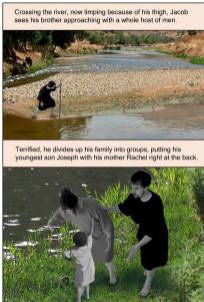


What then is the meaning of Jacob's competition with God?



Well, given that God is here Yahweh, god of the marginals, and given that Jacob wishes passionately to become his faithful servant, it stands to reason the striving must be Jacob's attempt to do the job so well as to finally do it correctly thus making him Yahweh's equal.

To verify the matter we must finish the rest of the story.



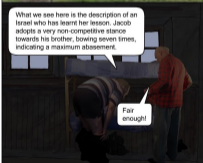
Crossing the river, now limping because of his thigh, Jacob sees his brother approaching with a whole host of men.

Terrified, he divides up his family into groups, putting his youngest son Joseph with his mother Rachel right at the back.

Then he goes out in front, bowing low to the ground every few steps, repeating this action seven times, till he comes near to his brother.



What we see here is the description of an Israel who has learnt her lesson. Jacob adopts a very non-competitive stance towards his brother, bowing seven times, indicating a maximum abasement.

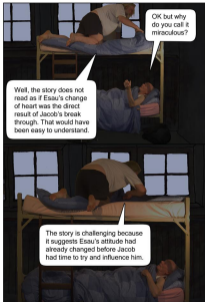


Esau, however, runs to meet him flinging his arm around Jacob's neck, kissing him and weeping with joy.









Shechem's Rape of Dinah

The Story of Israel
and the
Canaanites





The story relates that one day Dinah went out to visit some of the local women when Shechem, the son of a Canaanite prince, saw her and, overcome with lust, raped her (for, to him, she was of no account*).

* Editorial.



However, soon afterwards he realised he was in love with her. So he went to his father Hamor and told him he wanted her as a wife.



Meanwhile Jacob had heard what had happened but, as his sons were away, he decided for the moment to do nothing.



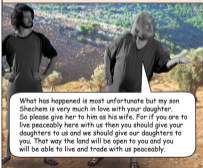
Just then Hamor arrived to ask for the hand of his daughter, Dinah, on behalf of his son, just as Shechem had asked.



At this point Joseph's sons came in from the fields boiling with rage for they had heard what had happened.



But Hamor spoke to them with great restraint and civility.



What has happened is most unfortunate but my son Shechem is very much in love with your daughter. So please give her to him as his wife. For if you are to live peaceably here with us then you should give your daughters to us and we should give our daughters to you. That way the land will be open to you and you will be able to live and trade with us peaceably.

Shechem too spoke reasonably to Dinah's father and brothers:



I only want to be friends with you. Ask me anything you want as a marriage present and I will give it gladly, only let this maiden be my wife.

But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully



We cannot give our sister to someone who is uncircumcised for that would be a disgrace. We will only give our consent on one condition: that all of you agree to be circumcised.



Two days later when the Canaanites were still very sore Jacob's sons grabbed their swords and, taking them completely unawares, killed Hamor and Shechem.



Finally they slew all the males in the city and took all the women and female children along with the livestock and anything they could find of value as booty.





I see you have rationalised the story in saying that ALL of Jacob's sons took part in the massacre.

Yes, sometimes it's suggested all of Jacob's sons were involved whereas at other times it's just Simeon and Levi.

I think the priestly editor was embarrassed by the idea that Israel could have done such a thing. So, just as the original story-teller had shielded Jacob he too shielded the majority of the tribes. That's why he wrote a new ending for the story:

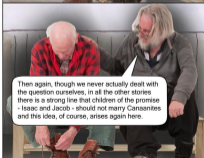


You have got me into deep trouble, making my name stink amongst the Canaanites. We are few in number so if they ever get together they will destroy me.

There was no call to treat our sister as a prostitute.

You're saying that even the Biblical editors found the story objectionable?

Yes. That's hardly surprising. For by the time they were writing Israel had become 'civilised' and they were leaders of the community







However, recognising his error he is prepared to make amends. A civilised man he does the right thing and compromises. That way everyone can continue to live in peace and harmony!



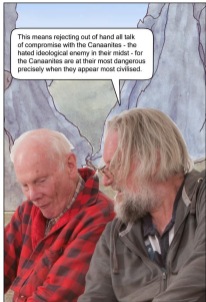
Leaving aside the act of rape don't you think it extraordinary the storyteller should describe Shechem and Hamor as behaving just as we as civilised folk would want to behave while portraying Jacob's sons as a godforsaken bunch of terrorists? This can hardly be an accident.



So what's he getting at, for heaven's sake?



He's saying that if Israel is truly intent on ridding the world of its odious privilege-seeking ways and hypocritical cover-ups she must not give way a single inch.

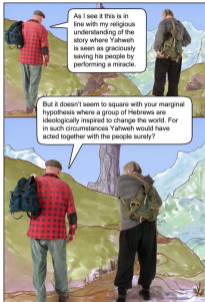


12

The Exodus Story

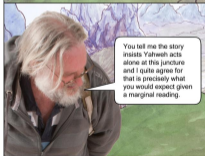
The God who will not act alone







I don't think it was, partly because I don't think the story's about such stuff and nonsense, but more importantly I think it makes better sense read differently.



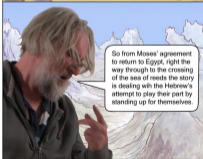
You tell me the story insists Yahweh acts alone at this juncture and I quite agree for that is precisely what you would expect given a marginal reading.

At the risk of being a bore let me remind you, one last time, that the covenant agreement between the Hebrew marginals and their god was that, if they stood up for themselves in an attempt to shame civilisation, he would see them right.



The situation is not complicated. You have to stand up for yourselves and I have to make the

Groan!



So from Moses' agreement to return to Egypt, right the way through to the crossing of the sea of reeds the story is dealing with the Hebrew's attempt to play their part by standing up for themselves.



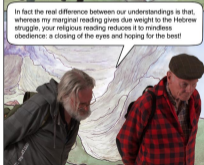
You might almost say that, right up to this moment, they are the only ones to act as they wait and wait for Yahweh to vindicate their stance.



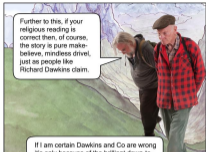
This being the case what happens next is simply Yahweh, at last, standing up to the mark and, now that the chips are down, fulfilling his side of the bargain.



So you see how wrong it is to say that a marginal reading is prohibited because Yahweh acts alone.



In fact the real difference between our understandings is that, whereas my marginal reading gives due weight to the Hebrew struggle, your religious reading reduces it to mindless obedience: a closing of the eyes and hoping for the best!



Further to this, if your religious reading is correct then, of course, the story is pure make-believe, mindless drivel, just as people like Richard Dawkins claim.

If I am certain Dawkins and Co are wrong it's only because of the brilliant down-to-earth sense a marginal reading produces.



So are you saying Yahweh did or did not act?

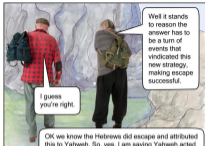


Well, what would an 'act of Yahweh' look like in terms of the covenant agreement we have described?



I suppose it would be a turn of events which vindicated Israel's stance in standing up for herself.





I guess you're right.

Well it stands to reason the answer has to be a turn of events that vindicated this new strategy, making escape successful.

OK we know the Hebrews did escape and attributed this to Yahweh. So, yes, I am saying Yahweh acted and it may have been a miracle but it wasn't magic.

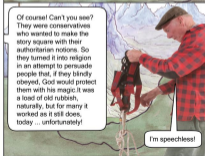


Fair enough but did the Hebrews themselves see it as magic?



Of course not for they were simply using religious language to talk politics and there is no room for magic in political discussion! It was revisionist priests who later introduced the notion of magic into the story.

Really?



Of course! Can't you see? They were conservatives who wanted to make the story square with their authoritarian notions. So they turned it into religion in an attempt to persuade people that, if they blindly obeyed, God would protect them with his magic. It was a load of old rubbish, naturally, but for many it worked as it still does, today ... unfortunately!

I'm speechless!

13

Moses

The Revolutionary Hero who
refuses to organise the Revolution





Well, if there was to be any hope of this motley crew of marginals making it across the desert into the Palestinian highlands where they could find a place to live, you would have to organise them first.



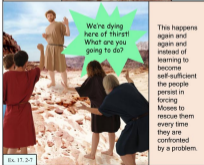
Yes that's certainly what Sargon would have done. But, tell me now, what did Moses in fact do?



Well, as far as organisation is concerned, he did nothing. The story describes him as leading the people into the Sin desert where they constantly complain to him about the conditions.

Why did you bring us here? There's nothing to eat!

Ex. 16, 2-8



We're dying here of thirst! What are you going to do?

This happens again and again and instead of learning to become self-sufficient the people persist in forcing Moses to rescue them every time they are confronted by a problem.

Ex. 17, 2-7

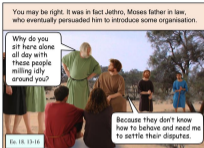


Given your own reaction what do you think of Moses' passivity?

It's strange isn't it? I can't think why he didn't organise the people?



There is a problem with organisation: it tends to be hierarchical which means it creates elites, something Moses clearly didn't want in Israel.



You may be right. It was in fact Jethro, Moses father in law, who eventually persuaded him to introduce some organisation.

Why do you sit here alone all day with these people milling idly around you?

Because they don't know how to behave and need me to settle their disputes.

Ex. 18. 13-16



This is interesting. I could understand people needing Moses' expertise as regards living in the desert. But this does not seem to have been the issue.

No they appear to lack all knowledge of communal living which surely can't have been the case.





You're being about as clear as mud!

What we have here is a situation experienced in all revolutions. Since it's only militants who have a clear grasp of the new ideology only they know how to apply it in concrete situations. This means that in the new order most people are lost and not sure how to behave. This explains the way in which the story now continues.

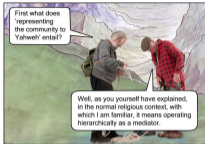


Jethro tells Moses he can't go on in the way he is doing since he is effectively killing himself.

You are taking too much on yourself. Your role is simply to be the interface between Yahweh and the people; representing the community to him and teaching the people his statutes.

Well I can take a guess at what this means in a religious context but I'm blown if I can understand what it means ideologically speaking.

Just take it in easy stages. It's not as difficult as it might seem.

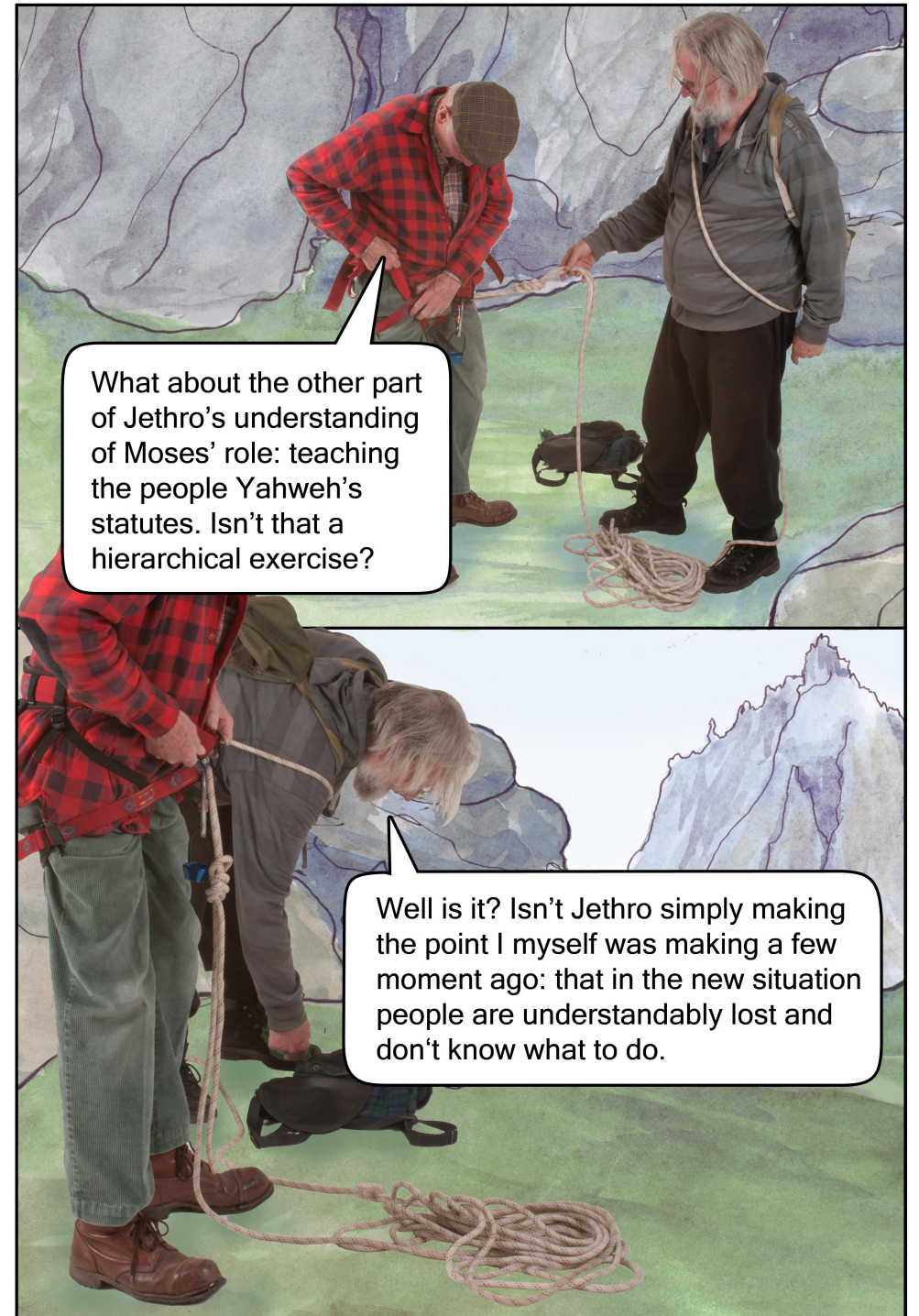


14

Moses

and

The Law





Select capable men who are trustworthy and fear God and appoint them as judges. They can bring important matters to you but judge simple cases themselves. That will take the load off you and all these people will go home satisfied.



Isn't Jethro here telling Moses to train up a few militants to help him put across the ideology way to the people. That way everyone will end up knowing what to do.

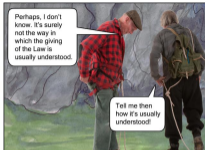


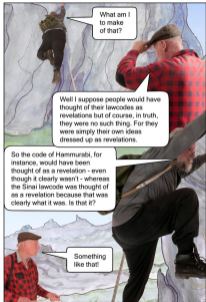
I would suggest that there is nothing intrinsically hierarchical, or more correctly centrarchical, in all of this, which was why Moses was able to take his father-in-law's advice.

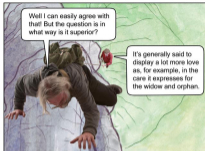


So you see the next bit of the story - the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai - as Moses' way of putting the new revolutionary ideology into peoples hands?

It's what the text suggests wouldn't you say?

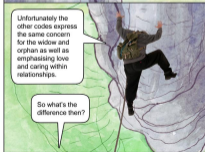






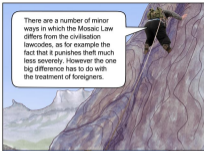
Well I can easily agree with that! But the question is in what way is it superior?

It's generally said to display a lot more love as, for example, in the case it expresses for the widow and orphan.



Unfortunately the other codes express the same concern for the widow and orphan as well as emphasising love and caring within relationships.

So what's the difference then?



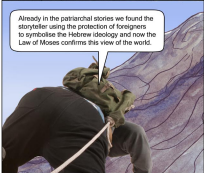
There are a number of minor ways in which the Mosaic Law differs from the civilisation lawcodes, as for example the fact that it punishes theft much less severely. However the one big difference has to do with the treatment of foreigners.




As is generally the case in our own communities today ancient civilisations treated foreigners as fair game unless they were specifically protected by treaties between civilisation powers.




In sharp contrast there are numerous passages in the Mosaic Law where it is strictly forbidden to exploit foreigners or treat them differently from other members of the community.




Already in the patriarchal stories we found the storyteller using the protection of foreigners to symbolise the Hebrew ideology and now the Law of Moses confirms this view of the world.



So you can keep love as a distinguishing feature of the Mosaic Law if you like but only if you make it clear you're talking politically about having an unusual regard towards people we civilisation folk heartily despise.



Well I'm aware there are many different kinds of love but I have always thought of them as being universal and beyond politics.

A man with a backpack is climbing a purple mountain. He is wearing a grey jacket and dark pants. A speech bubble is positioned above him.

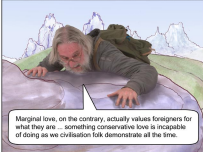
If that's the case you've been deluding yourself! For manifestly people's ideological perspectives colour their ideas especially politically important ones like love.

So how do these conservative and marginal ideologies make love look different?

Conservative love is characteristically condescending and it is usually spoken of as graciousness. We will find this 'quality' honoured in the Bible but only in revisionist texts.

A man with a backpack is falling from a purple mountain. He is wearing a grey jacket and dark pants. A speech bubble is positioned above him.

Condescending love is capable of having a regard for foreigners, of course, but only out of pity.

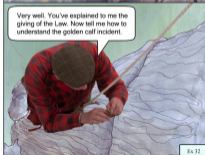
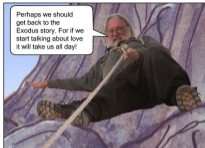
A man with a backpack is crawling on a purple mountain. He is wearing a grey jacket and dark pants. A speech bubble is positioned below him.

Marginal love, on the contrary, actually values foreigners for what they are ... something conservative love is incapable of doing as we civilisation folk demonstrate all the time.

15

The Golden Calf

Signs of Revisionism





Remind me about what happened.

Moses remains ages up the mountain with God and the people become anxious so, as usual, they run to their leader which, given Moses' absence, means Aaron, the high priest.



Clearly something has happened to Moses, so, since you are now in charge, you must provide us with gods to lead us.



Unlike Moses Aaron immediately gives way to their demands.

Very well tell everyone to take off their gold ear rings and bring them to me.

Aaron uses the people's gold to fashion an idol in the form of a calf in front of which he builds an altar.



Tomorrow will be a feast to Yahweh.

These are your gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

Consequently when Moses comes down from the mountain he finds the people worshipping the golden calf. So he breaks the tablets of stone on which the Yahweh's Law has been written.



What in heaven's name ...

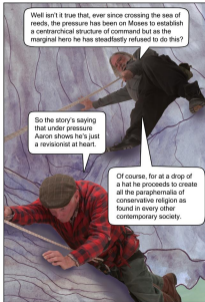
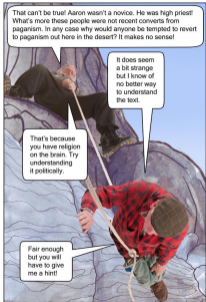
I know you're going to tell me that a lot of this story is symbolic but even if it is what does it mean?

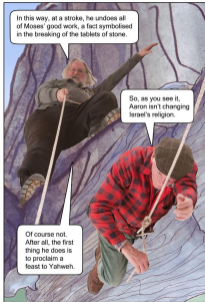


Well tell me why did Moses find what Aaron and the people did so bad?



I have always been led to understand they had wickedly reverted to paganism.

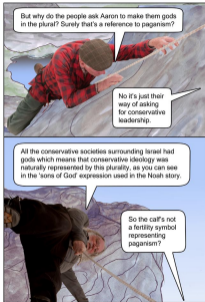




In this way, at a stroke, he undoes all of Moses' good work, a fact symbolised in the breaking of the tablets of stone.

So, as you see it, Aaron isn't changing Israel's religion.

Of course not. After all, the first thing he does is to proclaim a feast to Yahweh.



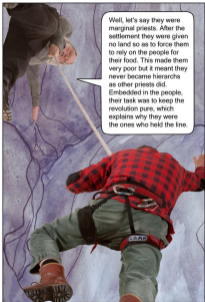
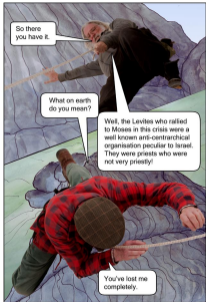
But why do the people ask Aaron to make them gods in the plural? Surely that's a reference to paganism?

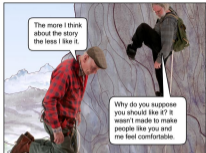
No it's just their way of asking for conservative leadership.

All the conservative societies surrounding Israel had gods which means that conservative ideology was naturally represented by this plurality, as you can see in the 'sons of God' expression used in the Noah story.

So the calf's not a fertility symbol representing paganism?







The more I think about the story the less I like it.

Why do you suppose you should like it? It wasn't made to make people like you and me feel comfortable.



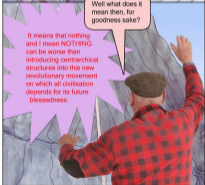
Fair enough but you can't justify the bloodshed can you?

I thought we had agreed the story's a representation not an account of an actual event.



Are you suggesting that somehow makes things better?

We will only be able to answer that question when we discover what the story means.



Well what does it mean then, for goodness sake?

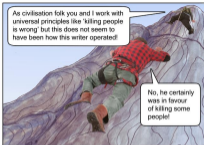
It means that nothing and I mean **NOTHING** can be worse than introducing centralised structures into the new revolutionary movement on which all civilisation depends for its future blessedness.



So the fact that Moses is a revolutionary justifies **anything** and **everything** does it? Bloody massacres included!

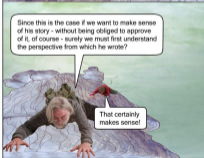


I'm not in any way concerned with justifying Moses' conduct. All I want to do, for the moment, is understand what the writer is saying.



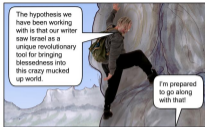
As civilisation folk you and I work with universal principles like 'killing people is wrong' but this does not seem to have been how this writer operated!

No, he certainly was in favour of killing some people!



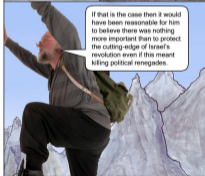
Since this is the case if we want to make sense of his story - without being obliged to approve of it, of course - surely we must first understand the perspective from which he wrote?

That certainly makes sense!

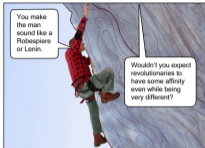


The hypothesis we have been working with is that our writer saw Israel as a unique revolutionary tool for bringing blessedness into this crazy mucked up world.

I'm prepared to go along with that!



If that is the case then it would have been reasonable for him to believe there was nothing more important than to protect the cutting-edge of Israel's revolution even if this meant killing political renegades.



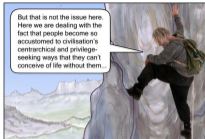
You make the man sound like a Robespierre or Lenin.

Wouldn't you expect revolutionaries to have some affinity even while being very different?

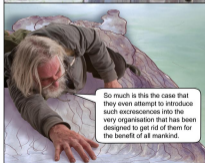


So I'm wrong to be shocked by what Moses and the Levites did?





But that is not the issue here. Here we are dealing with the fact that people become so accustomed to civilisation's centralised and privilege-seeking ways that they can't conceive of life without them...



So much is this the case that they even attempt to introduce such excrescences into the very organisation that has been designed to get rid of them for the benefit of all mankind.

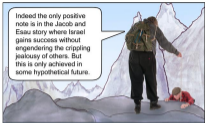
16

Moses

Marginal Hero and Civilisation Loser



Indeed the only positive note is in the Jacob and Esau story where Israel gains success without engendering the crippling jealousy of others. But this is only achieved in some hypothetical future.



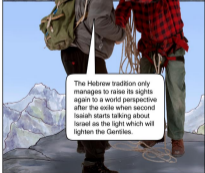
What's more the success even here is geographically limited since it only concerns Israel's Hebrew neighbours and does not include the Gentiles.



This is quite unlike the Sargon narratives which deal with the physical conquest of all the known world.



The Hebrew tradition only manages to raise its sights again to a world perspective after the exile when second Isaiah starts talking about Israel as the light which will lighten the Gentiles.



And this hypothetical future hope only becomes actual, and therefore on a par with Sargon's conservative exploit, in the life and work of Jesus, according to his disciples' claim.



Of course, if you adopt the revisionists' religious approach to the texts all of this fascinating conversation about how to vanquish conservative ideology so as to free the world from the oppression it creates is obscured.



Everything is reduced to a repetitive and mindnumbing call for blind obedience just so that conservative authority can continue to rule the roost.



I suppose you can be forgiven for reading the Bible in this way since it is how the biblical editors wanted people to read it.





It is, however, a complete travesty as I hope you will now admit!



Are you inferring that the Bible has to be read against itself!

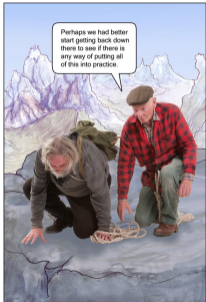


Yes, it's something like that. Another way of putting it is to say you have to read it, as Jesus did, with Hebrew eyes.



And that means seeing quite a lot of it as revisionist clap-trap, as you would put it!

Dead right!



Many thanks to all who have helped
in the production of this book.

For the great photos
Adrian Nettleship

For modelling
Róisín McQuaid
Billy Key
Ryan Partridge
Lydia Parker
Verene Parker
Douglas Parker
Jonjo McQuaid
Rachel Parker
William Pilkington
Ben Szulecki
Peter Mansfield
Marissa Mansfield
Sean Taylor

For help in editing
John Rowe
Julie Mansfield
Pat Parker

For the use of their Studio
Response London

For their background photos
Biblewalks.com

Many grateful thanks to all of you.

