

A story of a river

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Project Manager: Alisha Molter

Curator: Shirwan Can

Editor: Fatima Sharefeddine

Script: Sara Eleonora- Maria Pearce

Layout: Safen Muhammad

Illustrations and Cover Design: Luna Mahmud Darwesh (part 1), Halgurd Muhammad Tahir (part 2) and Bawer Abdulmadjid Muhamed (part 3)

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elbarlament - cultures of democracy is an independent, nonpartisan and impartial organisation that strives to empower and encourage communities and individuals to participate actively in political, social and cultural development processes around the world.

More information can be found on www.elbarlament.org and on the project’s website www.cleantigris.com

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Preface

The present comic book is the result of one year of joint efforts within the programme “Clean Tigris – a dialogue programme for sustainable peace in Mesopotamia”.

The final result that you are right now holding in your hands is poetic and thought-provoking at the same time.

In three stories, the book strives to raise awareness among children and adults alike, by telling the tale of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the Middle East.

As we follow the rivers from their mythical creation by Mesopotamian gods through a time when the first rules for the use of water resources were developed, to a world without water, we feel for Enki, the god of water and creation, who hopes that the people he created to give meaning to water will not disappoint him.

Notably the dystopian vision that we encounter in the third story is unfortunately already much closer to reality than one might think. Today, Iraq is one of the countries that are heavily affected by climate change. In particular, water scarcity and desertification threaten to accelerate political and cultural conflicts. Rising temperatures are shifting fertile and habitable zones. Deserts are advancing, water is becoming scarcer or flooding the land. Environmental changes and violence are causing refugee movements. Worldwide, such movements are expected to increase tenfold by 2050. At the same time, competition for transboundary water resources and the construction of massive dam projects are dramatically increasing the potential for conflicts.

In this atmosphere, women and men from different regions, social and ethnic backgrounds living and working along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers united behind the project “Clean Tigris - dialogue for sustainable peace in Mesopotamia”. City majors and civil society, politicians and decision makers and experts from up-and downstream are working together to find sustainable solutions.

Besides their life-giving character, the first year of the programme showed that the rivers also have a collective memory and are part of the cultural heritage of the country for many Iraqis. In short videos, our participants told us their personal and touching stories about the rivers, memories and traditions, shared poems or music dedicated to the Euphrates and Tigris. The comic book adopts this idea: with the disappearance of the rivers, not only would we lose life-giving resources, but a whole civilisation.

If we want to ensure that the planet remains habitable for future generations, we need to act now. A first step is to understand the value and importance of water as a limited resource - which is what this book aims to do.

We are eternally grateful to Shirwan Can for his great work and passion in curating the book. We further express our deep gratitude to our Iraqi illustrators Luna Mahmud Darwesh (part 1), Halgurd Muhammad Tahir (part 2) and Bawer Abdulmadjid Muhamed (part 3), who transformed this book into a poetic and artistic documentation of different drawing styles.

Deep gratitude is also due to Sara Eleonora-Maria Pearce for developing the script and Fatima Sharafeddine for editing the English and Arabic editions of the book.

This book wouldn't exist without the support of the ifa, funding programme zivik, and the funds of the German Federal Foreign Office, who supported the idea for this book in a year of worldwide lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the team of Clean Tigris for making the realisation of this book possible, notably Roza Kurdo and Ramy Syriani.

Now, we wish you a joyful journey. Whether you read the book at home all by yourself, seated on the riverbank or you read it out loud to your children, we hope that after reading it, you will love the Euphrates and Tigris river even more than you might already do, and be grateful for the most valuable and lifegiving resource we have on this planet: water.

Alisha Molter
Project Manager "Clean Tigris"
elbarlament - cultures of democracy

Become

Somewhere in the lands of Mesopotamia, ancient Gods and Goddesses create the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Creation is sparked from the primordial seas and the Gods collaborate to construct the universe as we know it. Tensions between the Gods bring about the creation of humanity and the universe is set on a path that could lead to the destruction of all things...



Before time, there was only darkness. It overwhelms, turns and swirls into waves. Nothing but darkness.



*Before time, there was nothing but Gods, spinning,
moving, flying in the darkness.*



*In the ocean before time, there was a Goddess, Nammu,
in labor, pushing, breathing. Become!*



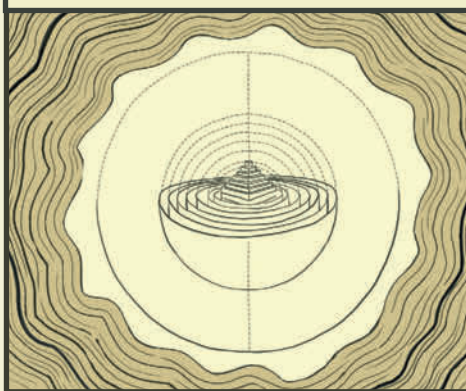
Nammu gave birth to the universe



Her children, Anu and Ki



Split from Earth, Planets and sky, they
swirled together in the darkness



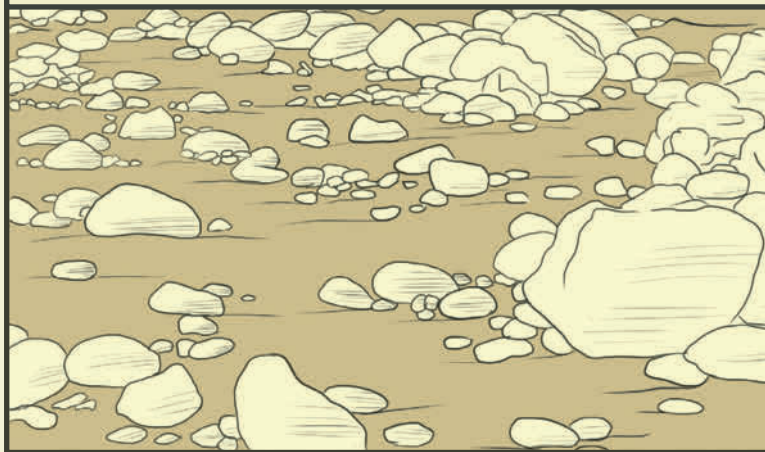
Anu and Ki created Enlil, the God of the air



Enlil separated earth from sky, and raised Anu to the heaven. She became the sky



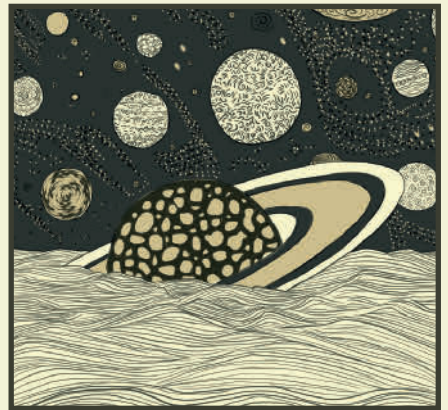
Ki became the great goddess of the earth



Disorganized moons and planets were shooting off in all directions; there was chaos.



Life in the ocean and the land was out of balance

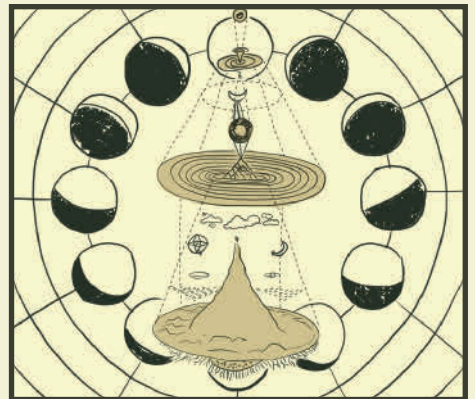
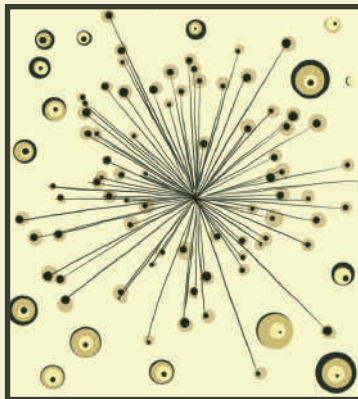
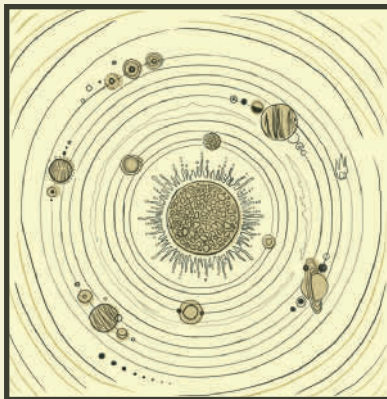


The Goddess Enlil created the moon Goddess Nana to balance the tides, the ocean and gravity



Then she created Utu, the God of the sun, to balance light and warmth, and to regulate the seasons





Enlil and Ki, joined efforts and created Enki, the God of water and wisdom, and the souls of living creatures



Enki was thinking of creating a new system in which water and living creatures can live in harmony

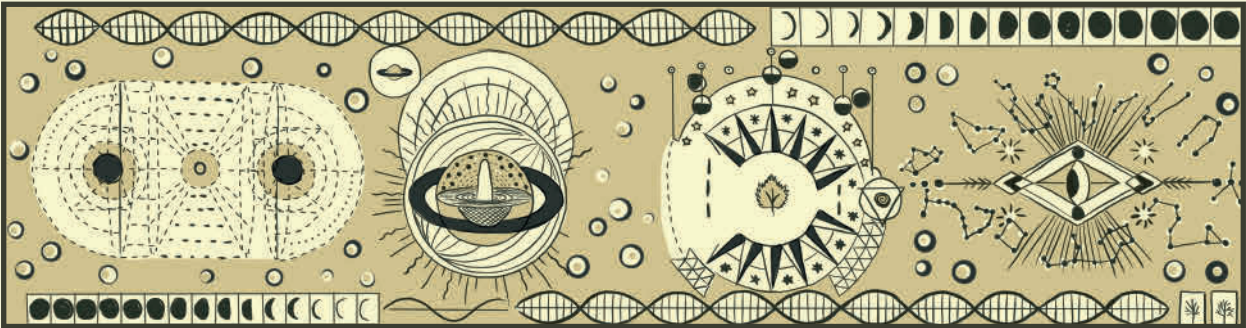
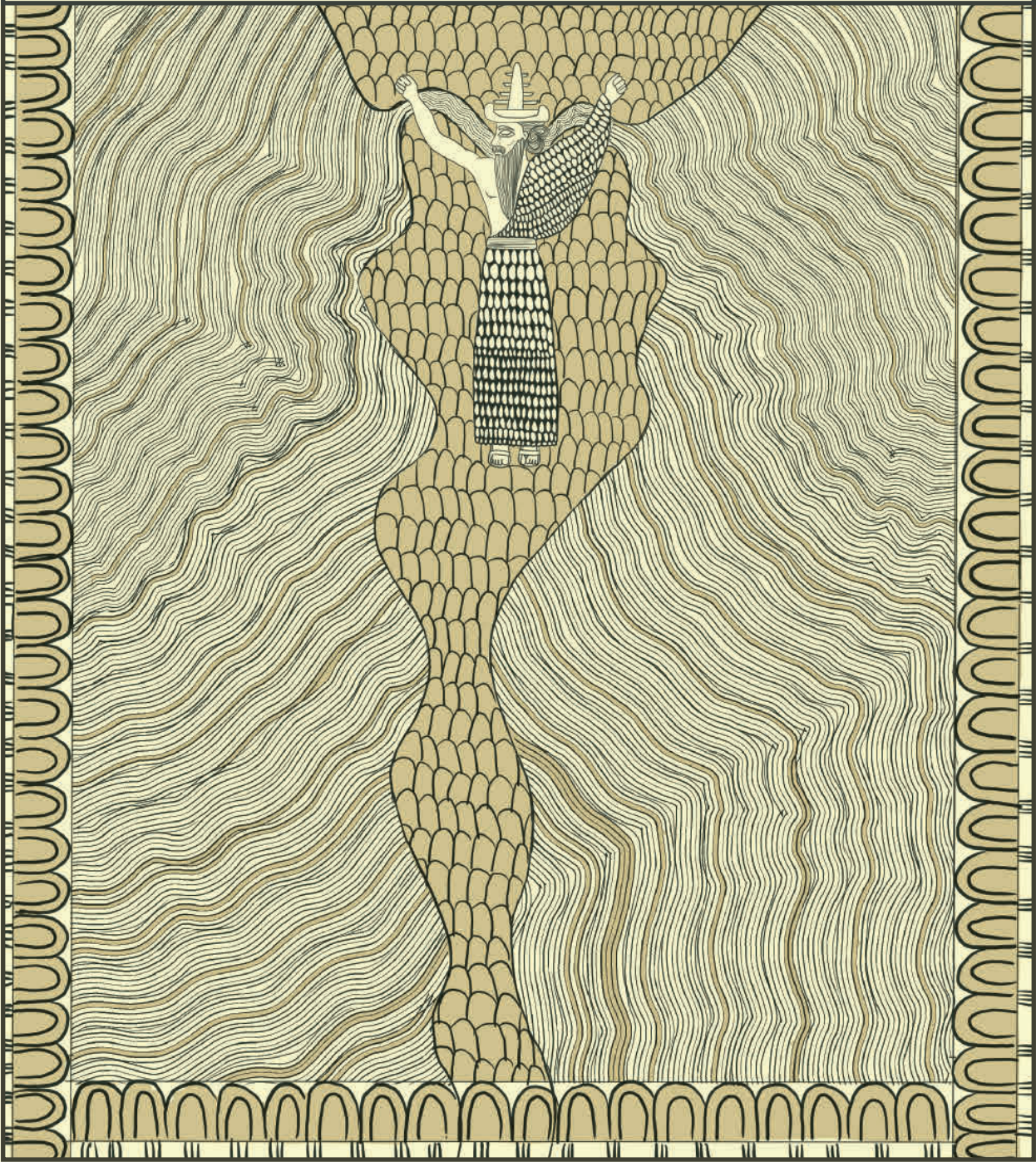




Enki asked Nammu for the holy water to create rivers and creatures



Enki touched the holy water and created Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

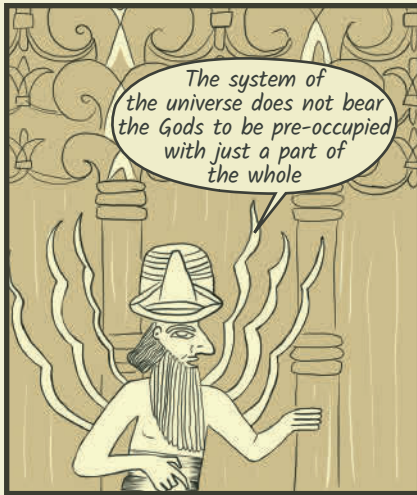


Enki commanded and the earth filled with animals, vegetation, plants and birds, all existing in a delicate web of balance



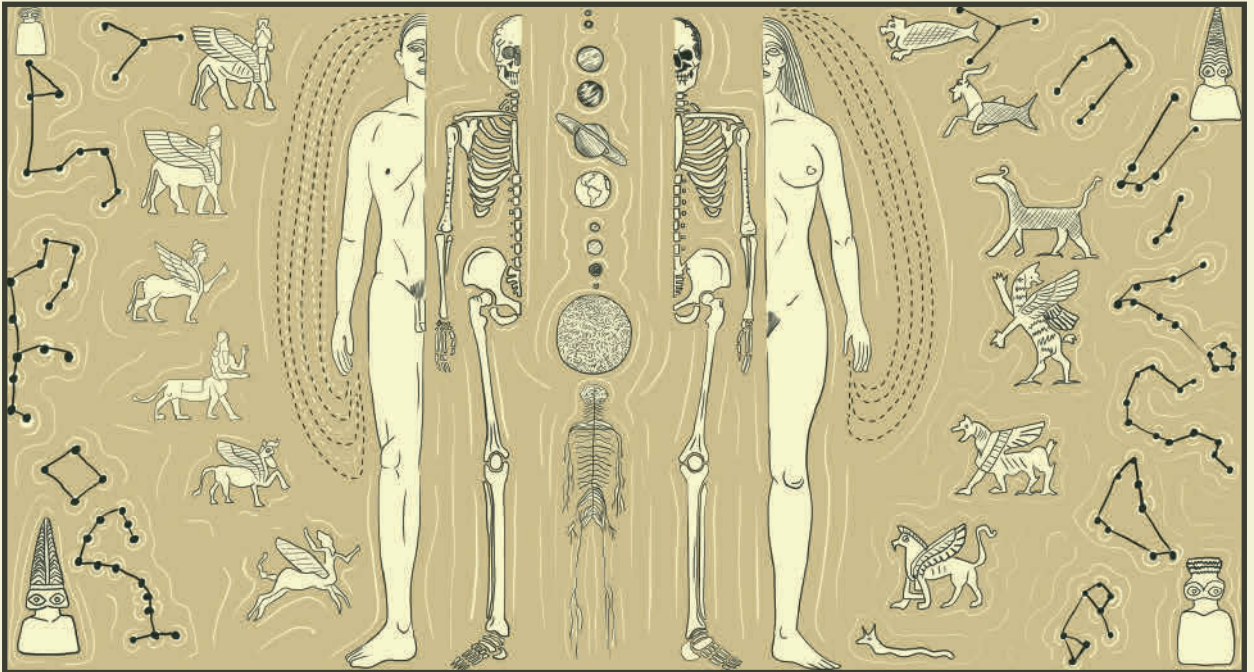
Nammu and Enki were satisfied and happy with what they have accomplished,
and they returned to the table with the other Gods and Goddesses







Enki and Enlil combined different materials from all deities and created human beings



Enki directed humans to take care of each other and of all other creatures, and to maintain balance on earth. Enlil gave them free will to use their wisdom and knowledge



Humans descended to earth

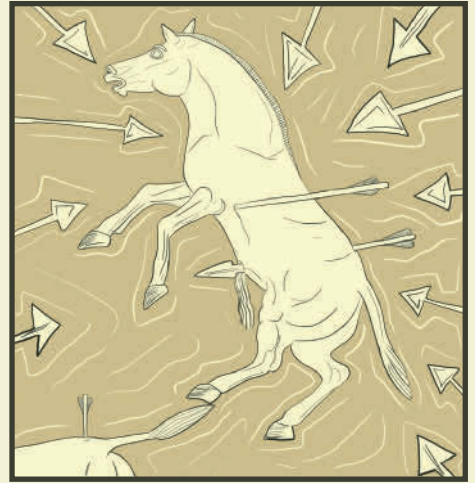


In the beginning, humans lived in peace and balance with all other creatures, consuming only what they needed, and returning surplus resources. They were excellent stewards of the planet

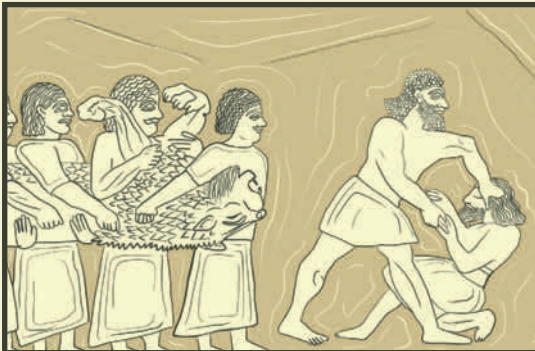


Unfortunately, one day they got bored and discovered they could dominate other creatures and each other through violent actions





They started killing and torturing, and they murdered other humans without mercy

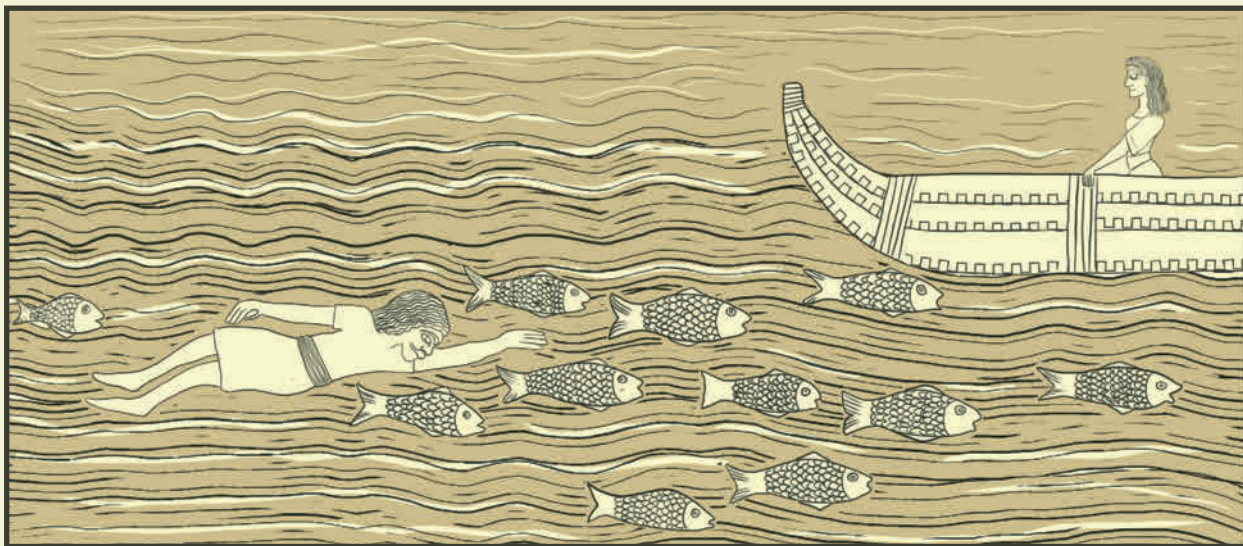


This behavior angered the Gods, so they all went to Enki and Nammu to complain





From all humans, Enki chose two humans whom he believed would live in peace. Ziusadra and his wife Zahra

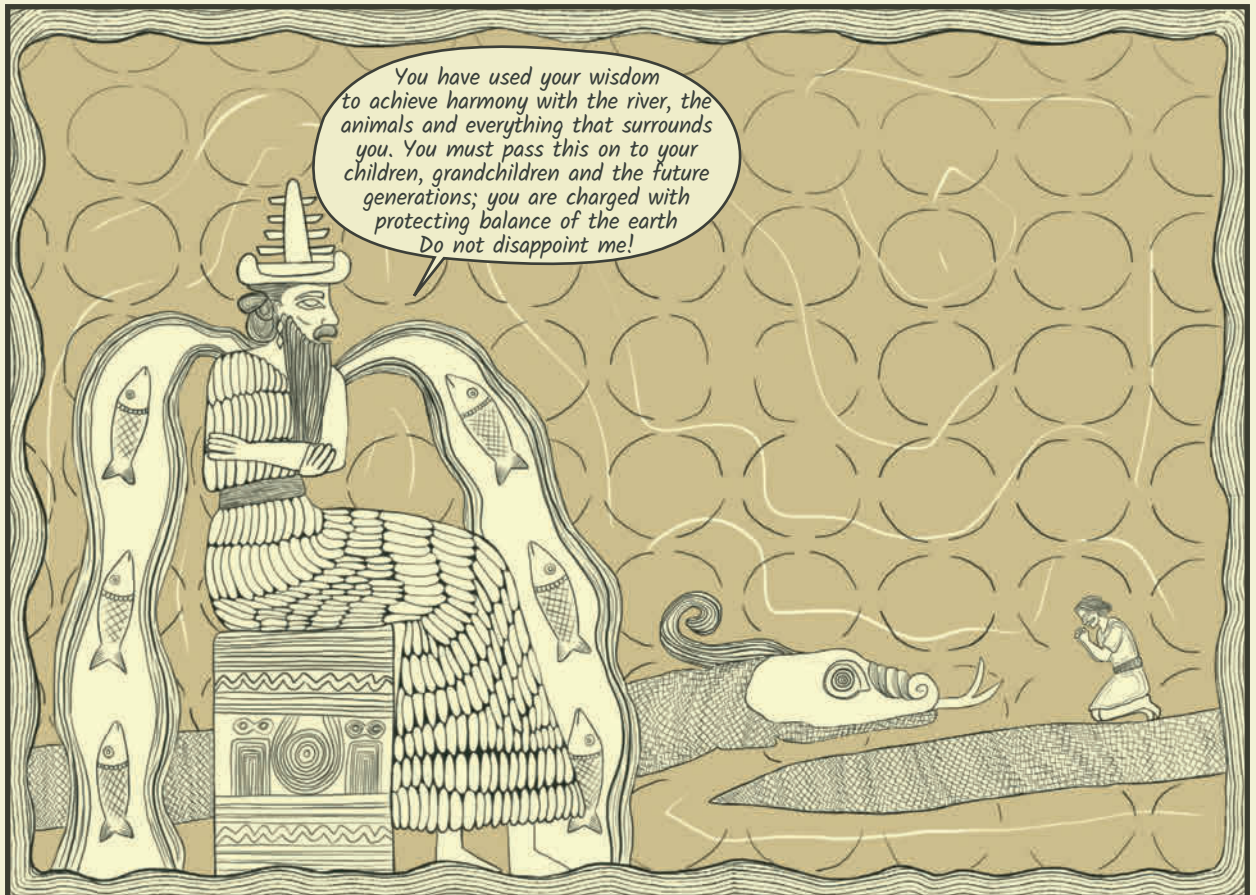




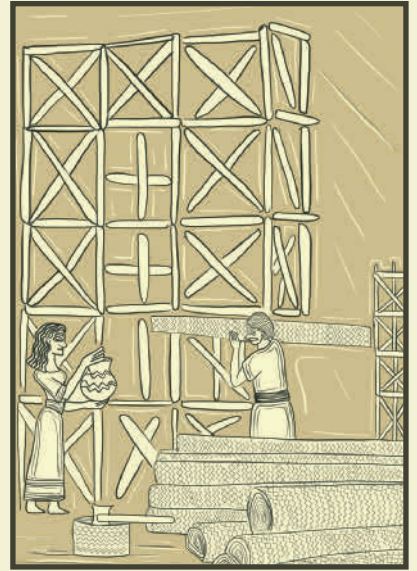
In the deep night, Enki visited Ziusadra in a dream



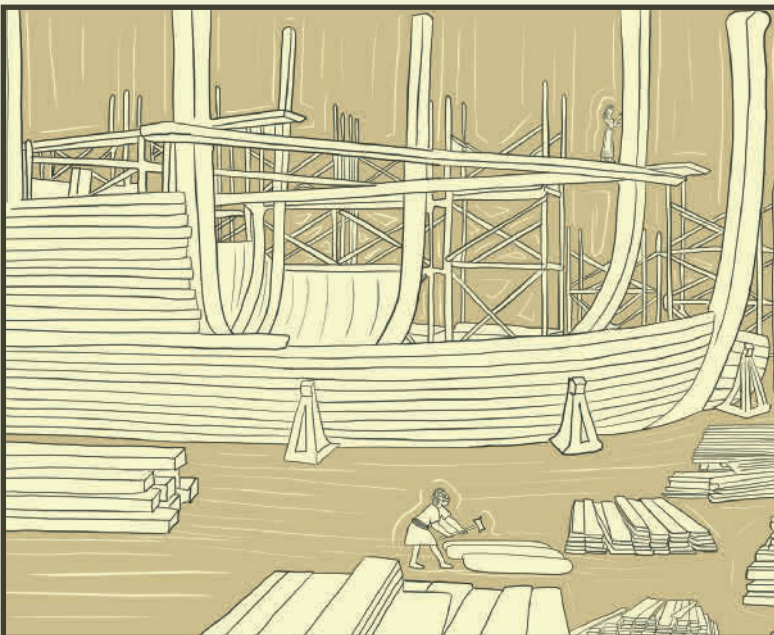
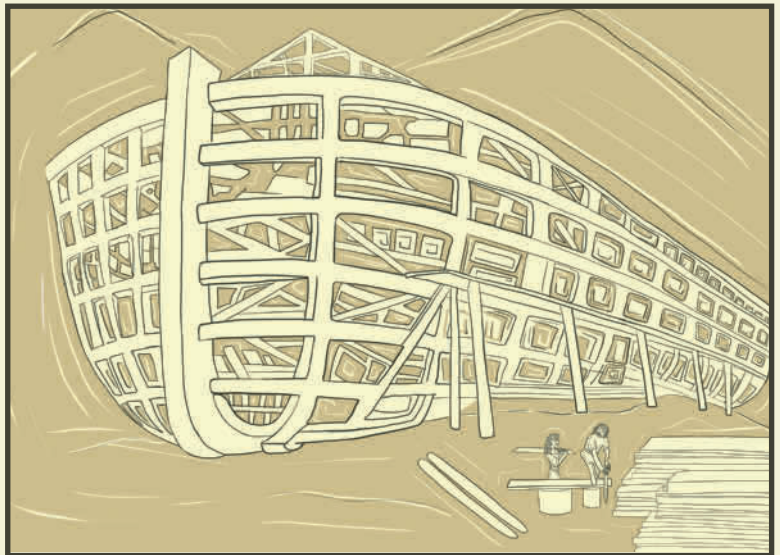




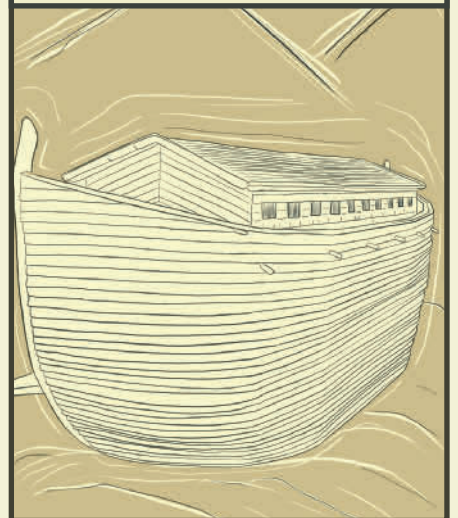
*My love, I saw a dream... We must
build an ark*

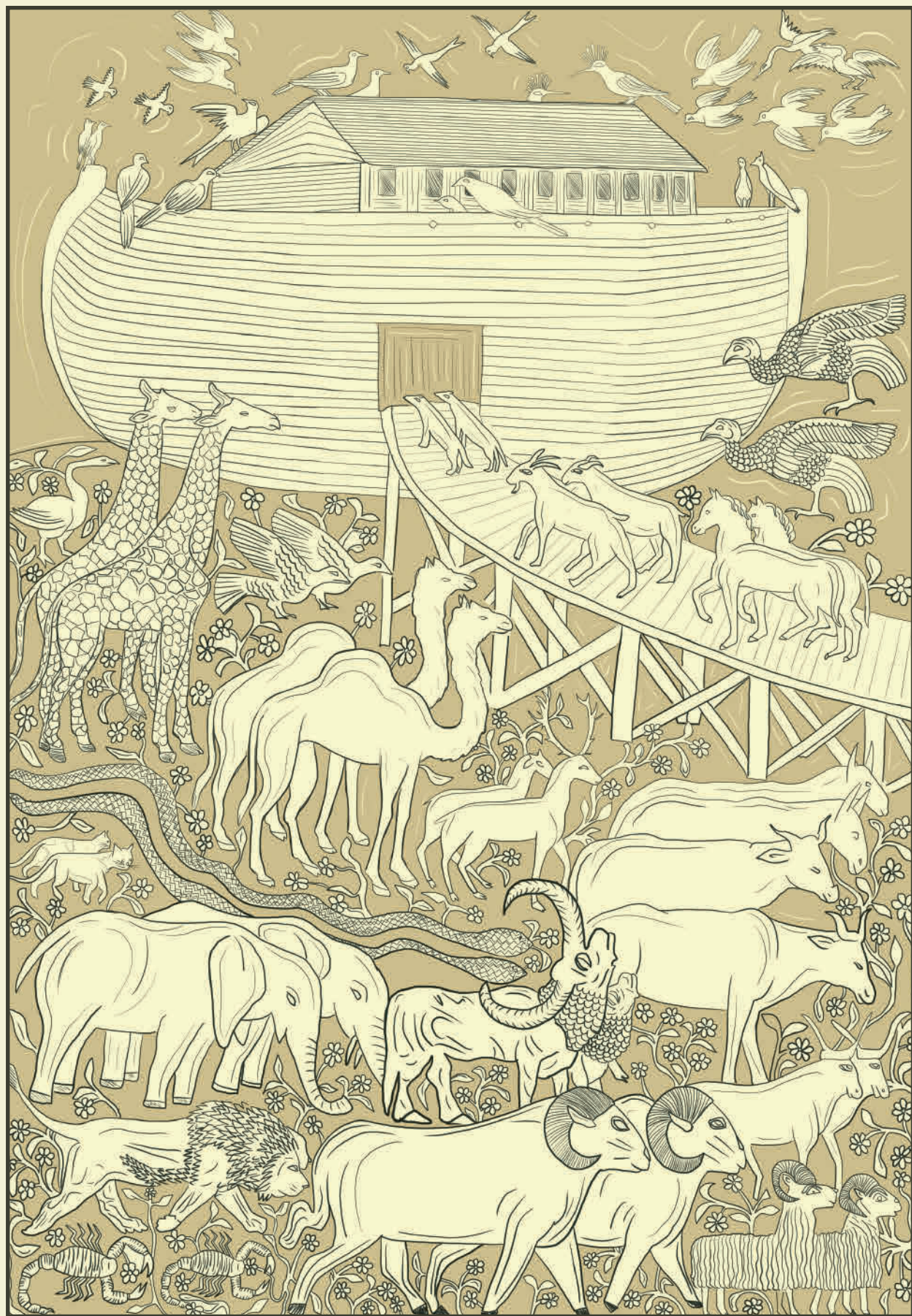


*Ziusadra and his wife worked tirelessly on
building the ark day and night*

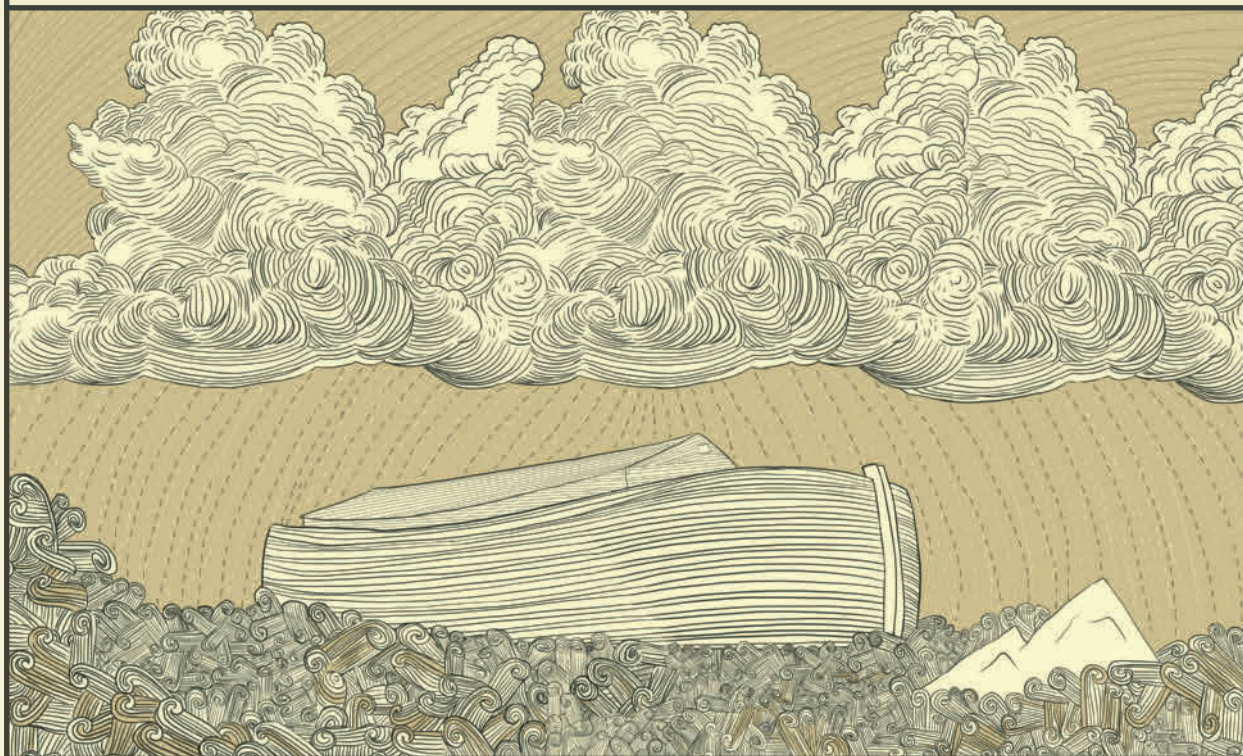


*When the ark was completed, they
gathered animals of every species, and
prepared to start their journey*

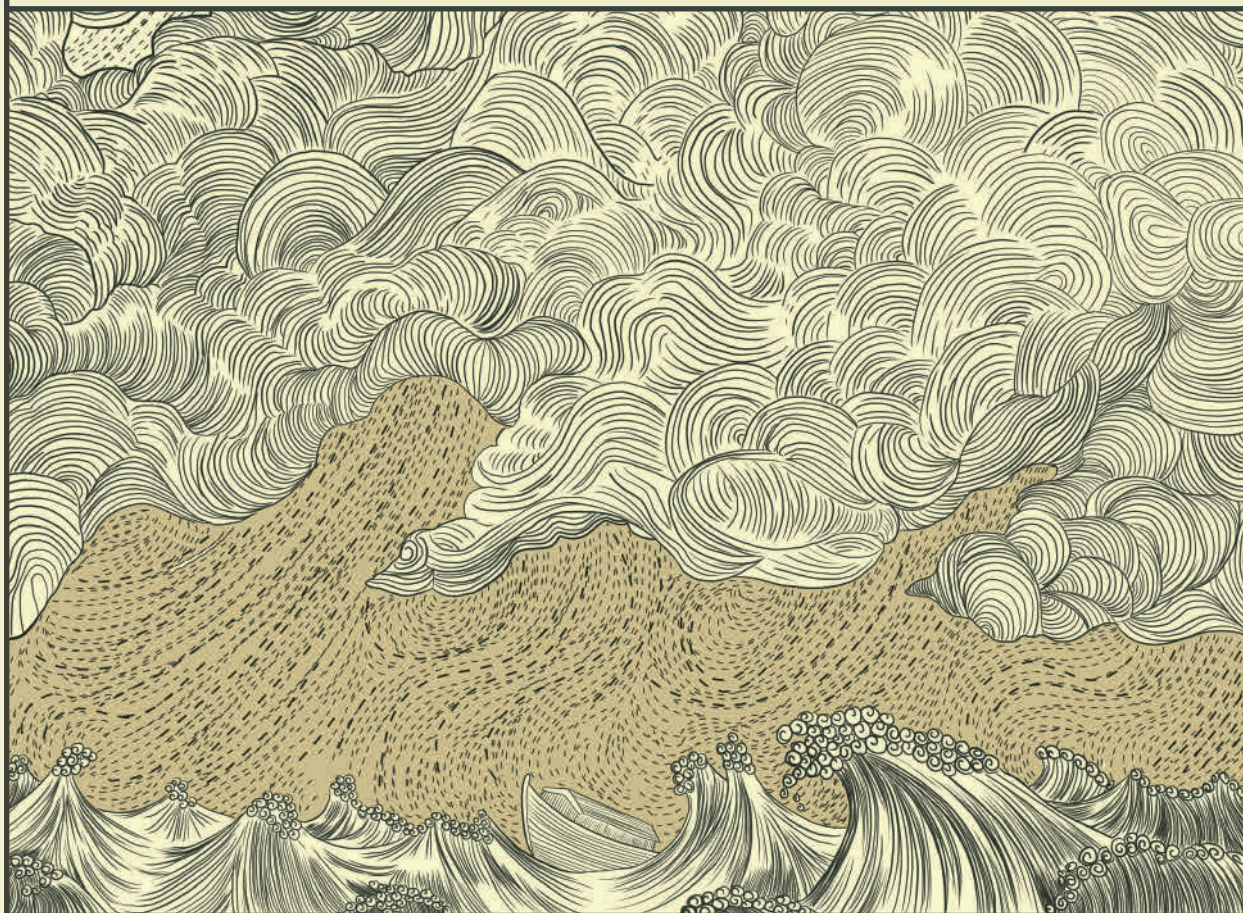


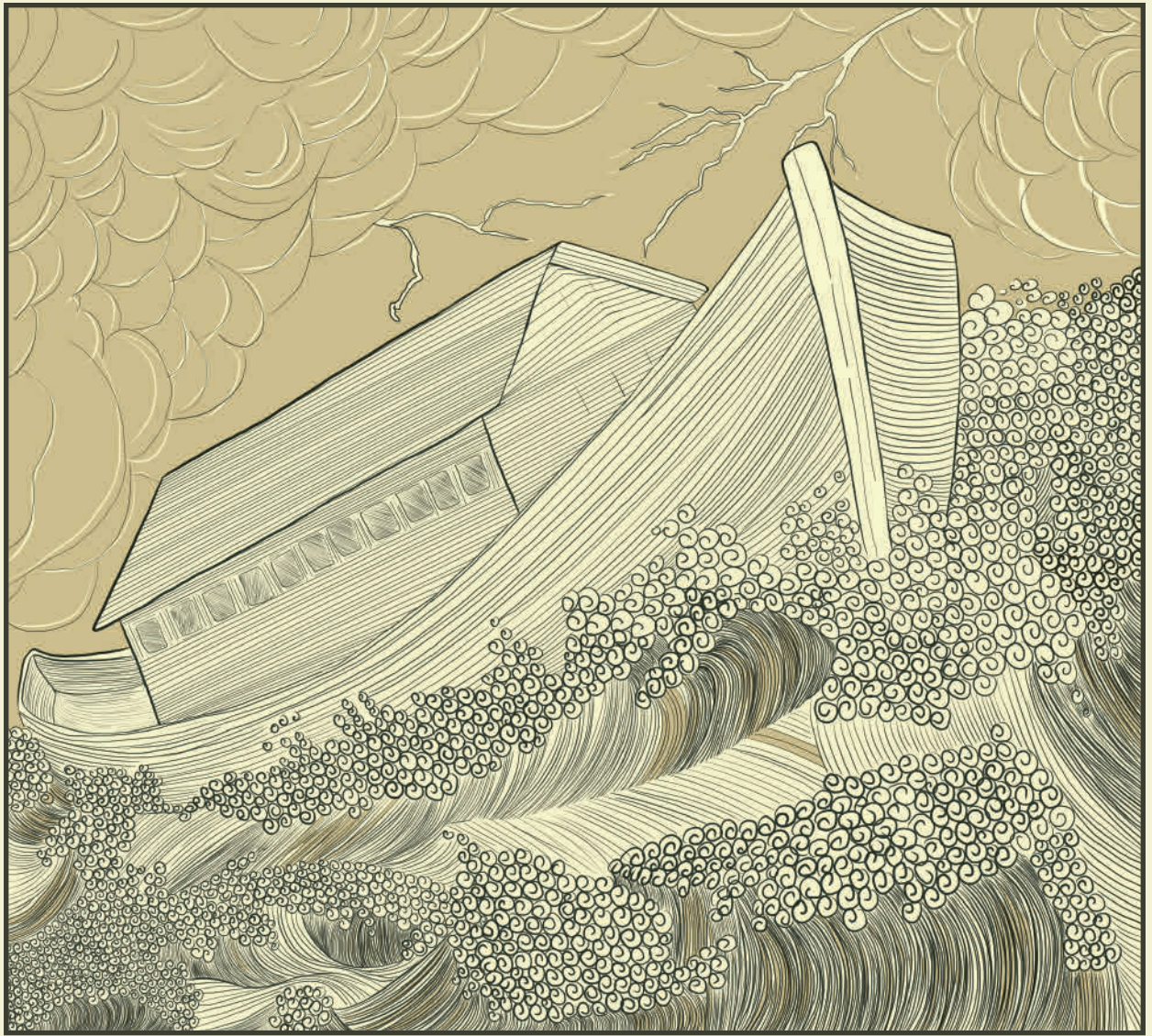


The weather grew darker and darker, and heavy rains fell for seven consecutive days and nights



All of humanity was washed away, except for Ziusadra and his wife, in addition to the animals. They remained safe on the ark





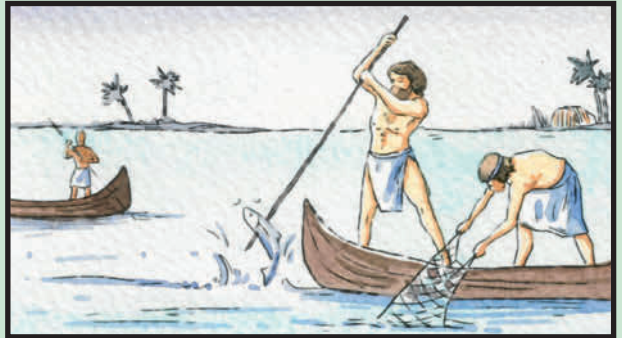
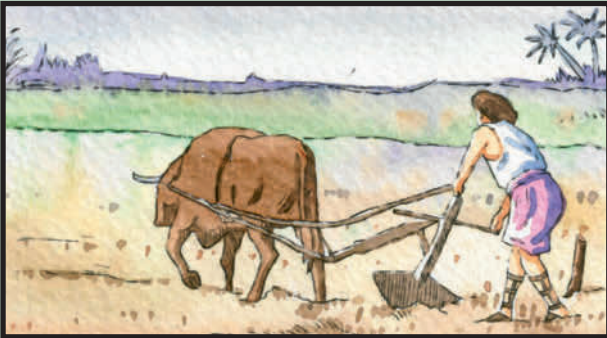
Finally, when the rain subsided, they stepped off the ark into a new world



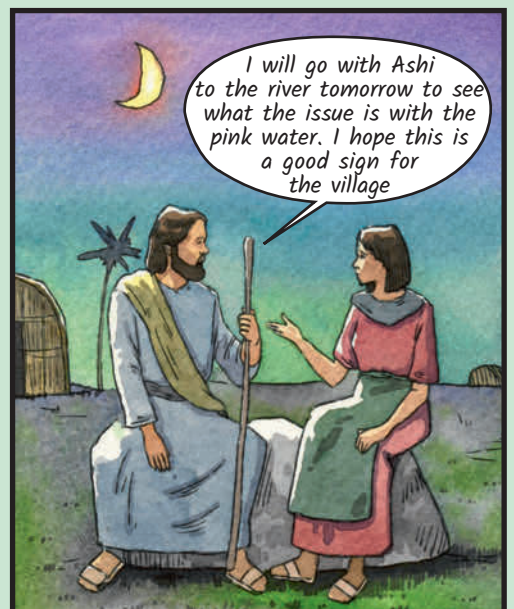
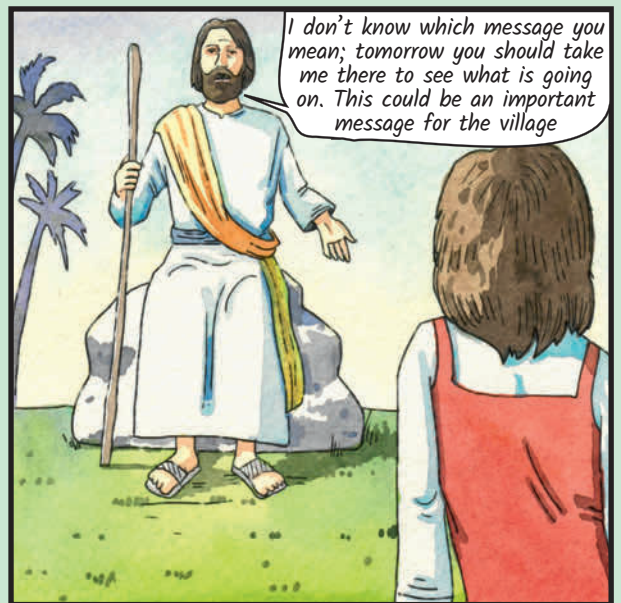
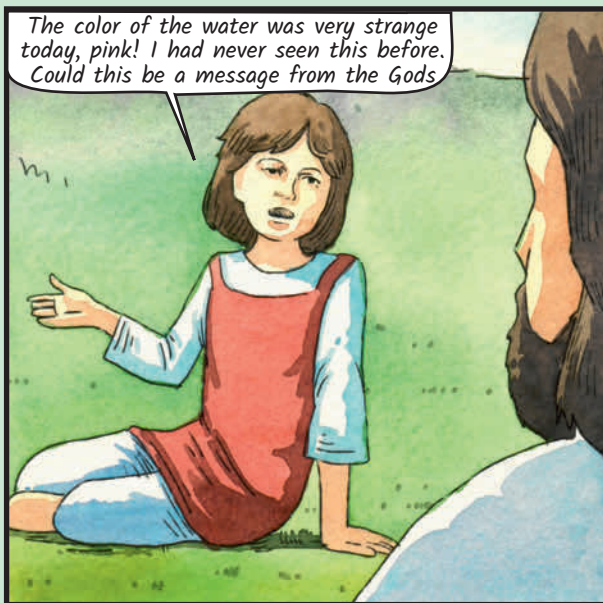
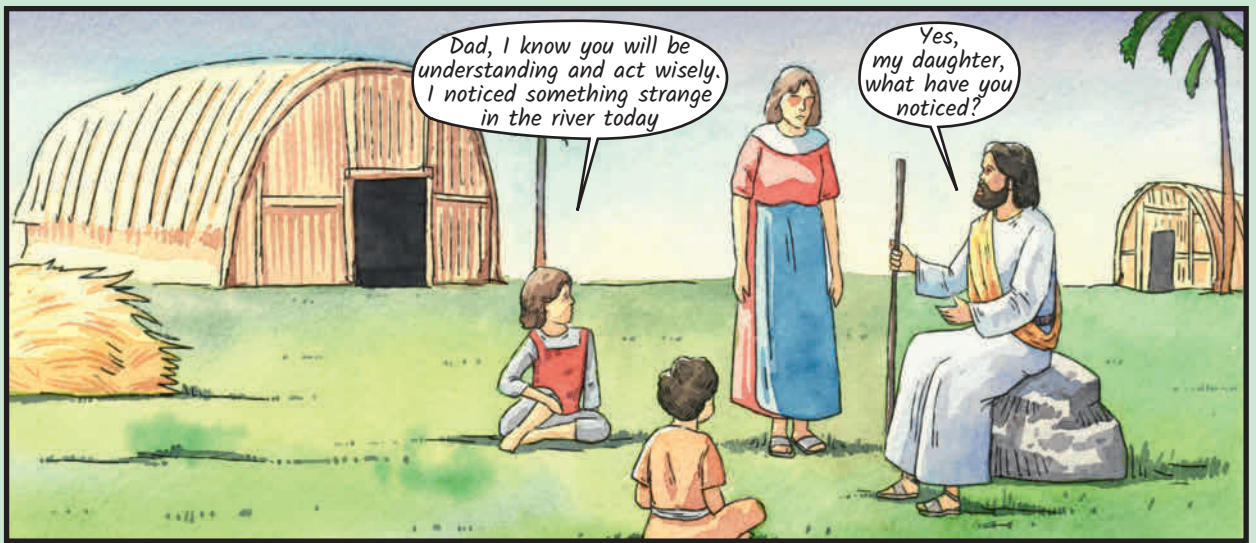
Ashi and the Codex of Hammurabi

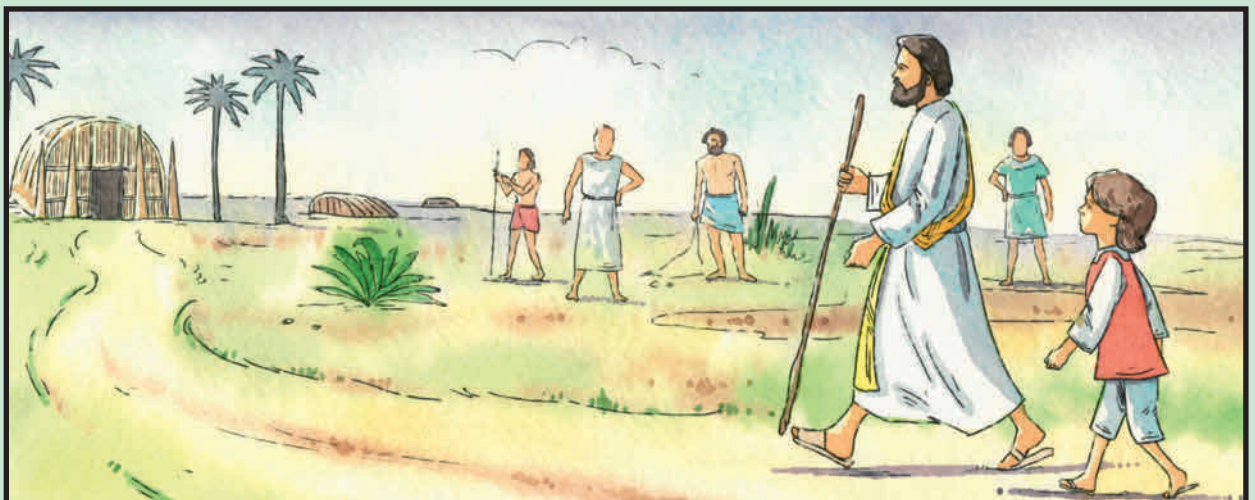
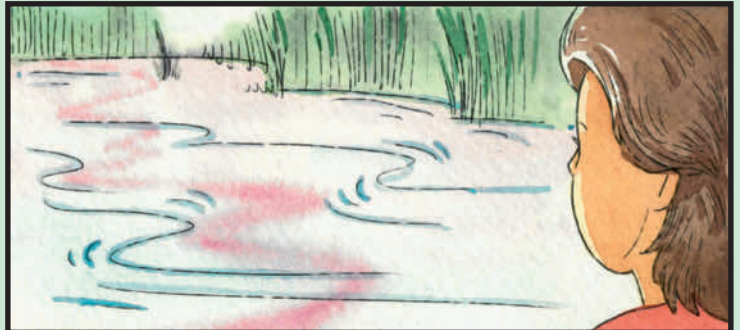
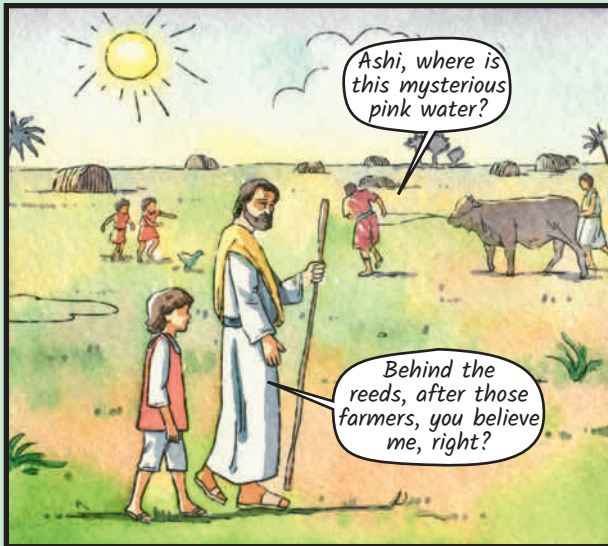
Thousands of years have passed. The waters have shaped the landscapes of a new civilization: Mesopotamia. In a small village on the Tigris, Ashi has a vision that will make her travel through the history of villages and traditions that live from the Tigris river. On her way, she explores the people's connection to nature and the intricate balance of life along the river – but she also witnesses first conflicts about water resources. Her trip inspires one of the oldest and completely preserved law-codes, carved in a two-meter high black stone: the famous Codex of Hammurabi.

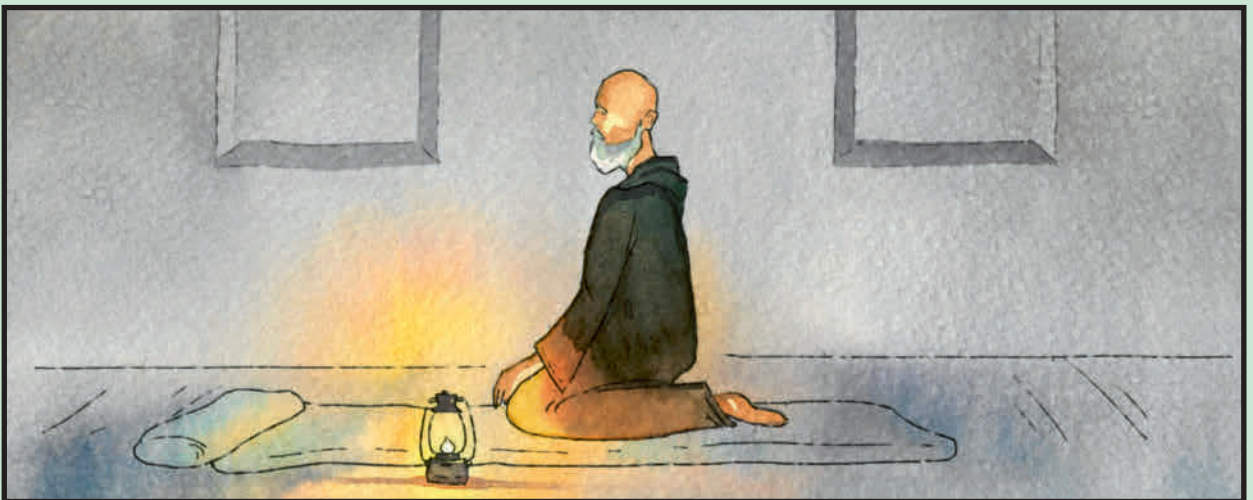
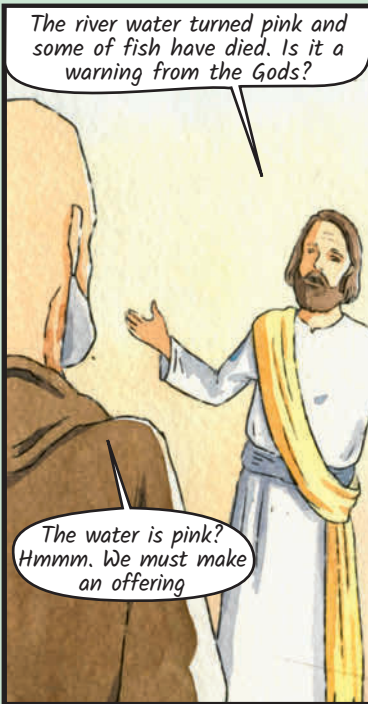
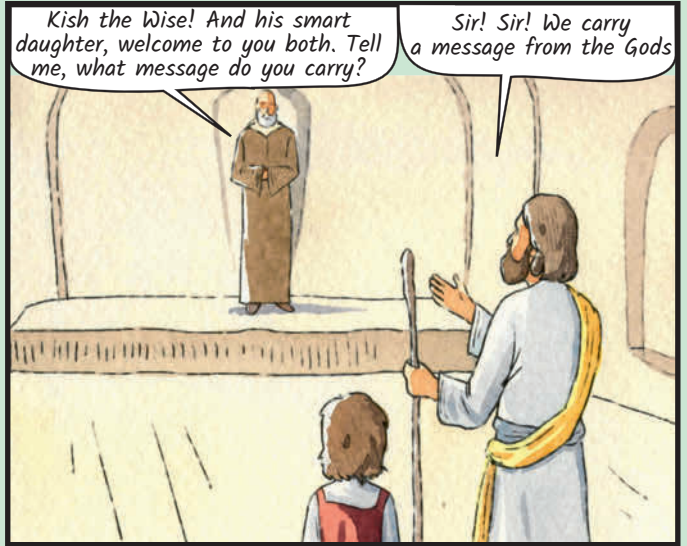
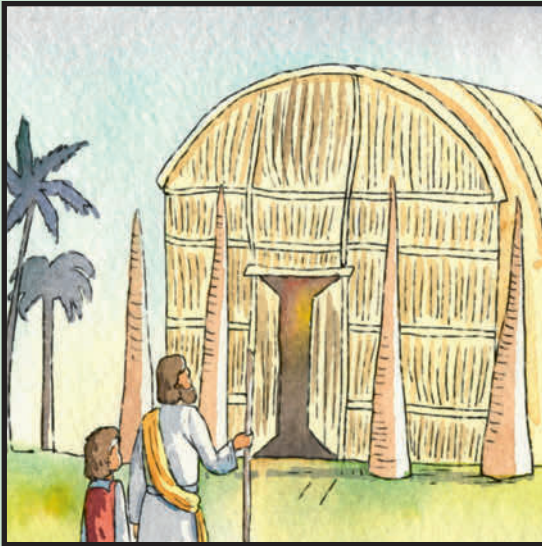




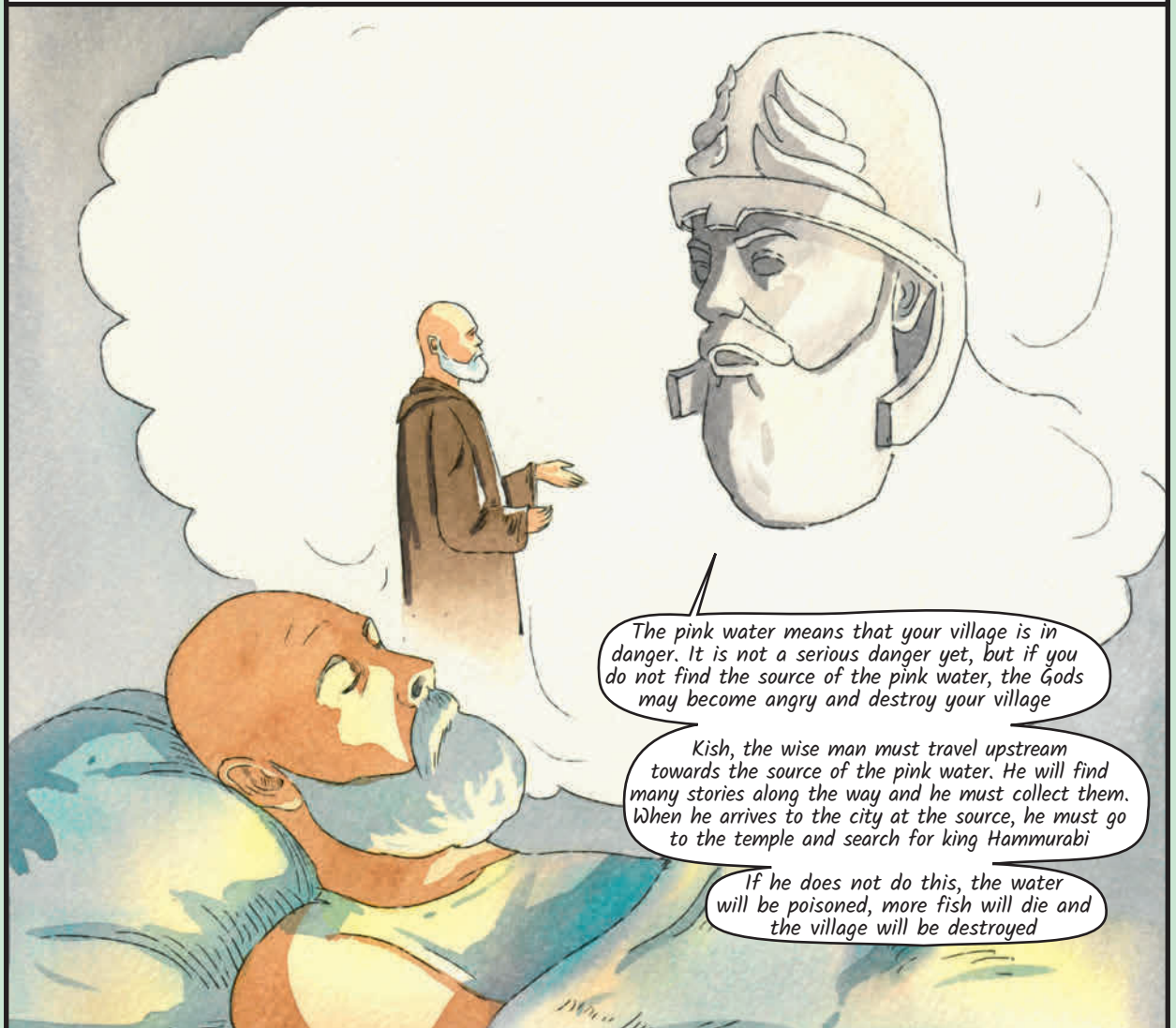








In a dream, the God Enki appears to the priest



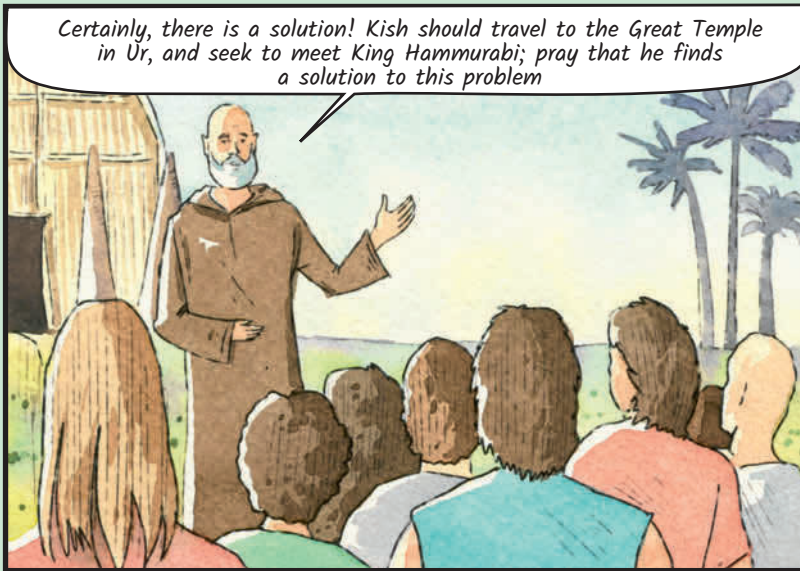
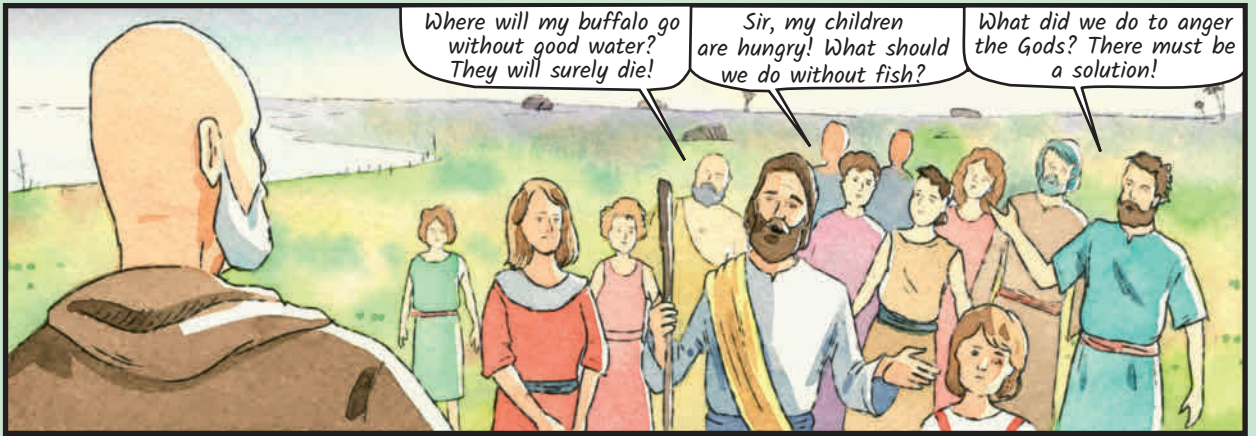
The pink water means that your village is in danger. It is not a serious danger yet, but if you do not find the source of the pink water, the Gods may become angry and destroy your village

Kish, the wise man must travel upstream towards the source of the pink water. He will find many stories along the way and he must collect them. When he arrives to the city at the source, he must go to the temple and search for king Hammurabi

If he does not do this, the water will be poisoned, more fish will die and the village will be destroyed



Fishermen in the north of the village have not caught fish in three days, the farmers water is muddied and pink

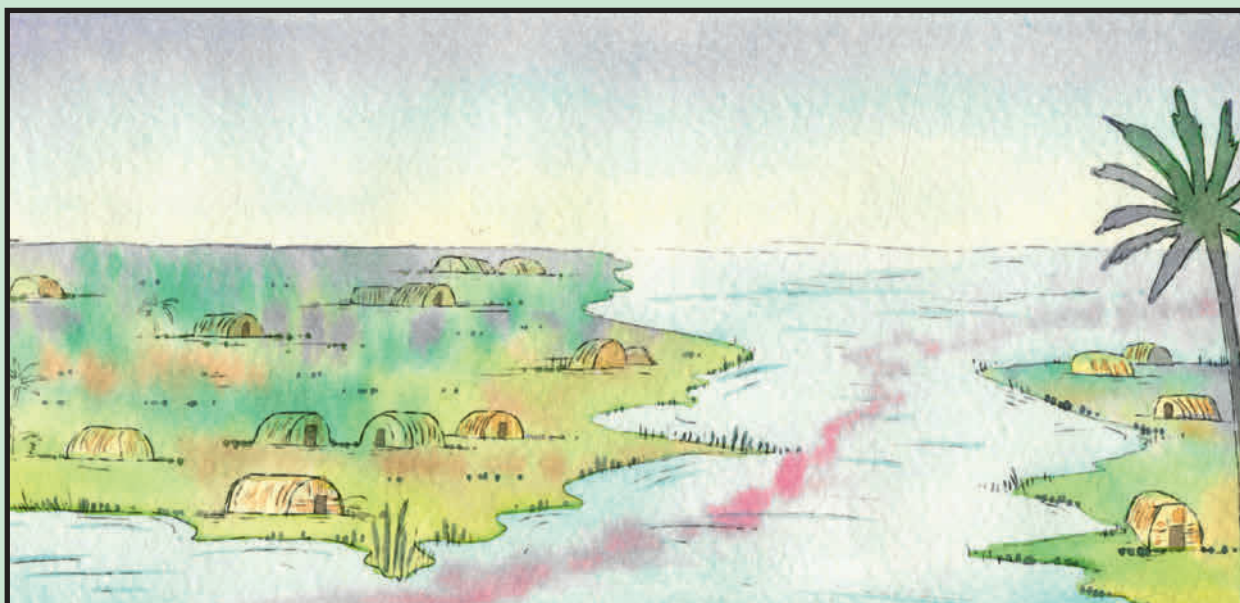
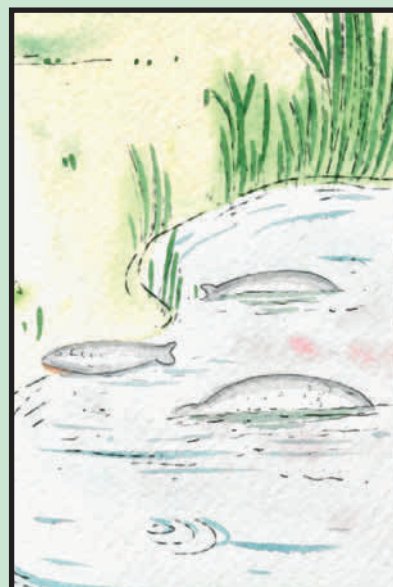




The journey to Ur is not long. Three days, there will be three villages, if they travel quickly and sleep little



The first day, the first village: Kish and Ashi follow the direction of the pink water upstream. The pink color becomes more evident as they approach the next village, and they notice a few dead fish here and there





Yes, I have, sir. I am Kish from the village downstream. I came with permission from the temple priest

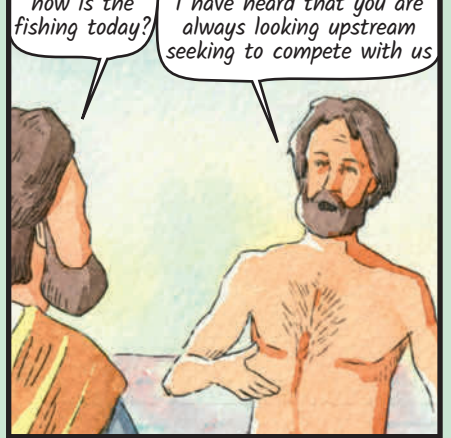


Well, the temple is a few steps away from the river, I don't have time to show you the way



Sir, I see you are a fisherman; tell me, how is the fishing today?

Why are you asking about that? Do you want to compare our villages? Of course! I have heard that you are always looking upstream seeking to compete with us

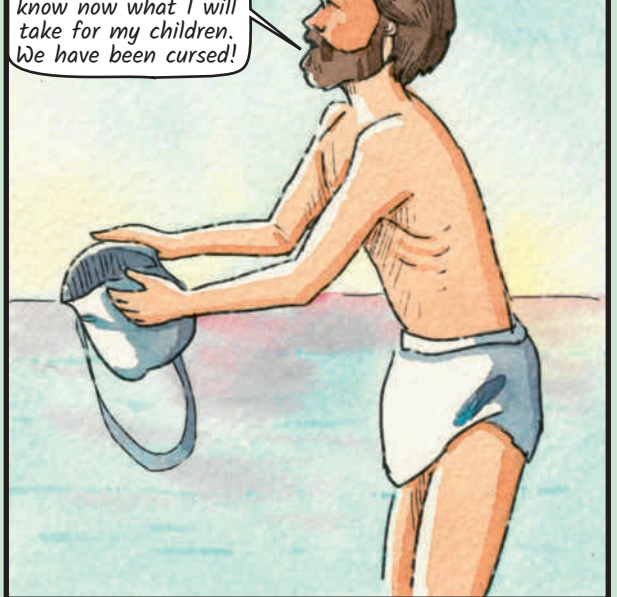


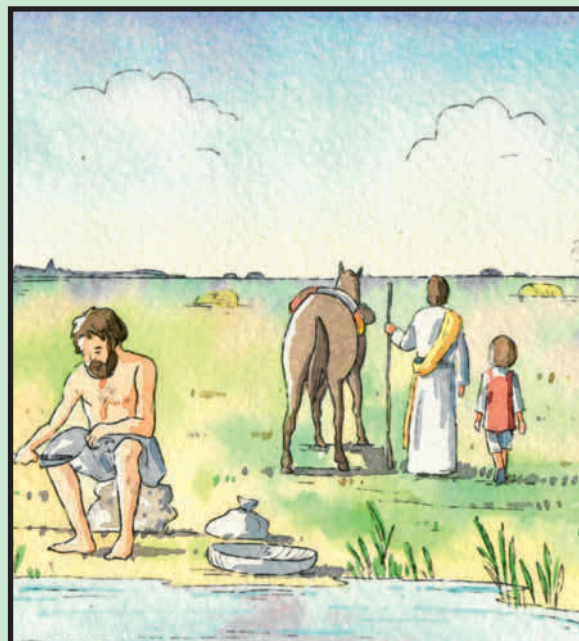
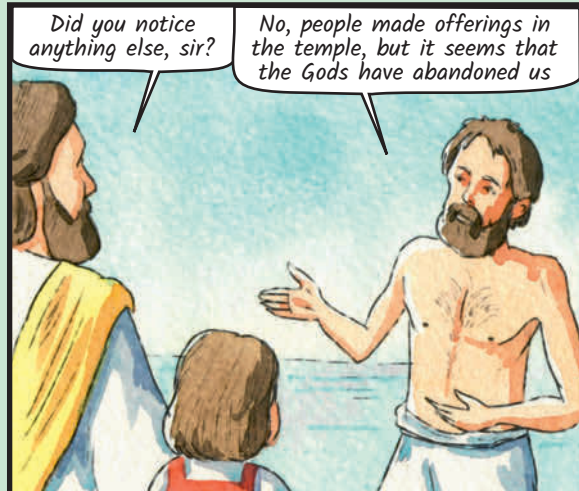
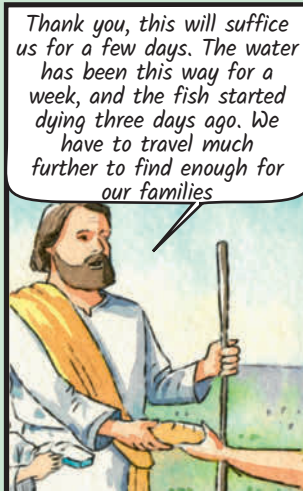
Sir, you are wrong. We wanted to know if you have any fish to sell?

Oh, well, oh, ah Can't you see that I didn't catch any fish today? What I have is not even enough to feed my family



You see, since the color of the water has changed here, the fish started dying. I do not know now what I will take for my children. We have been cursed!





Kish and Ashi arrived at the temple in the center of the village, and found people gathered to make offerings





Ah, Kish the wise man from the downstream! I was anticipating your visit, but you took longer than expected! Did you come to ask about the water?

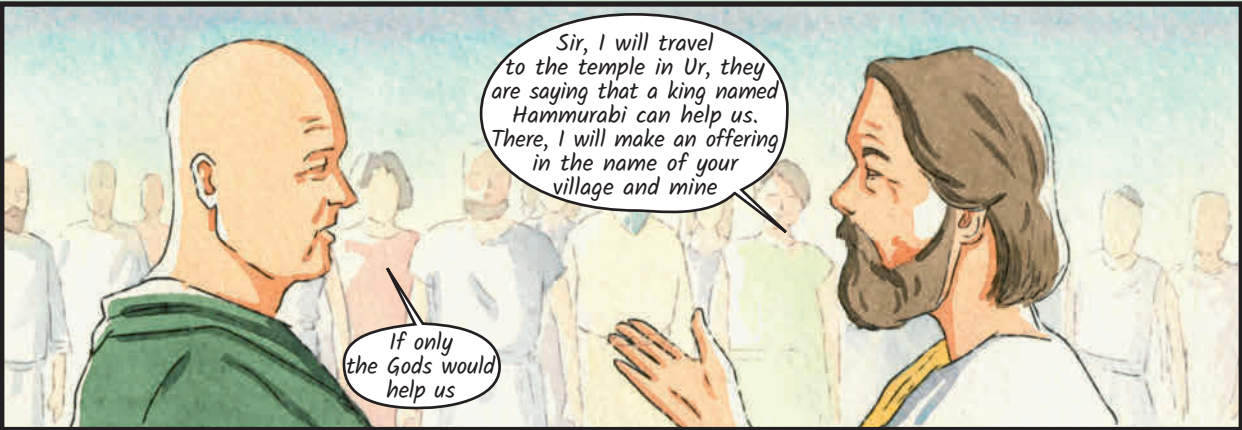
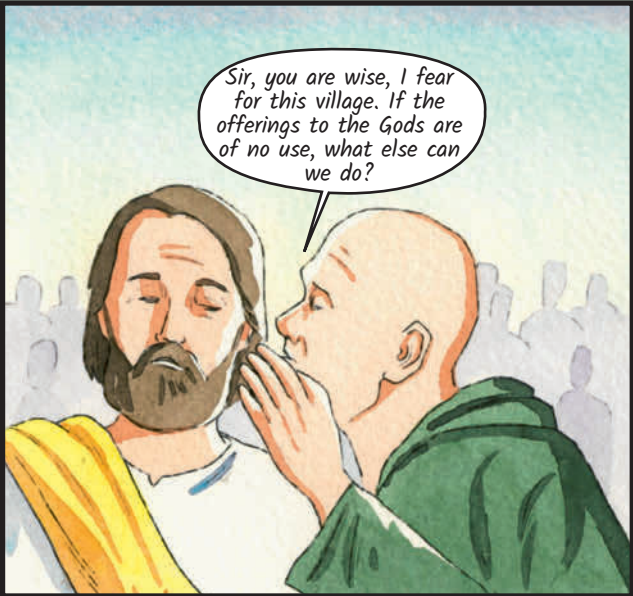
Yes, sir, how did you know?

I received the message of the Gods before your arrival. I assume the people of the village were kind to you and your family?

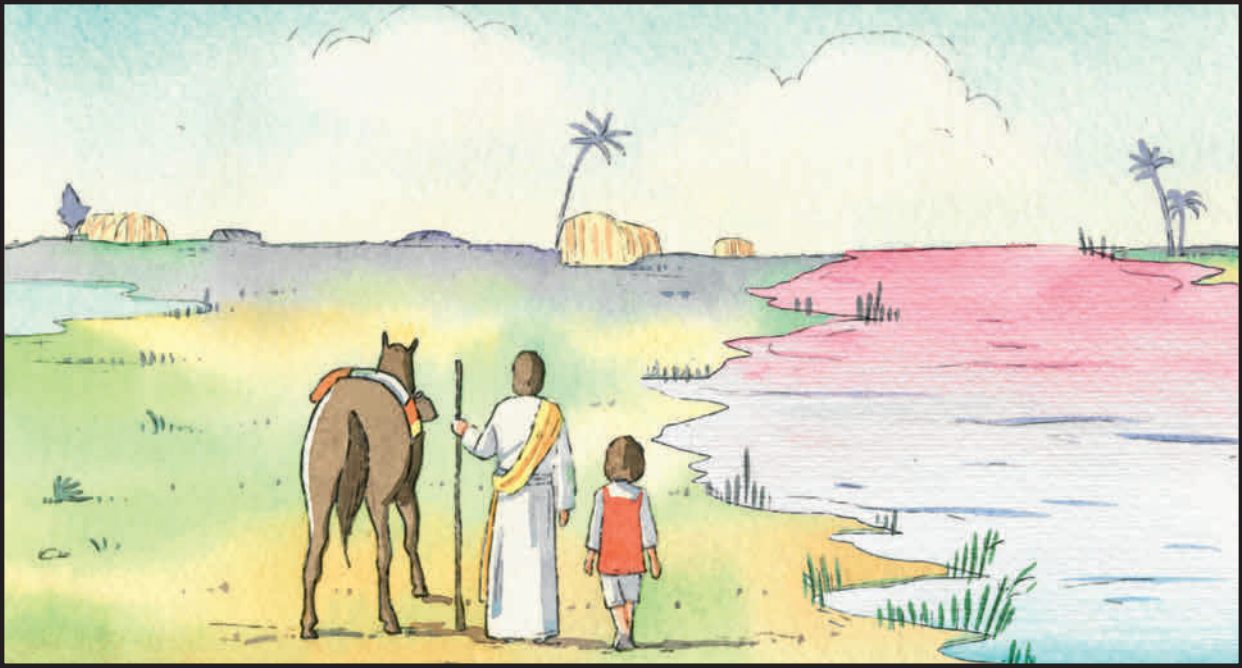
Yes, thank you, the Gods have blessed us, sir. But the darkness is approaching. We must continue forward. Tell me, what do you know about the water issue?

I think we have angered the Gods in some way and I still need to understand exactly what to do. Pink water continues to flow, we continue to make offerings but the fish keep dying. I haven't found a solution yet

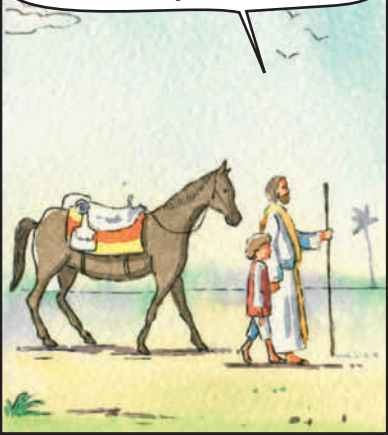
Is it only the fish that are suffering, or are the rest of the animals dying as well?



Kish and Ashi leave the temple, and at sunset they move upstream towards the next village



We were lucky in that village, they were nice. The next village might not welcome strangers easily. The conflict in the village was not easy, and it seems that the problem of water coming from the north may be worse for them. Be careful and remain vigilant



I have one question; why did the Gods get angry at all the villages? Is it normal for anger to include everyone? I'm confused. Why are the northern villages suffering also?



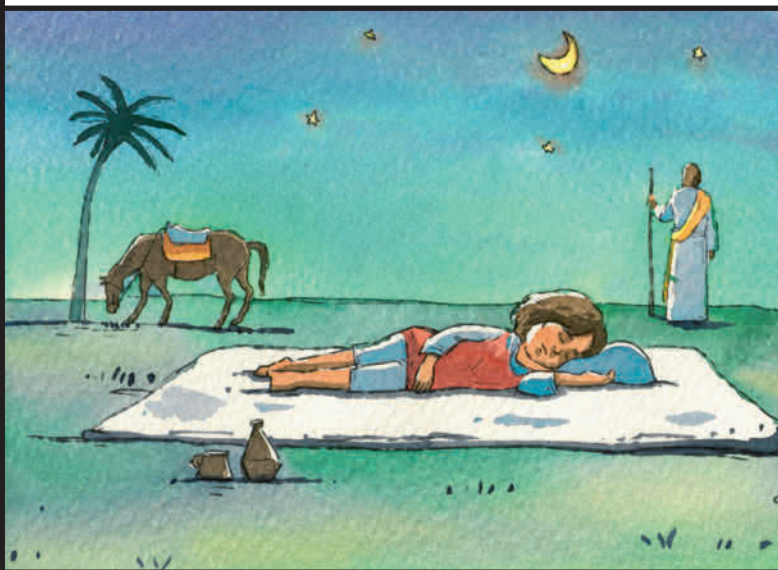
It is a good question, but who knows what the motivations of the Gods are? Our village and this village may have survived the war, but we do not know if the next village will escape from the toxic water!



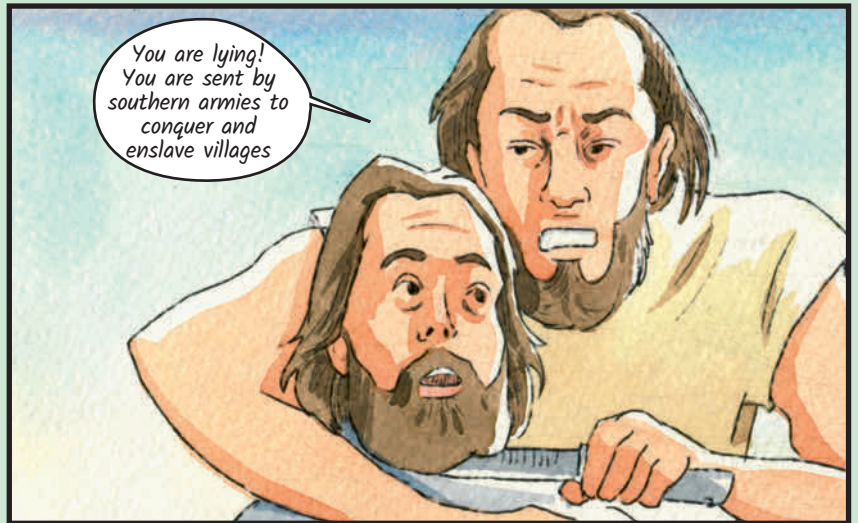
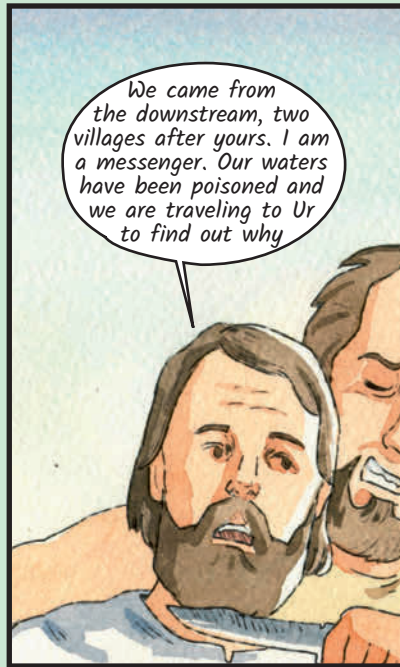
The war happened here, and this village has suffered enough. We must be careful

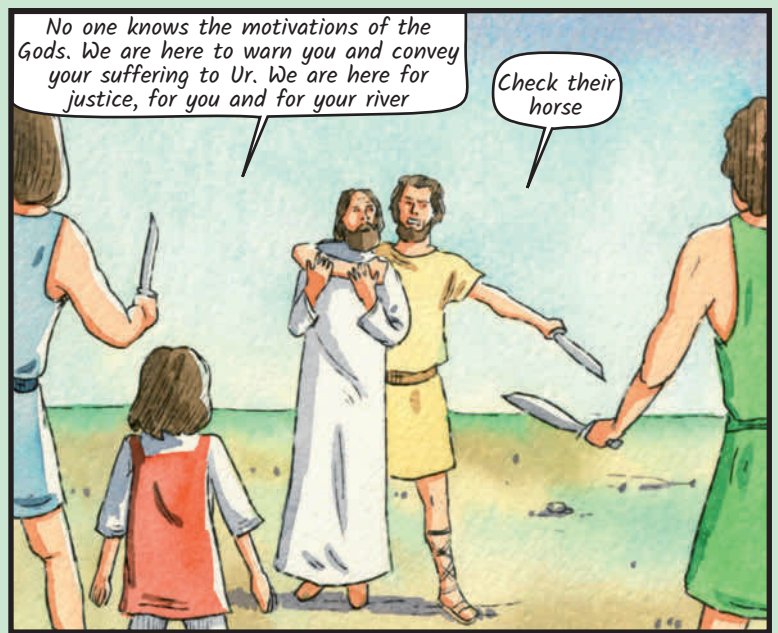


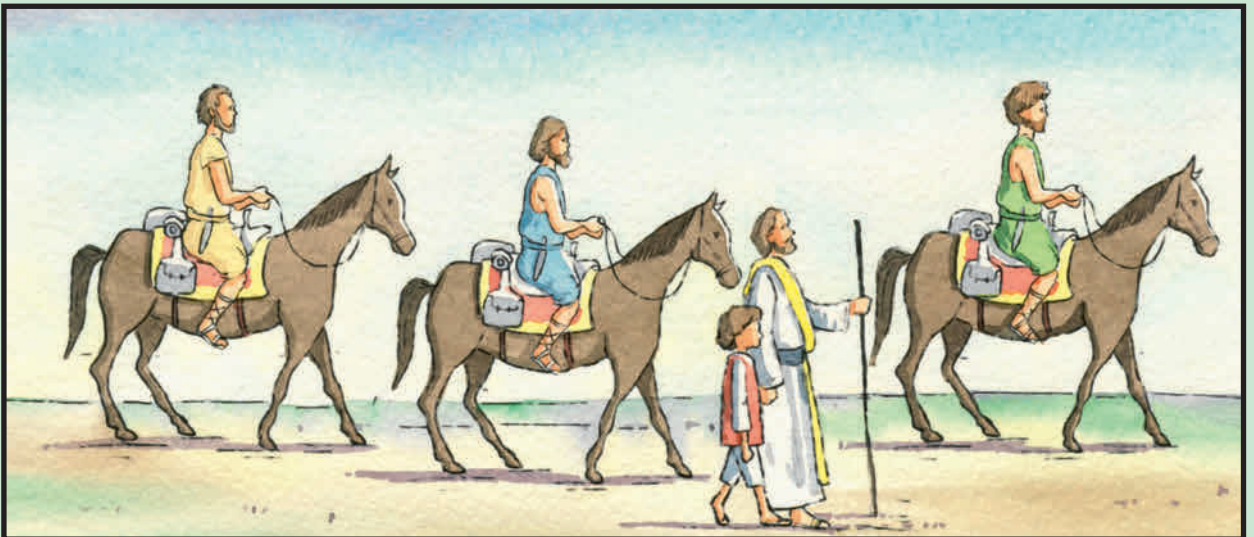
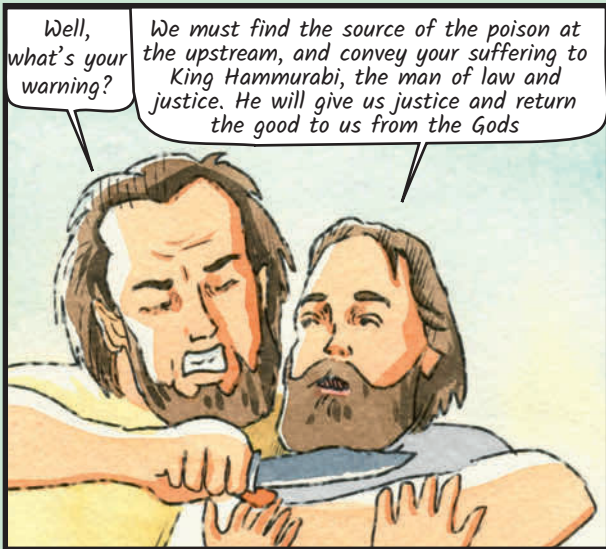
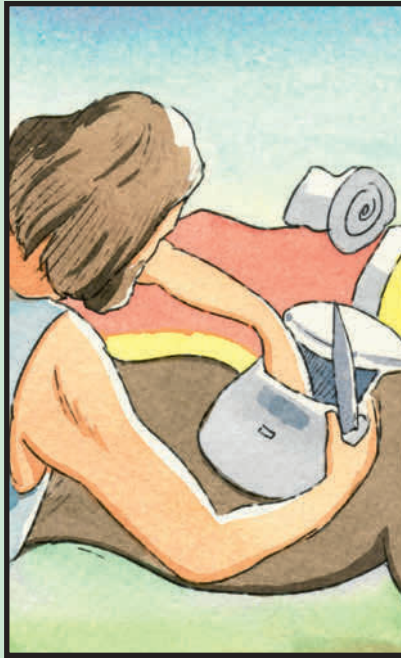
Kish and Ashi tie the horse and create a place to sleep. Kish guards the site; he does not sleep until dawn



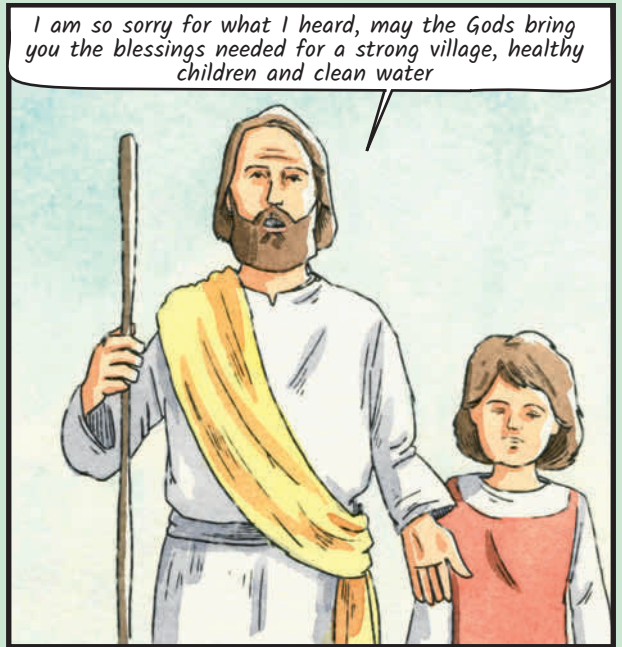




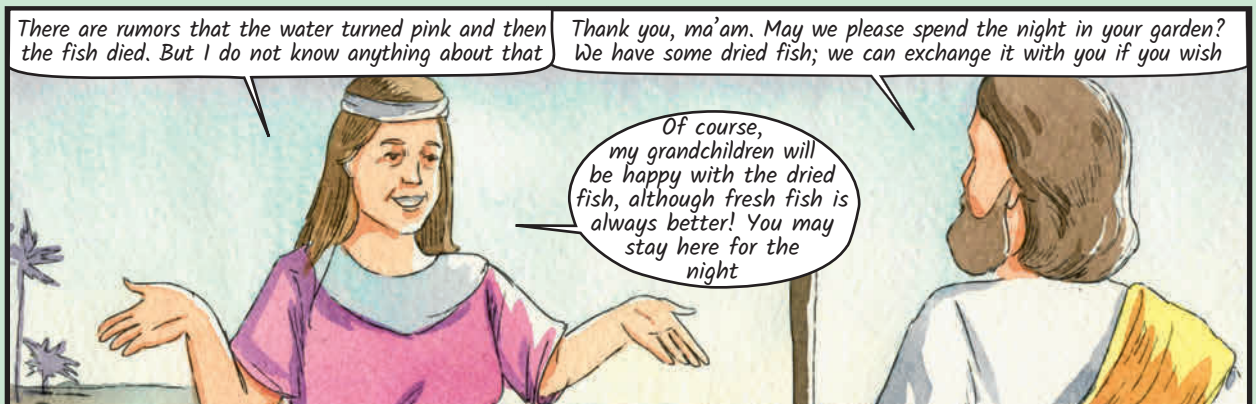
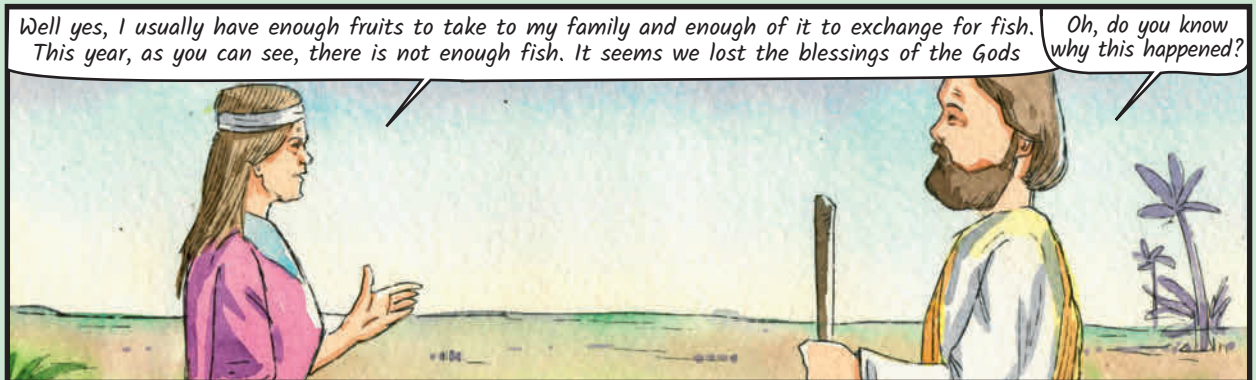
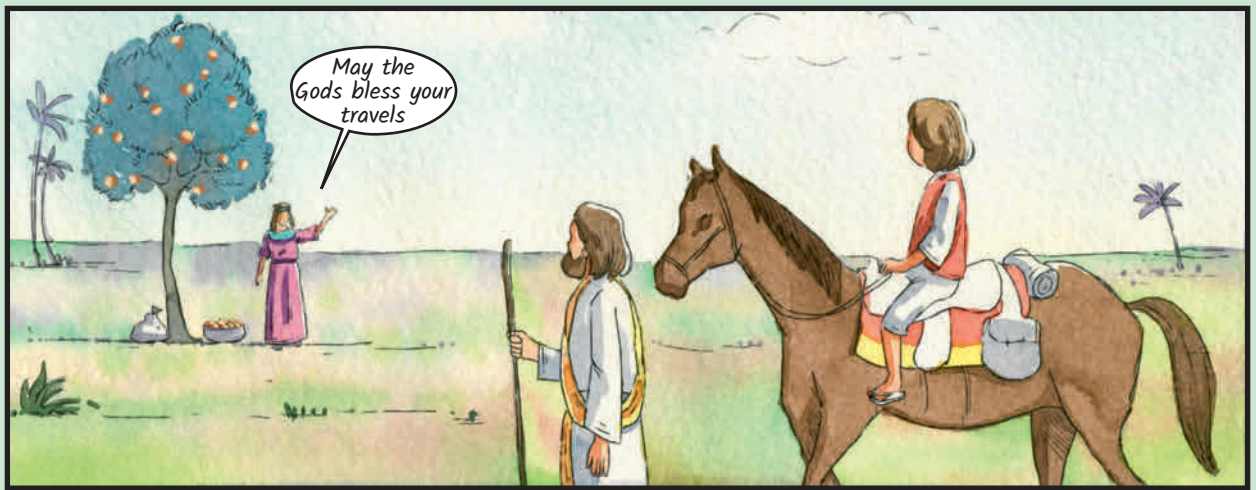








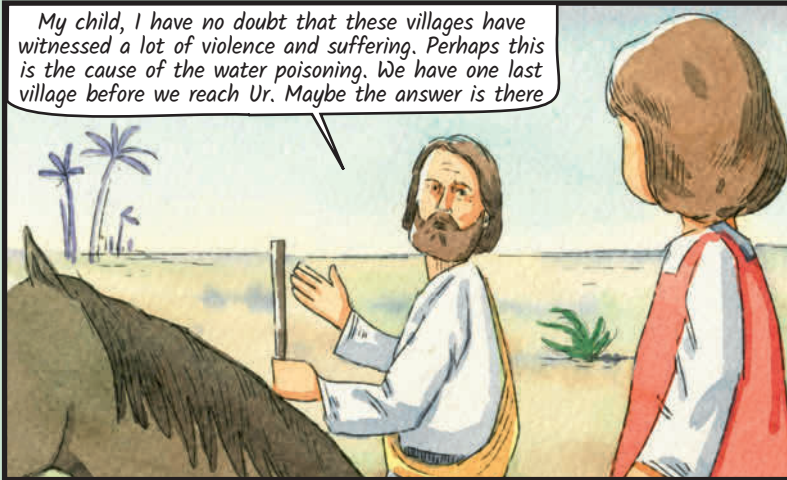
Kish and Ashi leave the village and head upstream, following the pink water



*Kish and Ashi travel through the orchard, the irrigation stems have an invisible but very light pink undertone.
The trees appear healthy, albeit not fruitful*



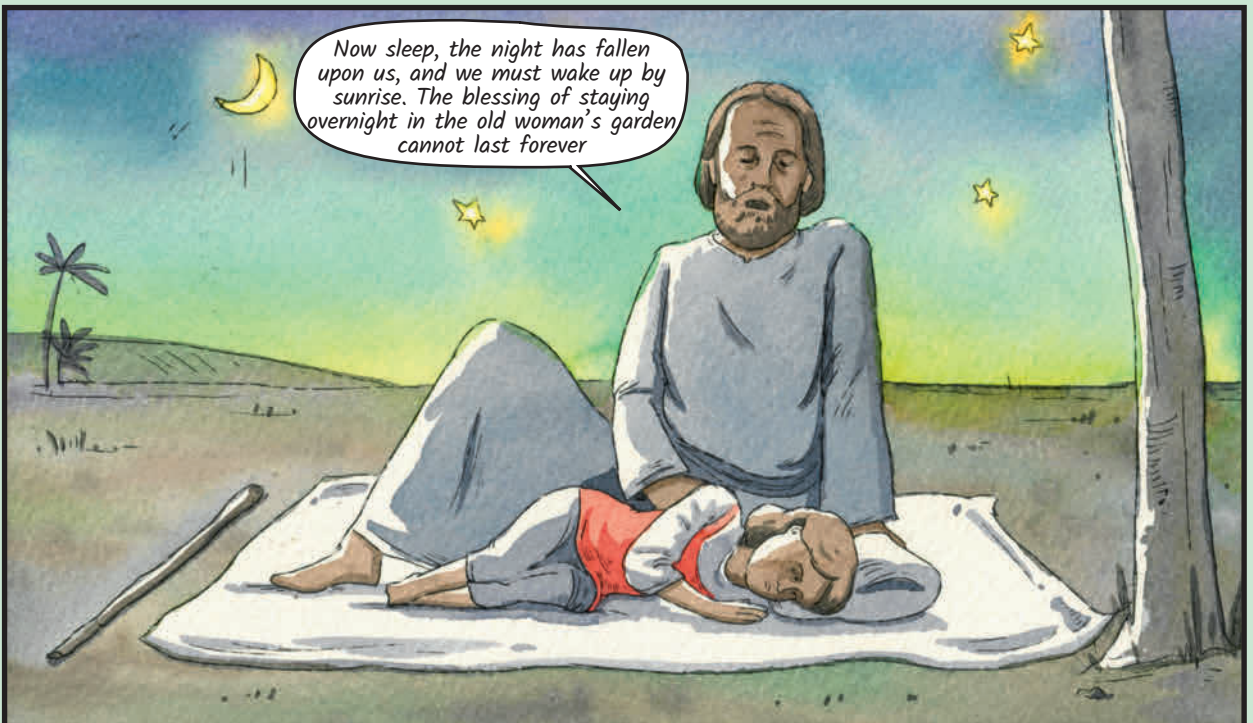
My child, I have no doubt that these villages have witnessed a lot of violence and suffering. Perhaps this is the cause of the water poisoning. We have one last village before we reach Ur. Maybe the answer is there



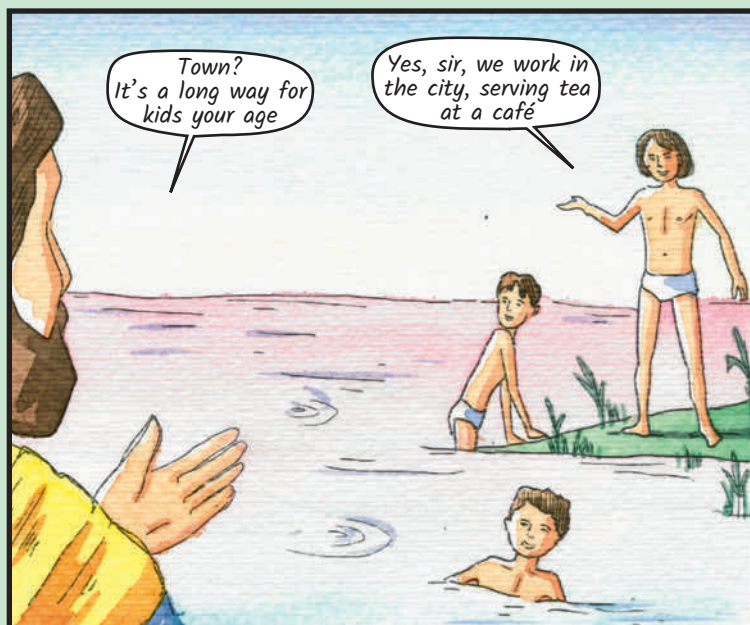
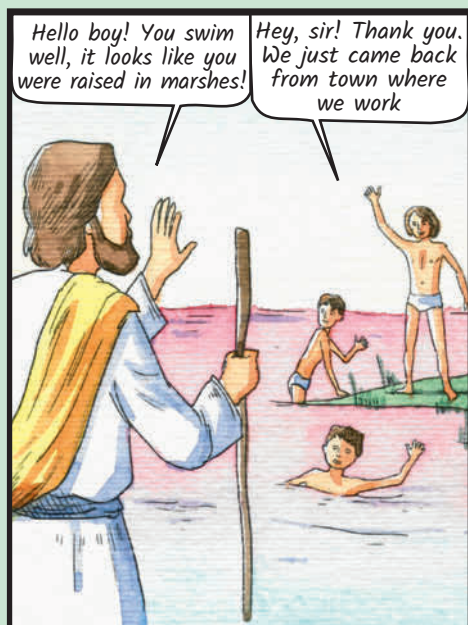
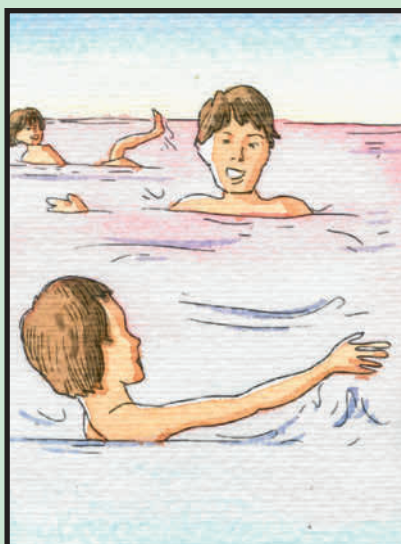
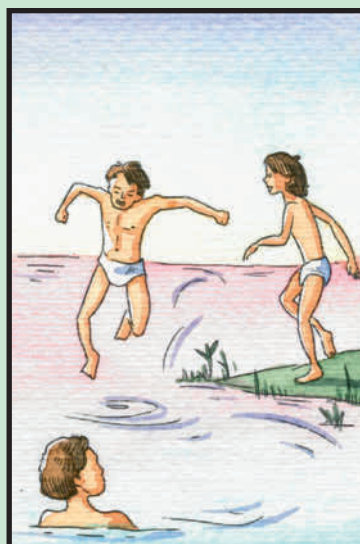
It seems that the source of this pink water comes from the upstream villages. It is really strange. Why do the Gods send a message from the upstream villages?

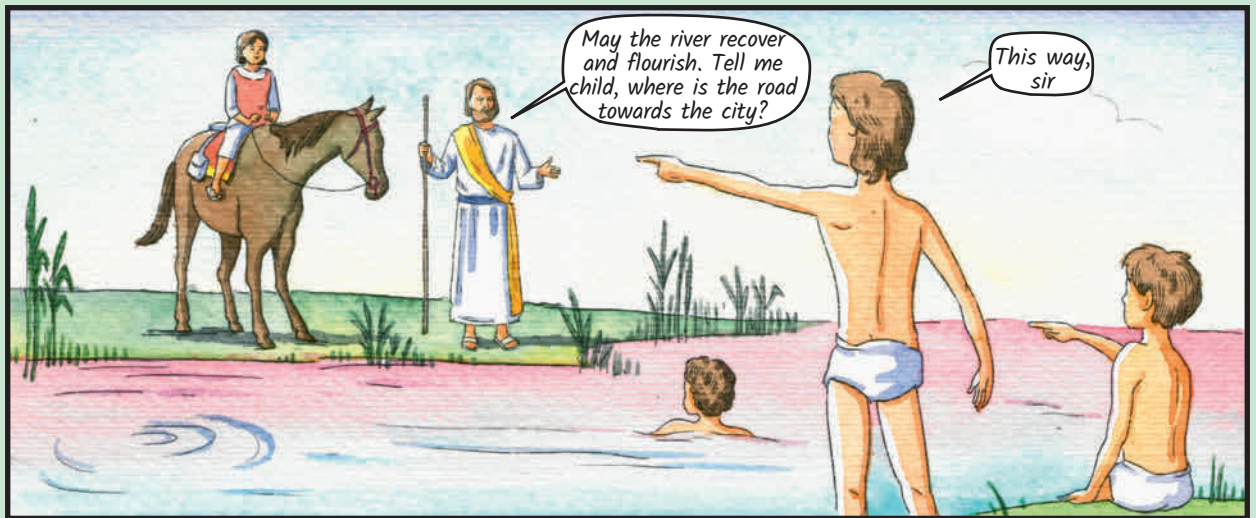
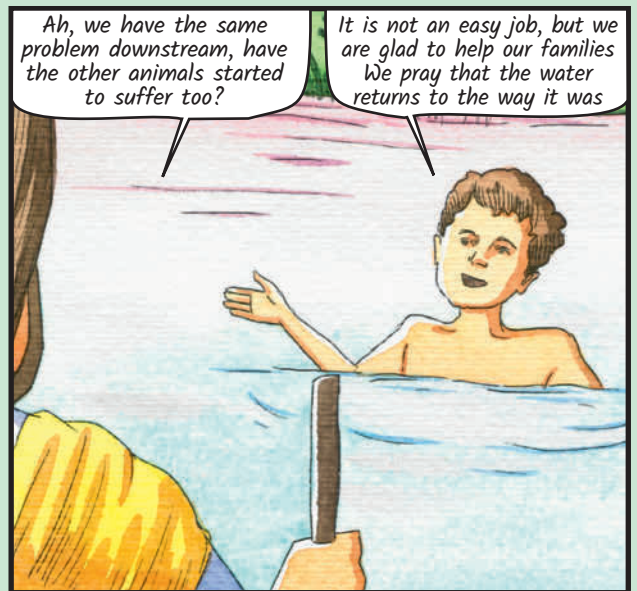
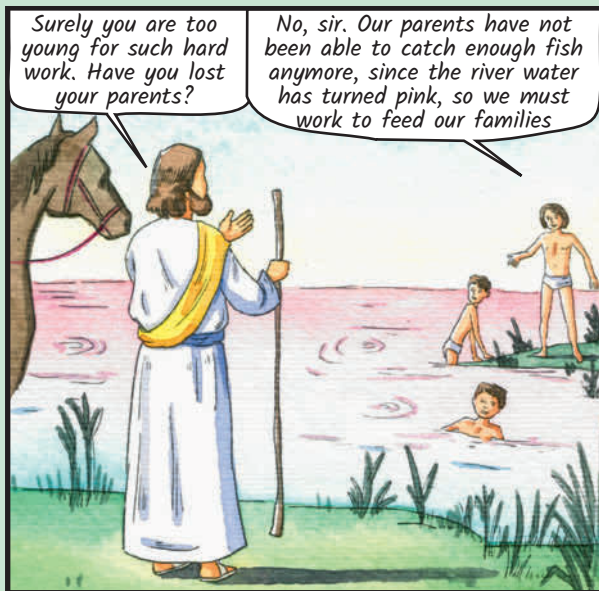


Now sleep, the night has fallen upon us, and we must wake up by sunrise. The blessing of staying overnight in the old woman's garden cannot last forever

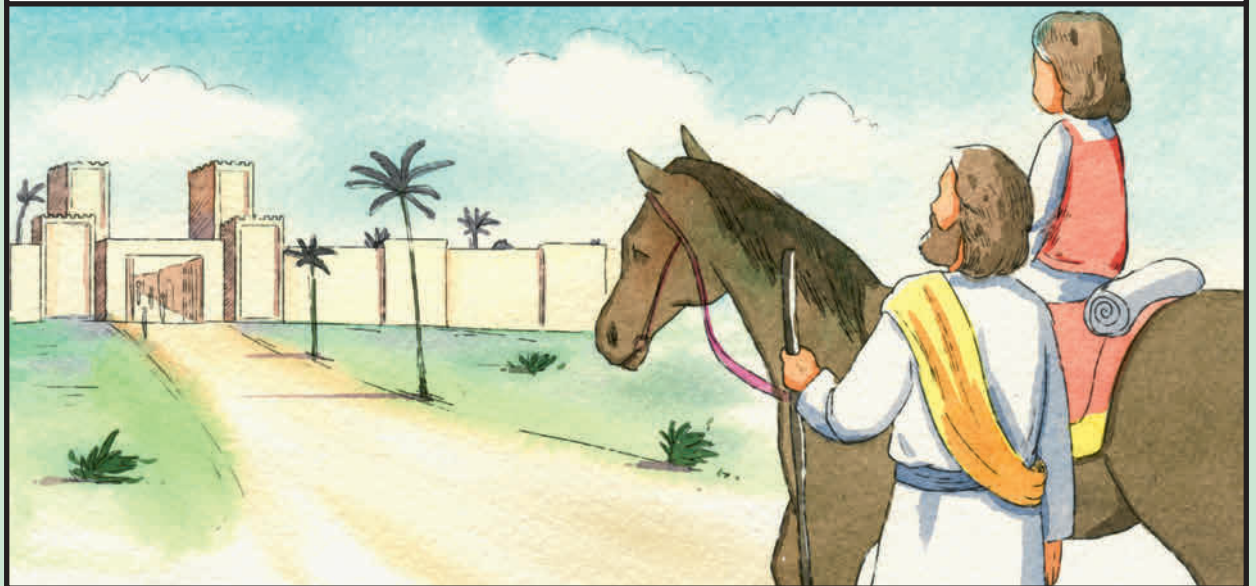


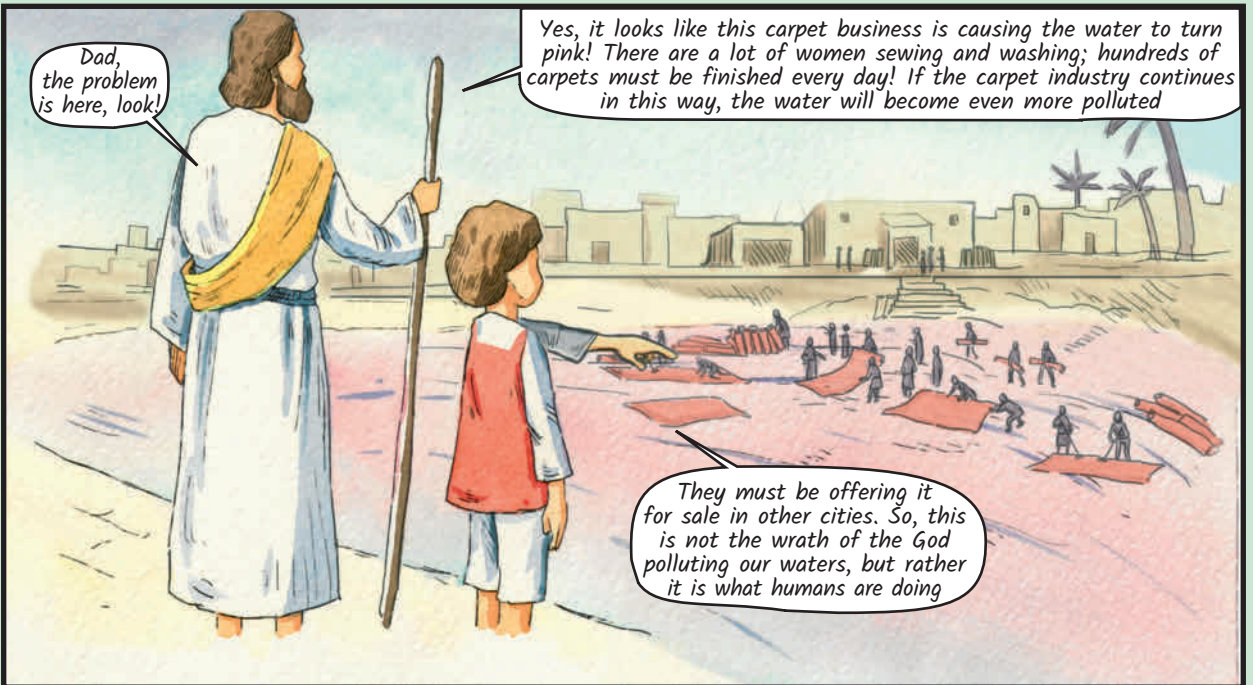
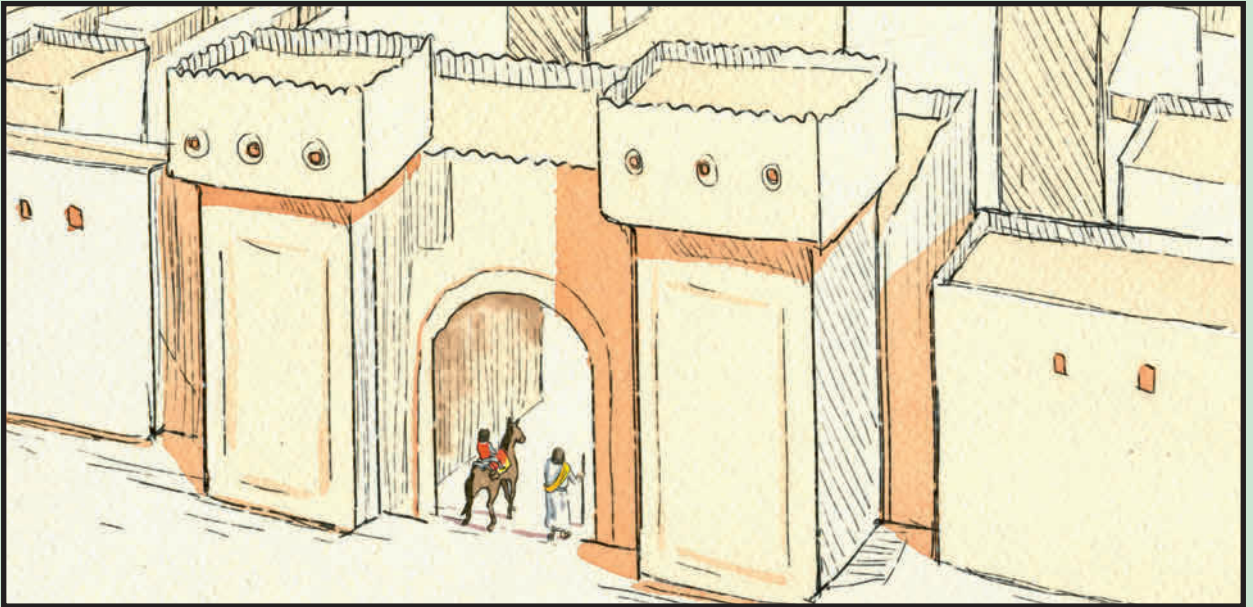
*In the morning, Kish and Ashi arrived at the next village;
thankfully it was not as damaged as the last one*

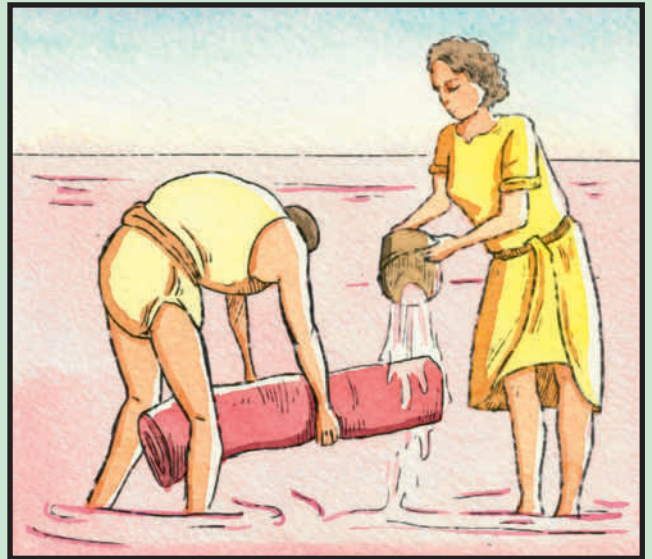


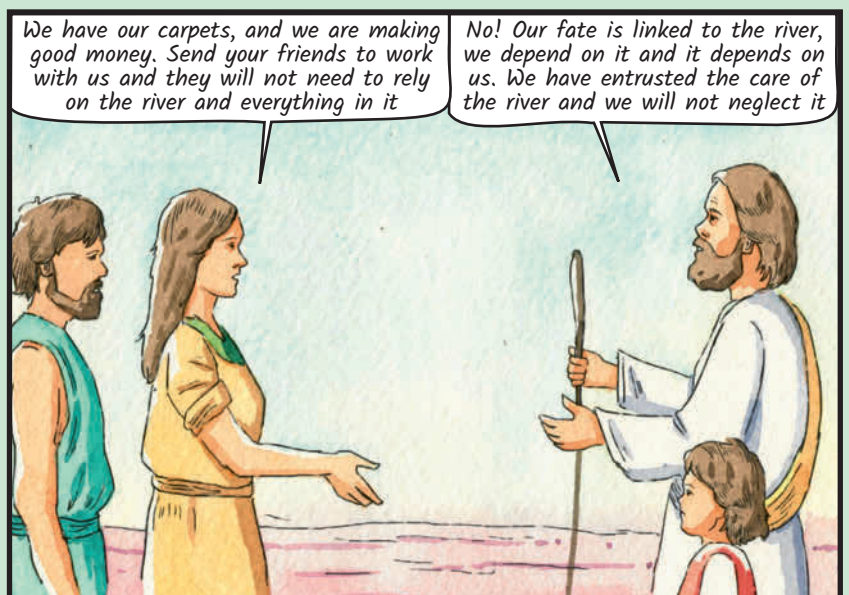
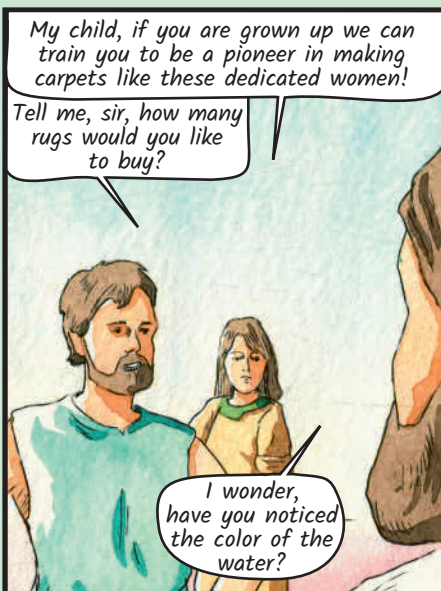


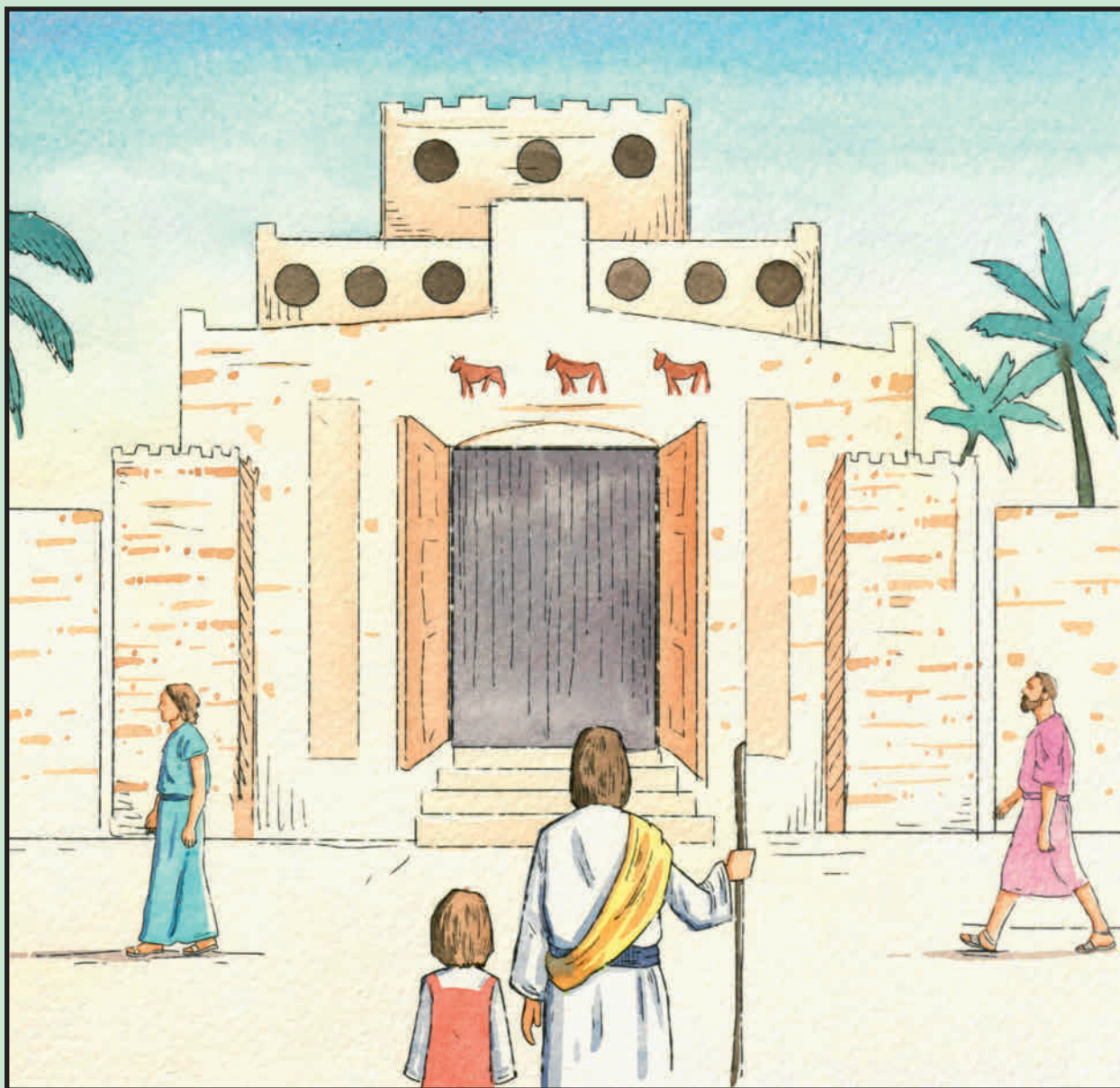
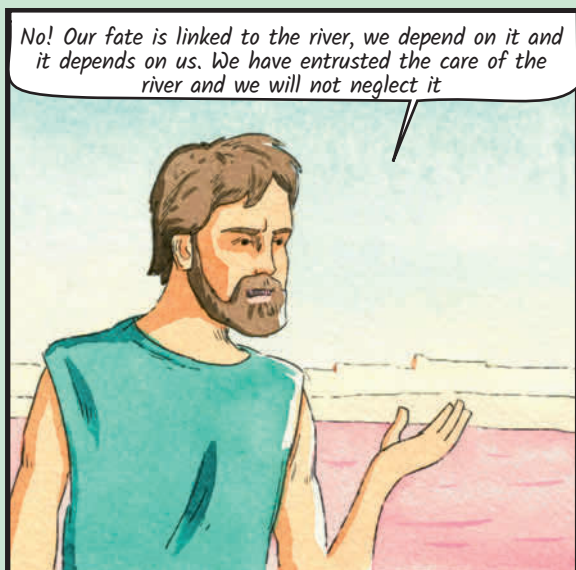
Kish and Ashi arrived to the entrance of the city of Ur

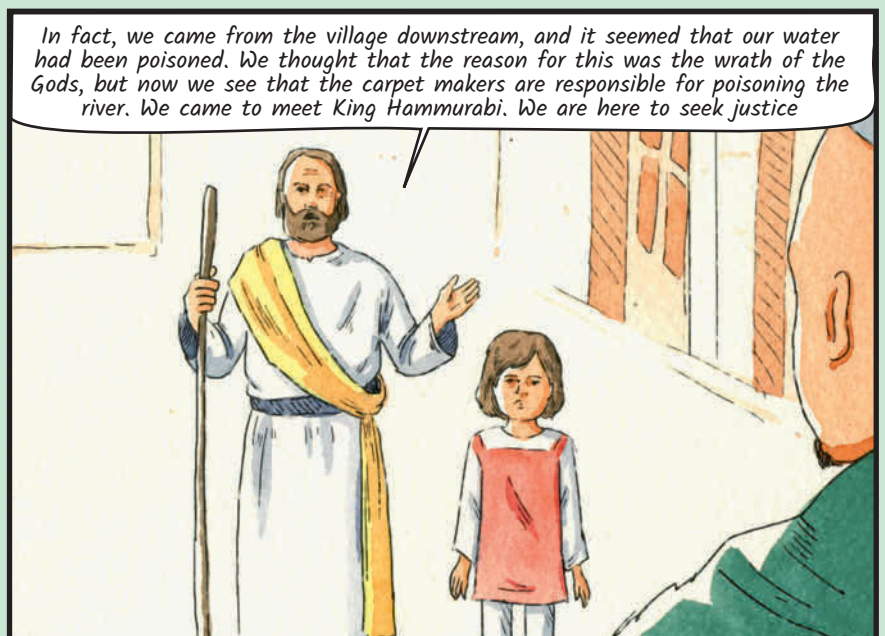
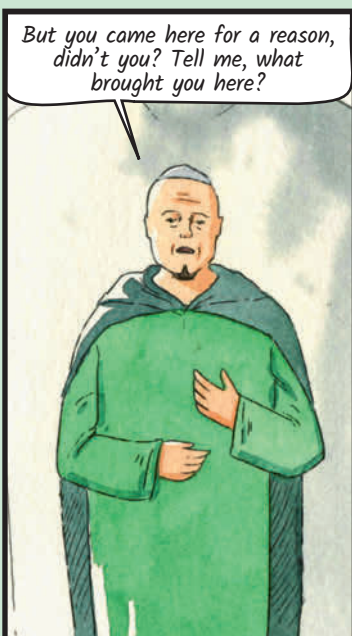
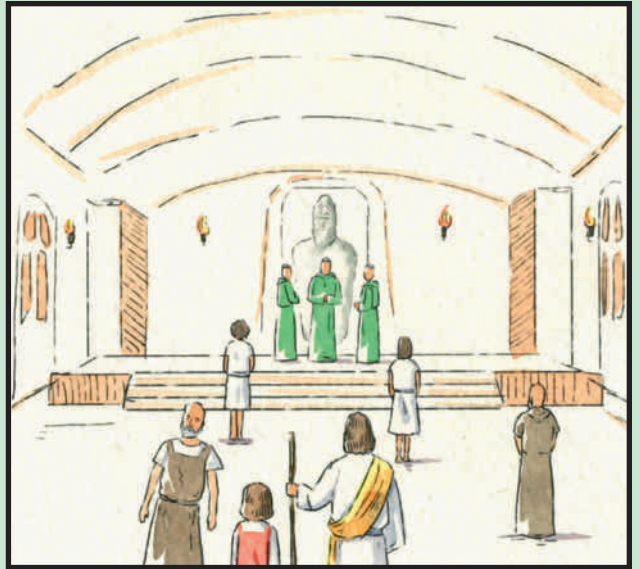


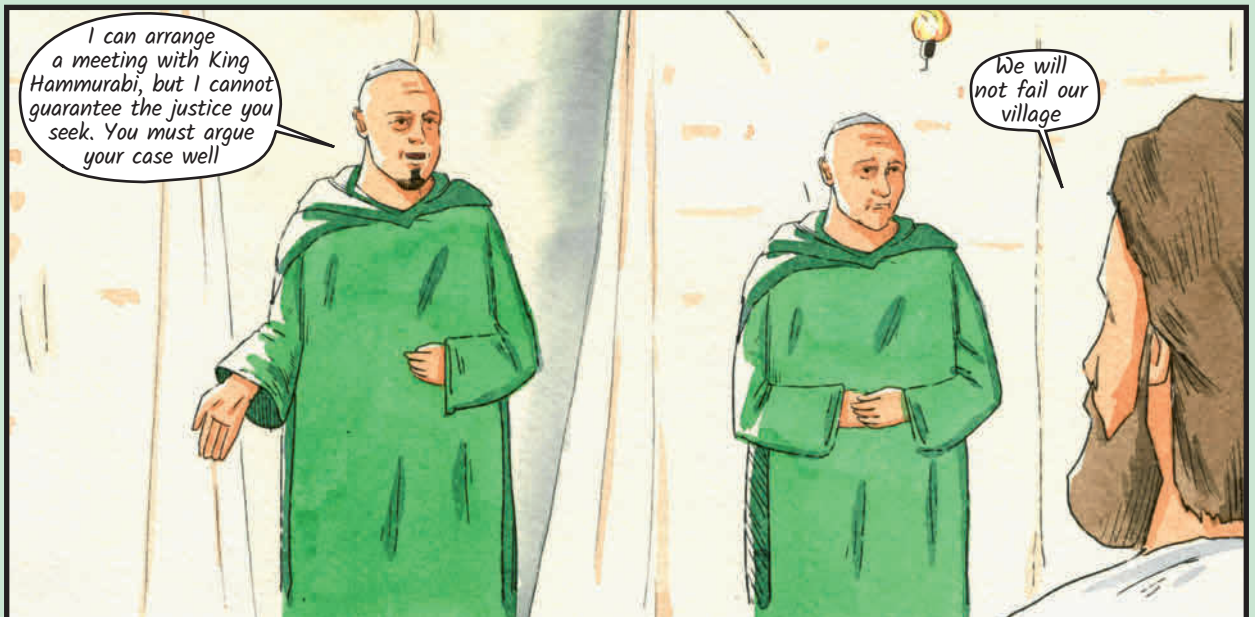
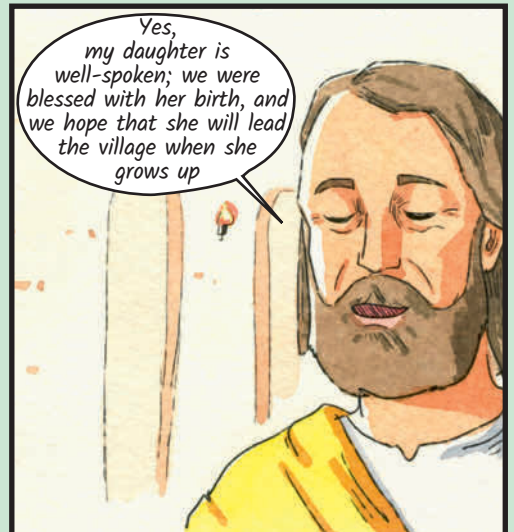


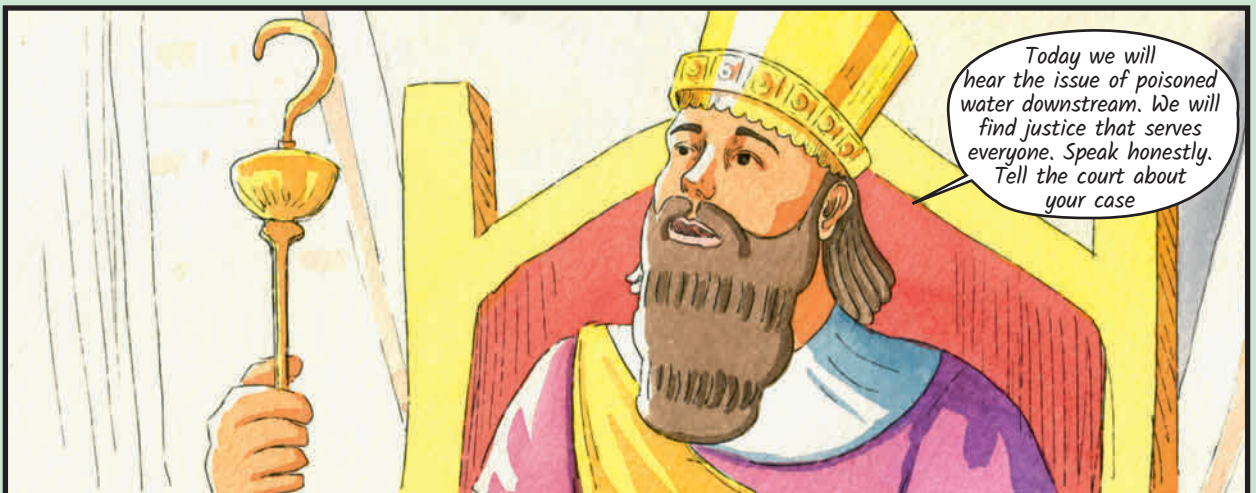
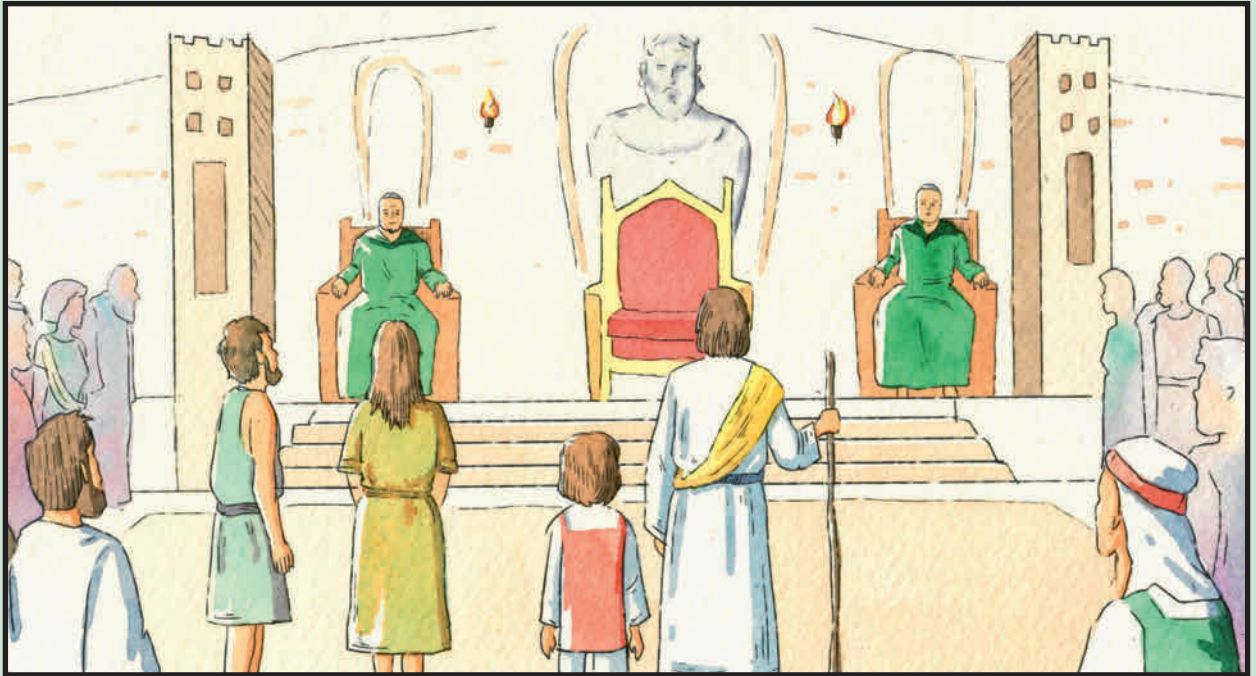












A few days ago, the water in our village turned pink, and the fish started to die. My daughter Ashi and I traveled towards the north to find the source of the poison, and we heard many tragic stories ...



I have a younger brother, I want him to enjoy the same clean water as me, and I want the same for my children. We are the guardians of the river, and it is our responsibility to preserve the natural balance future generations

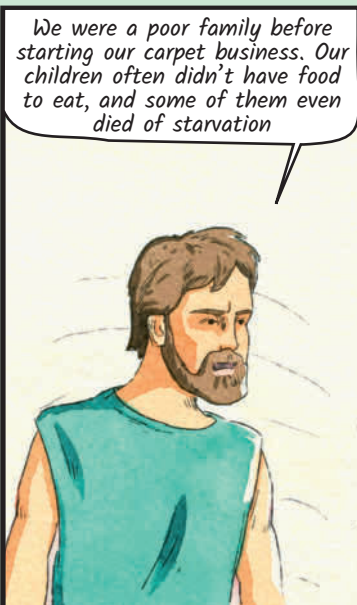


The poison from carpet production and dyeing is destroying our livelihood. We do not hate carpet makers; we want them to have an income, but not at the expense of our environment

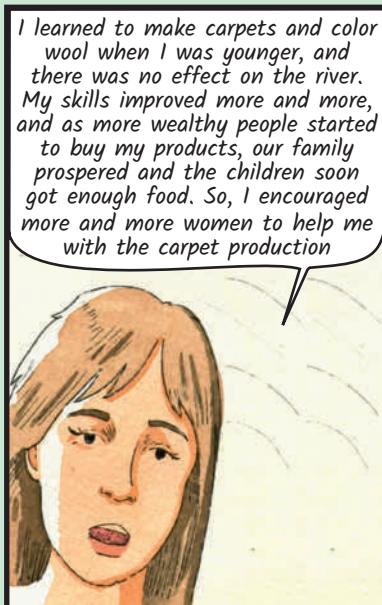


We want to reach an agreement so that we can all benefit and share water resources

We were a poor family before starting our carpet business. Our children often didn't have food to eat, and some of them even died of starvation

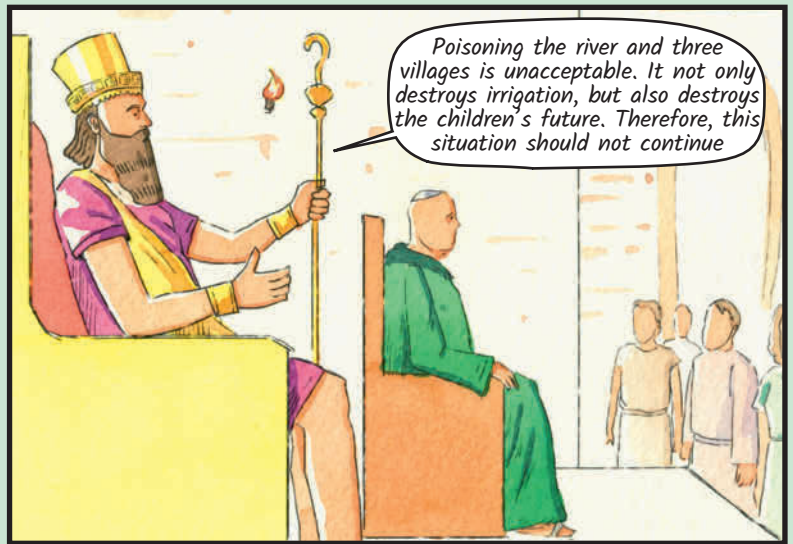
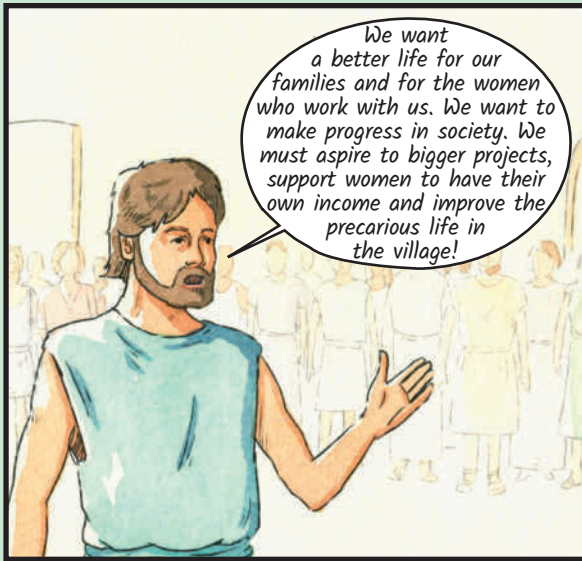


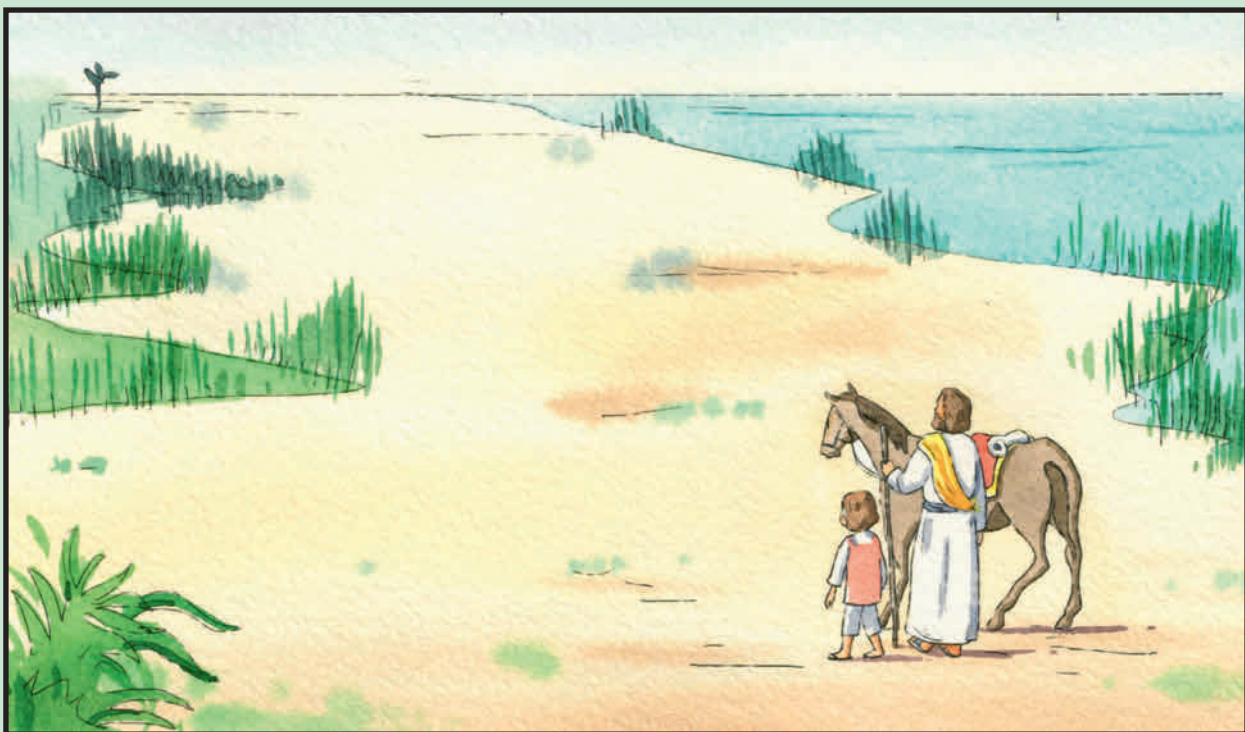
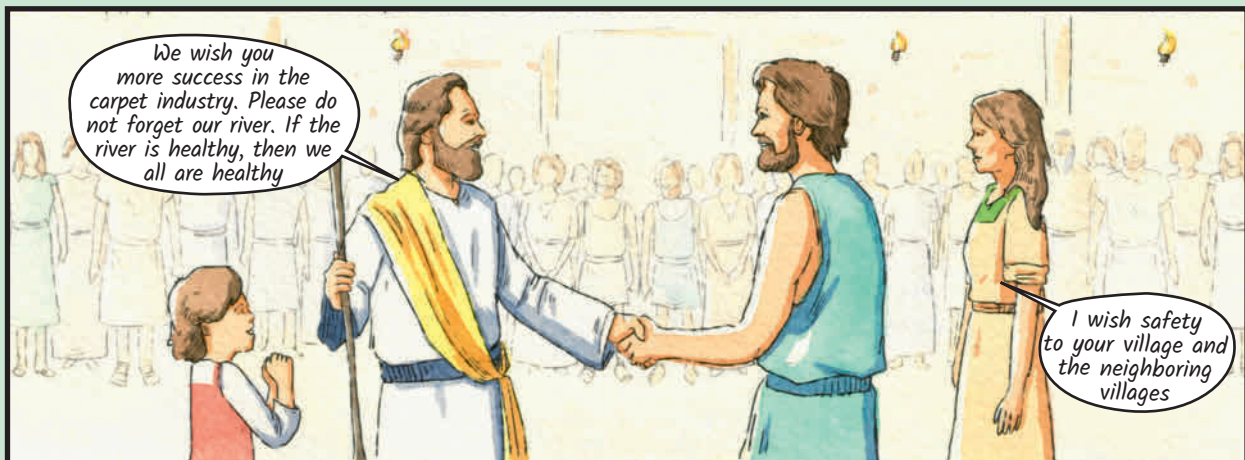
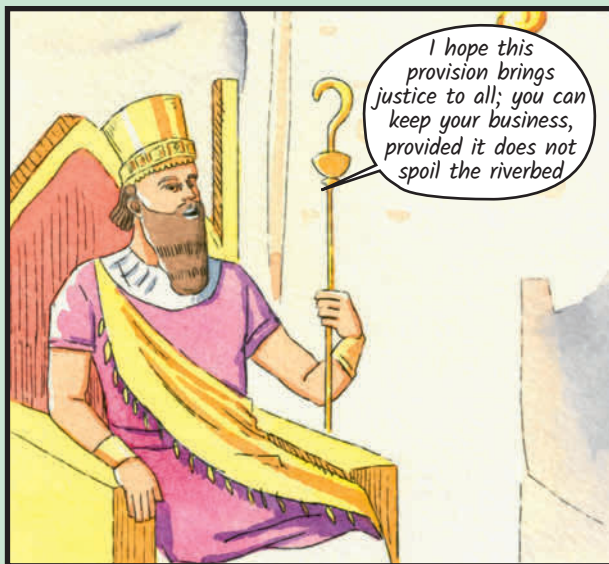
I learned to make carpets and color wool when I was younger, and there was no effect on the river. My skills improved more and more, and as more wealthy people started to buy my products, our family prospered and the children soon got enough food. So, I encouraged more and more women to help me with the carpet production



We realized that we were helping women bring income to their families and food to their children. So, this is how our business grew bigger and bigger









Apocalypse

A new future began. The God of Water is in grief. Against all hopes at their creation, humans forgot how to treat their natural resources with respect and the powerful streams of the Middle East are drying out. Sand storms desertify the landscapes. Refugees flee their drought-ridden villages in hope of finding water upstream. From the top of a mountain, Enki, in the shape of a wise woman, sits on a mountain and can do nothing but witness the world collapsing - and keep hoping that the humans he created wake up before it's too late...

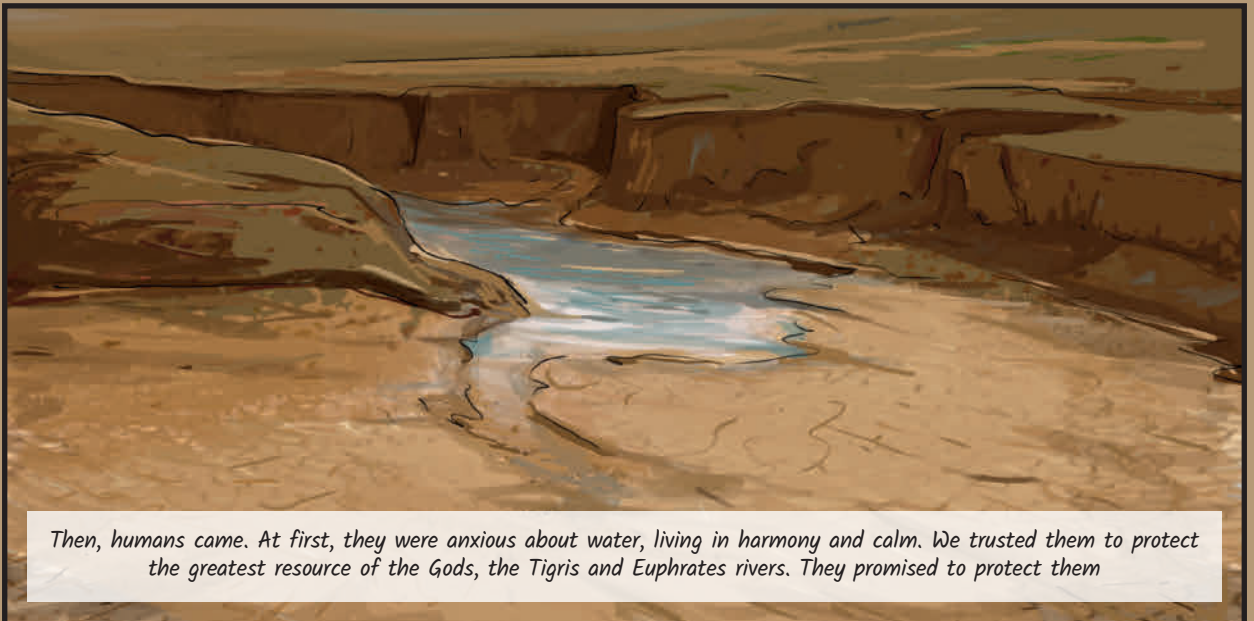


Enki is sitting between two mountains, looking at the landscape of the earth

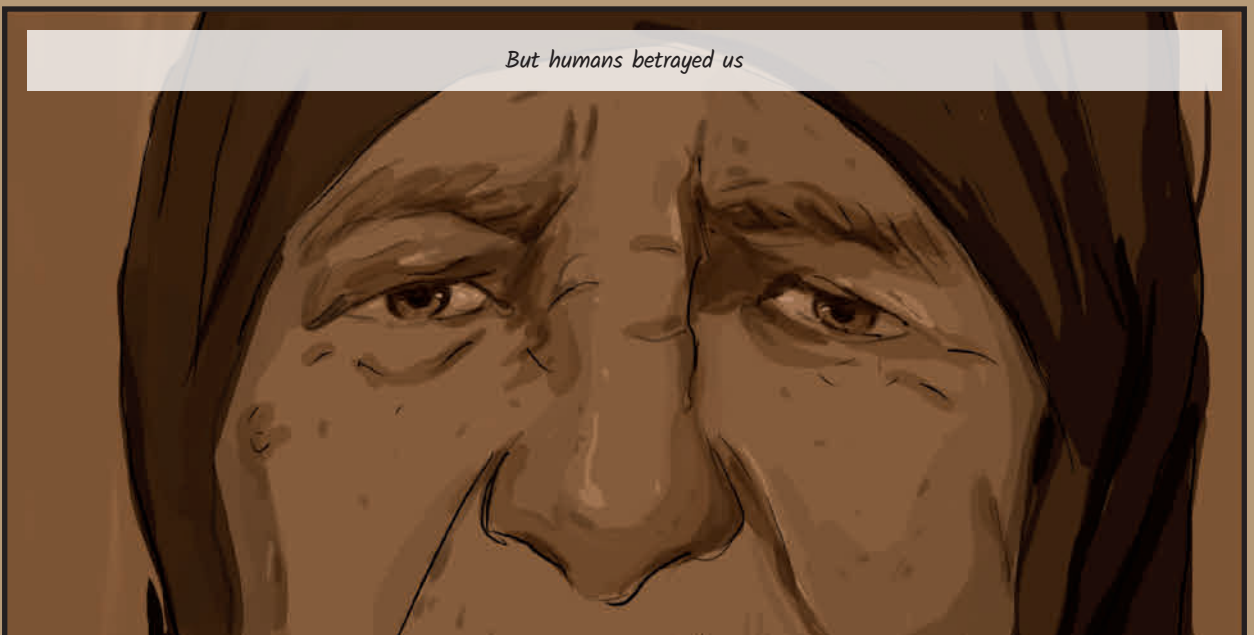




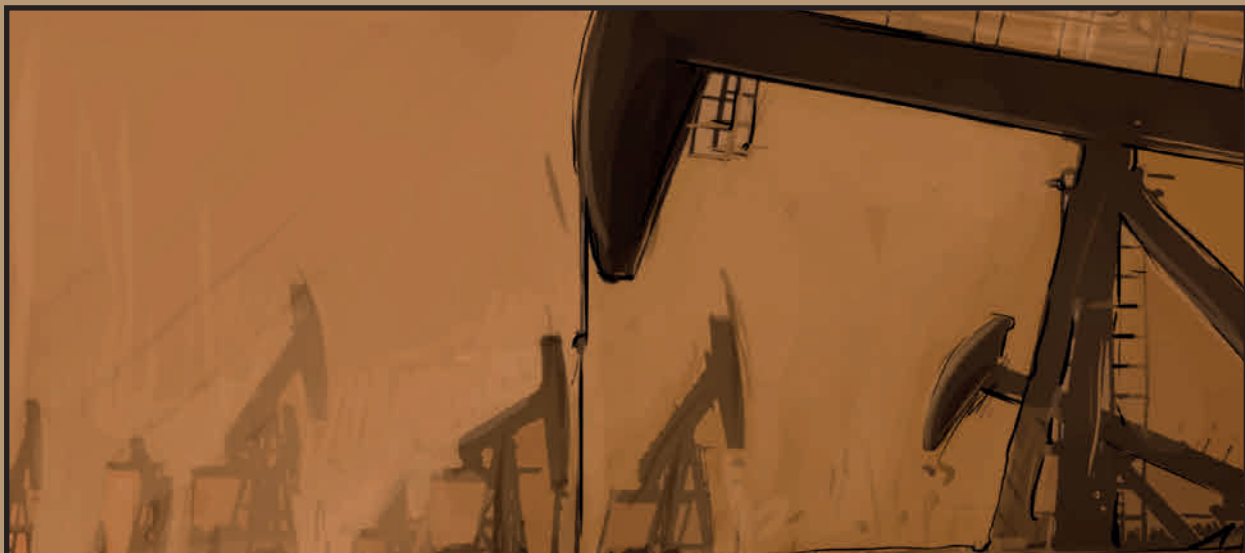
Let me tell you a story of destruction. Everything between these mountains was green and lush, and the rivers flourished



Then, humans came. At first, they were anxious about water, living in harmony and calm. We trusted them to protect the greatest resource of the Gods, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. They promised to protect them



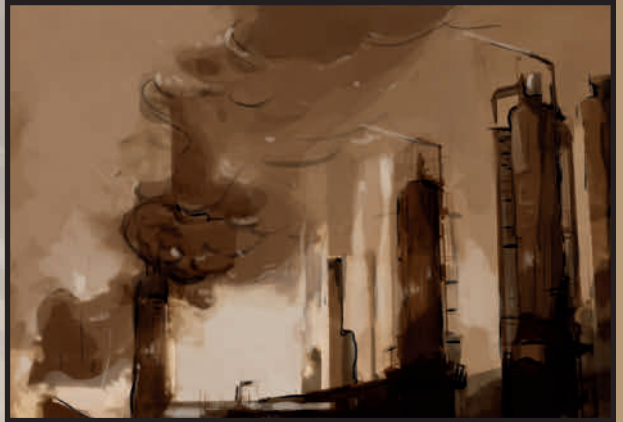
But humans betrayed us

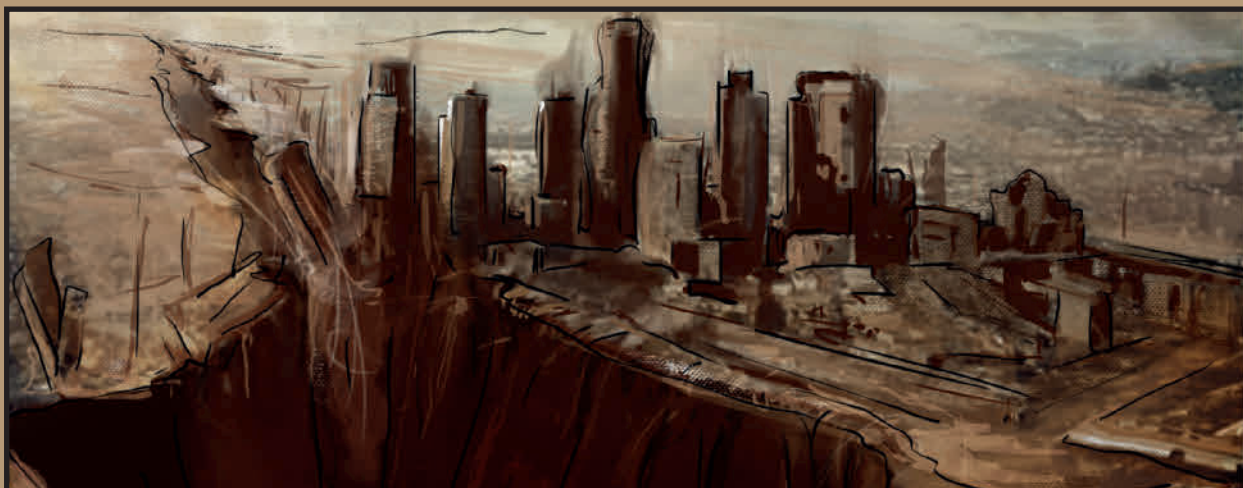


*Then, when resources were scarce, they turned against each other.
With violence, they conquered other lands, destroyed and destroyed and destroyed*



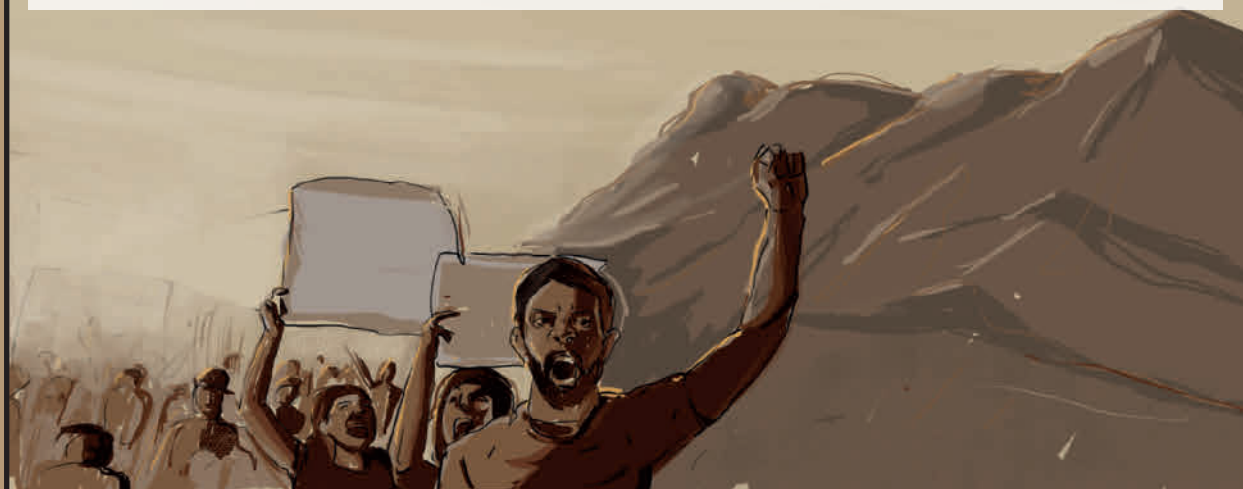
They were offered something that they believed was more important than the river, and they thought they could steal resources from the land, the river and the mountains without consequence. They were offered gold, oil and wealth, they believed this would make them superior. That was deceiving to them



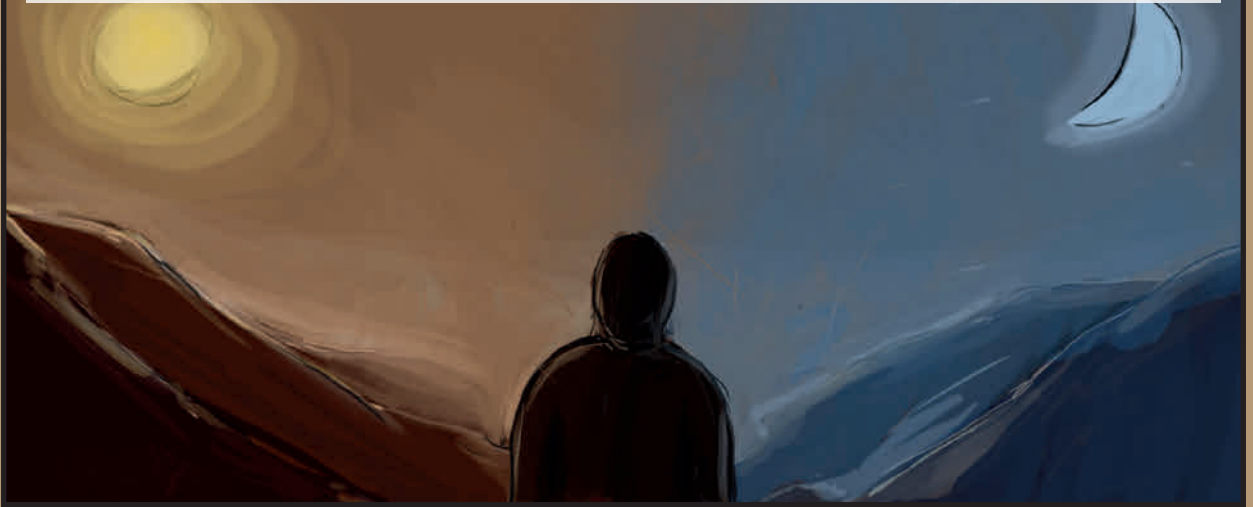


Then, when there was nothing to be destroyed by humans, when the earth reached a point of no return, and the balance collapsed, the damage was irreversible. The earth rose to take revenge on the humans

*Now, only mountains are left. Humans continue stealing and storing their possessions;
water is now only a commodity to buy, steal or sell*



*Thus, with the destruction of anything, something new will be born and something else is destroyed.
When the moon rises, the sun sets. I did not know this before, when I created the humans*



When the Old Gods die, the New Gods, the Gods of oil and wealth will rise, and in time the New Gods will fall also, because they are empty. Humankind created them only to satisfy their greed. The Old Gods are resting, but they shall return

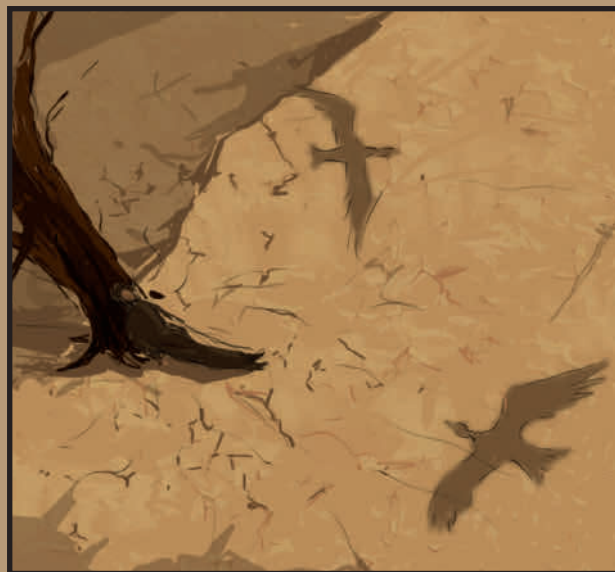


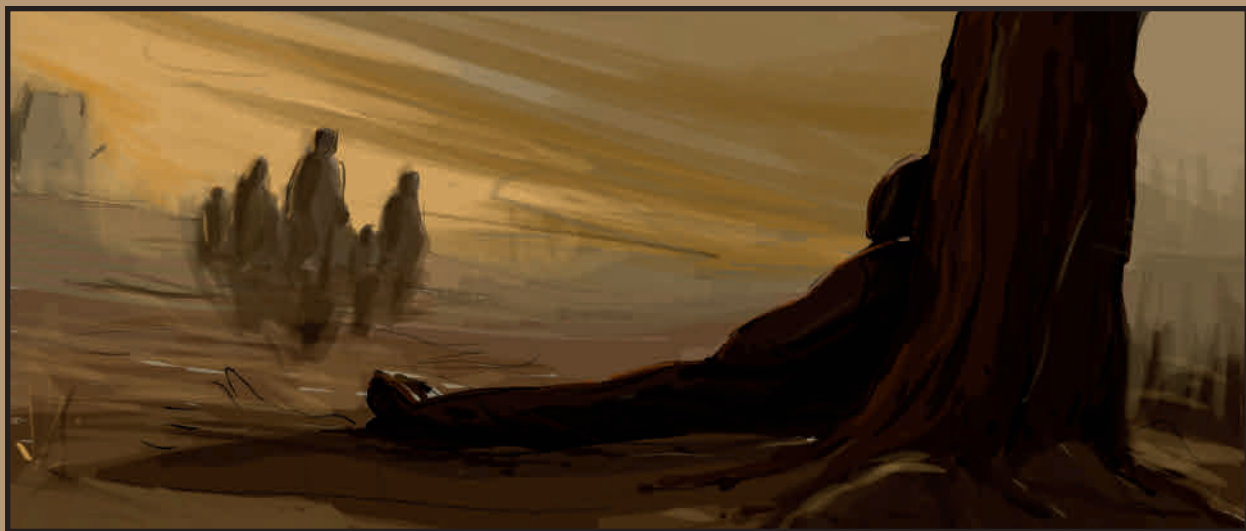
And I will wait, on the mountains that once gave birth to civilization, I am tired but somehow there is hope inside of me. The humans have been deceived, yes. But they realize that their new gods are empty















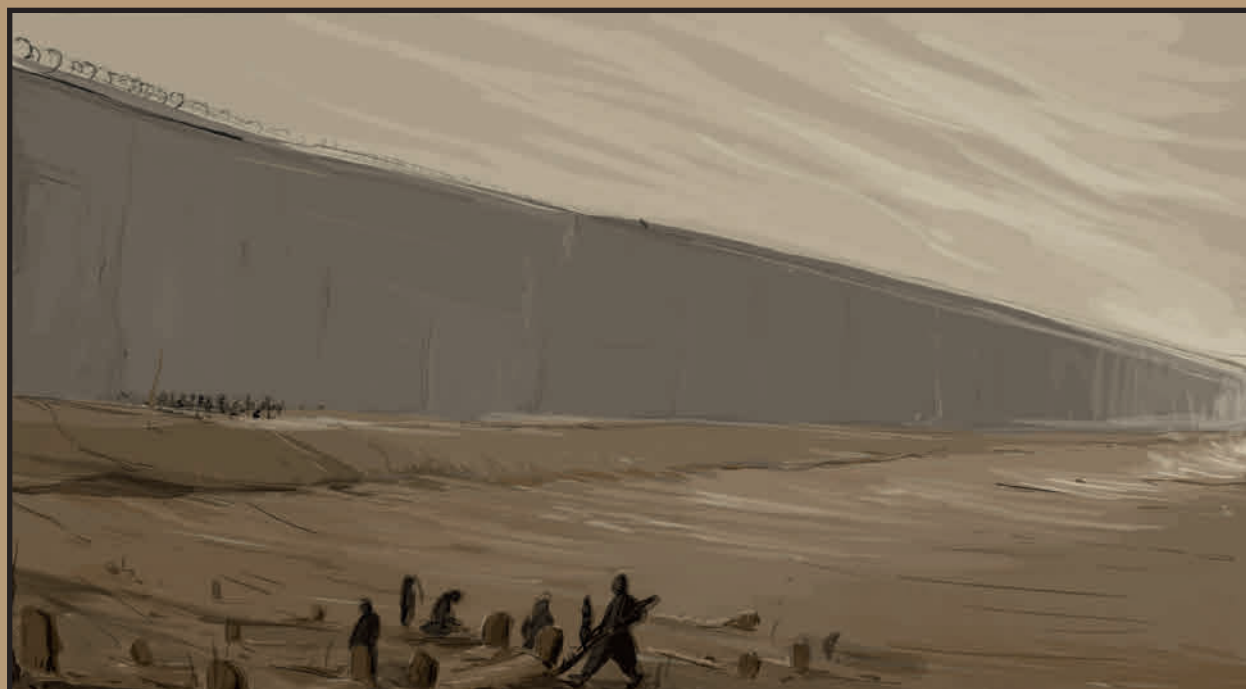
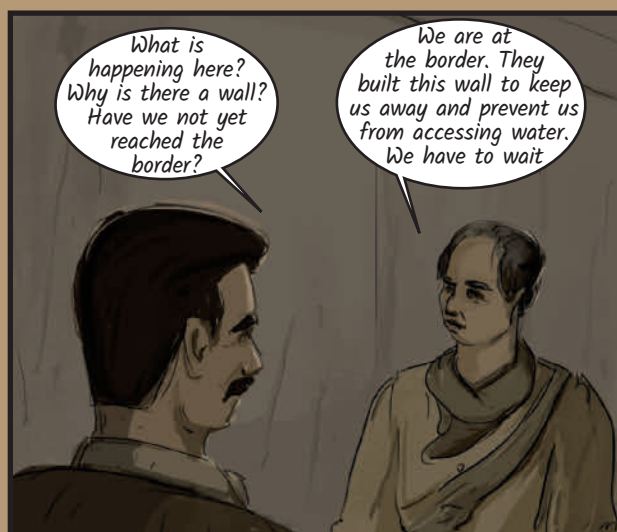
No, when the rains became irregular, they built dams in the north. People in the south started getting sick and the water dried up. We then were considered as less human because we no longer had access to water

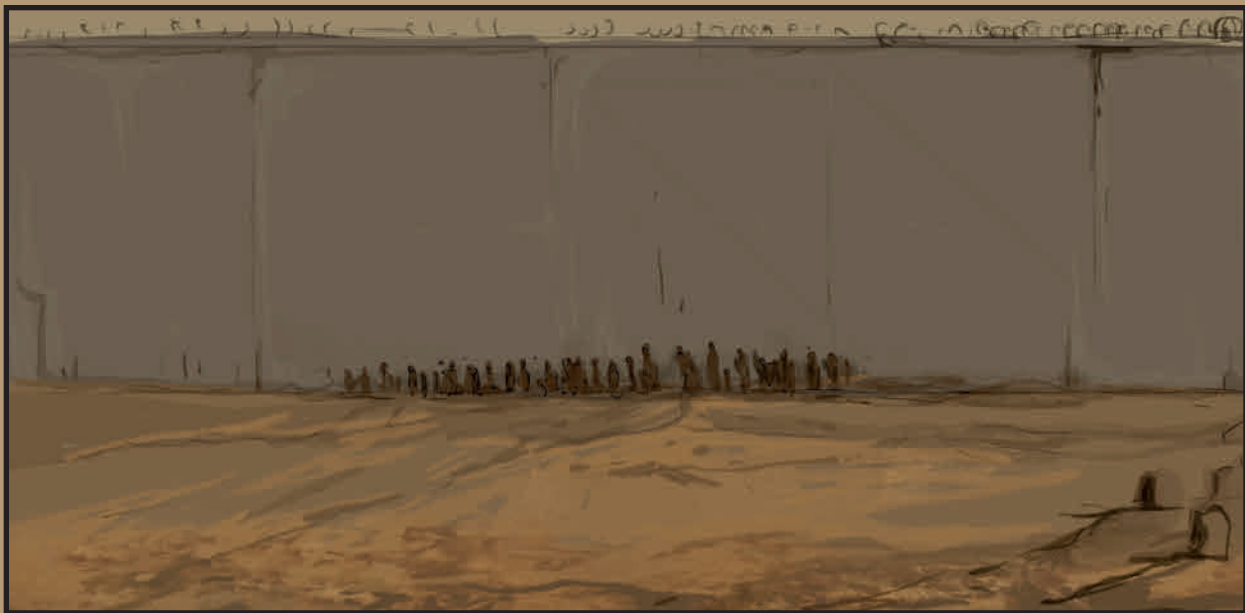


It wasn't always this way, children. We used to have swamps, buffalo, fruit, reeds, dates, palm trees and wide rivers extending to the horizon. Everything was beautiful

But then, the oil spilled into the rivers and the cities upstream began to keep water for themselves. So, people from the south started to migrate, in order to find enough food and water to sustain their children











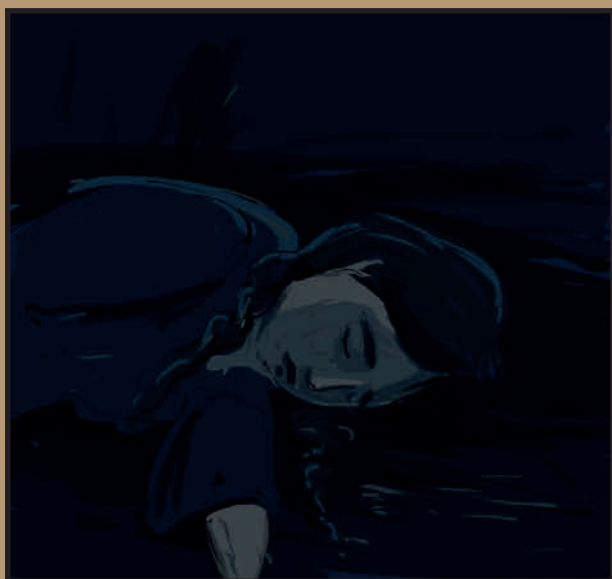
I see
someone
moving



My sister is
breathing



Who are you?
Will you hurt us?









It never had to end this way. The world is divided between those who possess water and hoard resources and those who die



Human beings had many opportunities for change, but they chose their own interests and thus their demise



Do I regret saving them all those past centuries?



We may have lost a lot. The other Gods still despise me because of this destruction

*But there is hope, the world will find balance. With or without humans
The universe is much bigger than this little blue planet and so, yeah, I must have hope*



