



A giant staircase to heaven

The tower of Babel, from Genesis 11

NOAH AND HIS FAMILY lived in the land and his children had children, and those children had more children, and then those children had even more — well, you get the picture — until there were lots of people on the earth once more.

Now, back then, everyone spoke exactly the same language so you didn't need to learn Swahili or Japanese or anything because you could say, "Hello!" to anyone and they knew what you meant.

One day, everyone was talking and they came up with an idea: "Let's build ourselves a beautiful city to live in! It can be our home. And we'll be safe forever and ever." Then they had another idea: "And let's build a really tall tower to reach up to heaven!"



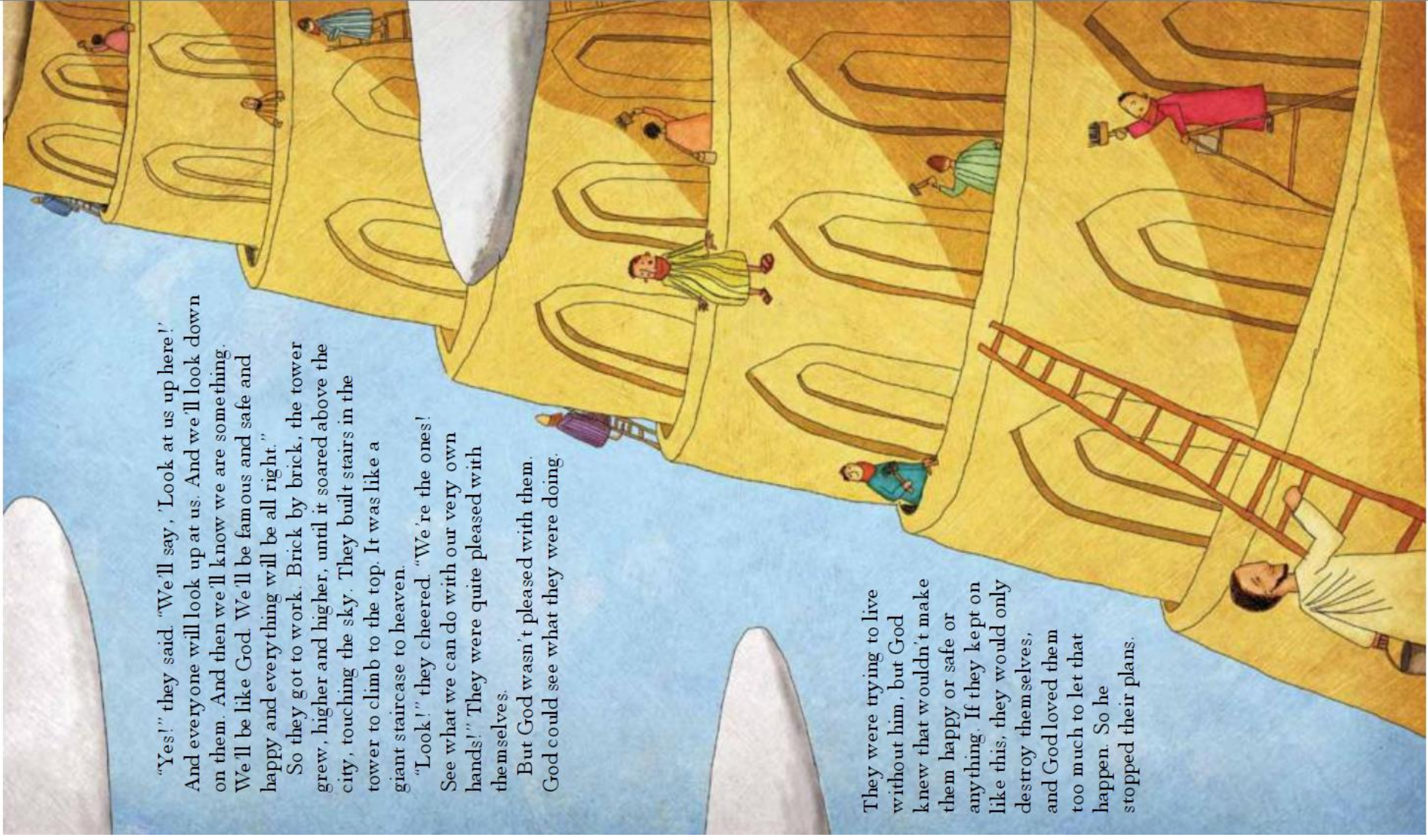
"Yes!" they said. "We'll say, 'Look at us up here!' And everyone will look up at us. And we'll look down on them. And then we'll know we are something. We'll be like God. We'll be famous and safe and happy and everything will be all right."

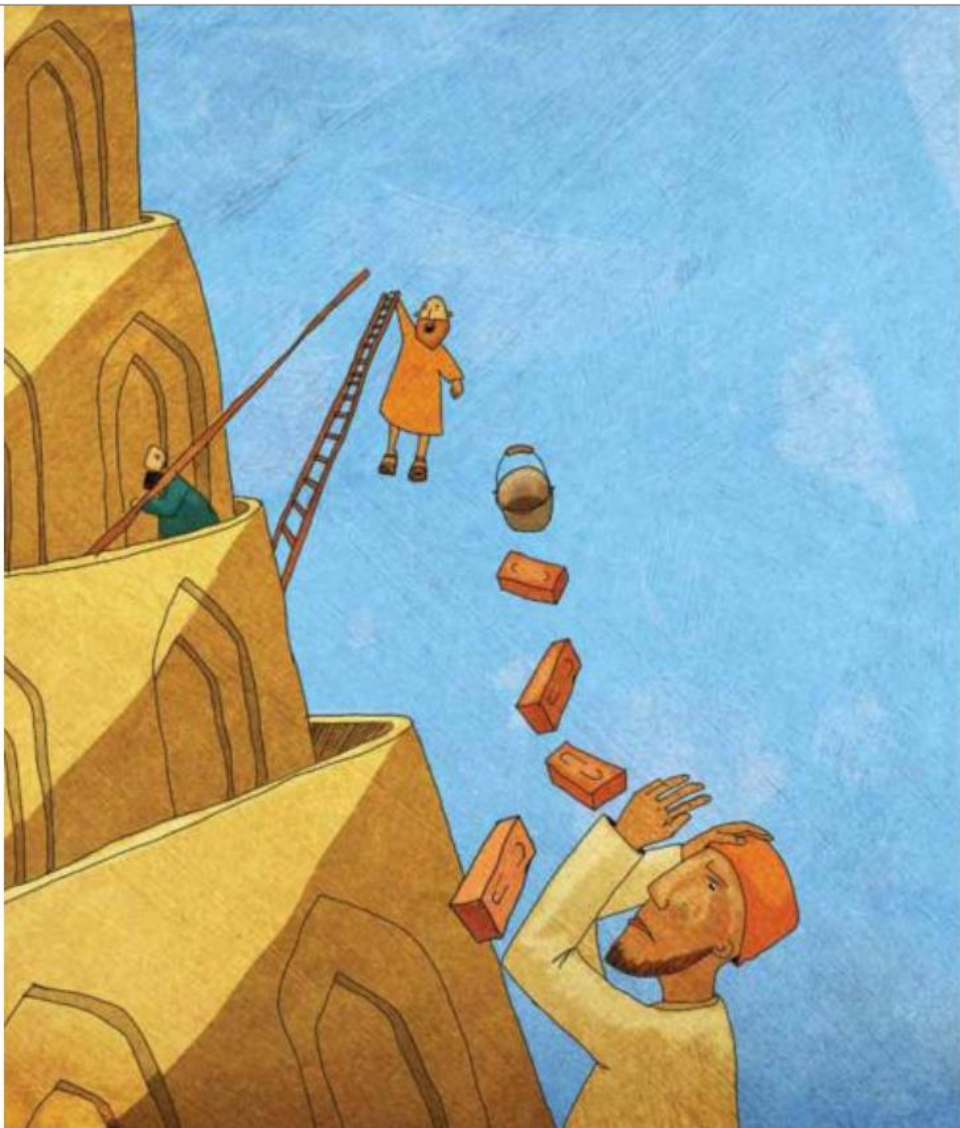
So they got to work. Brick by brick, the tower grew, higher and higher, until it soared above the city, touching the sky. They built stairs in the tower to climb to the top. It was like a giant staircase to heaven.

"Look!" they cheered. "We're the ones! See what we can do with our very own hands!" They were quite pleased with themselves.

But God wasn't pleased with them. God could see what they were doing.

They were trying to live without him, but God knew that wouldn't make them happy or safe or anything. If they kept on like this, they would only destroy themselves, and God loved them too much to let that happen. So he stopped their plans.

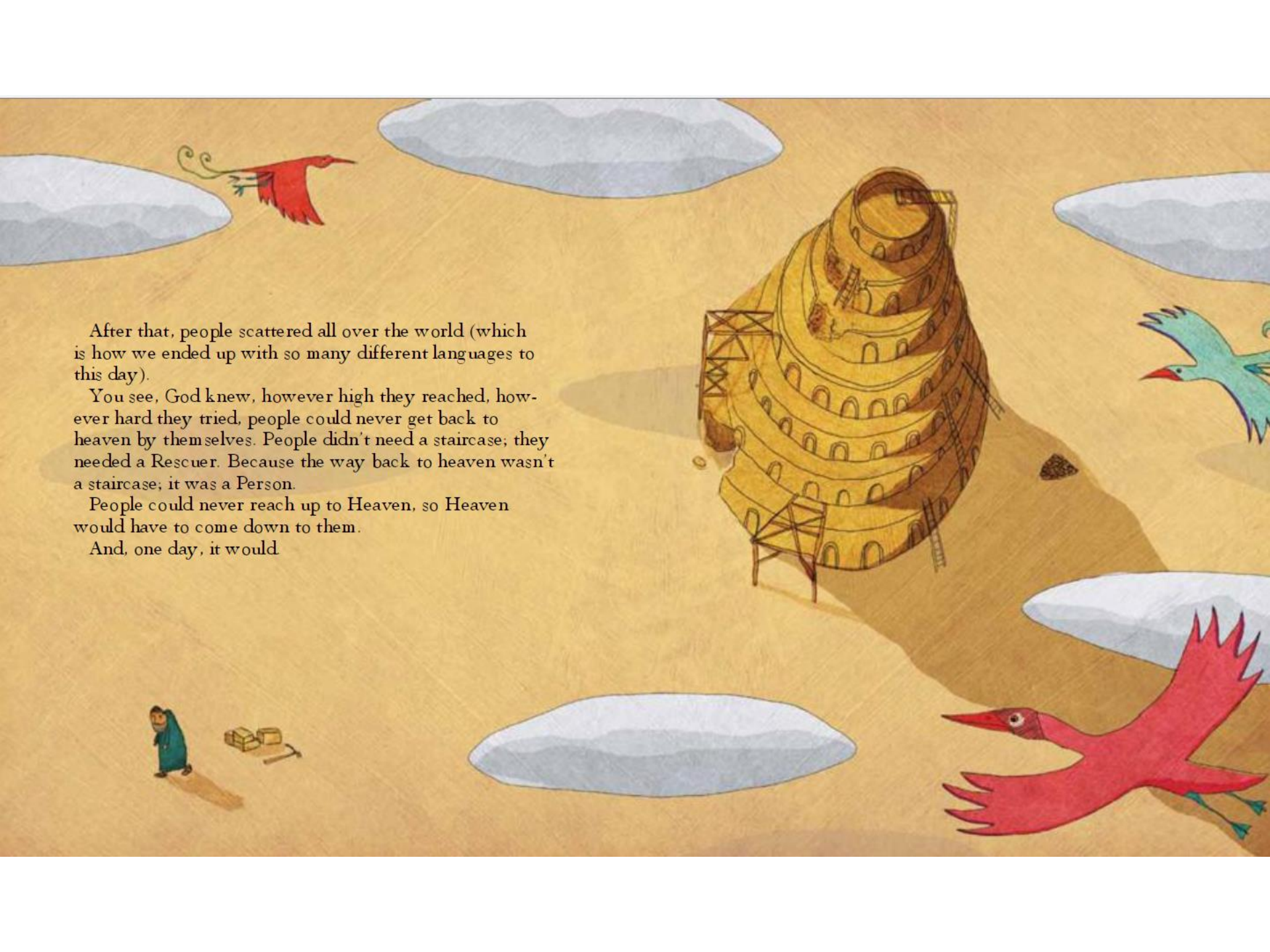




One morning, they went to work as usual but everything was different — their words were all new and funny. You see, God had given each person a completely different language! Suddenly, no one understood what anyone else was saying. Someone would say, “How do you do?” and the other person thought they said, “How ugly are you!” It wasn’t funny. You could be saying something nice like, “Such a lovely morning!” and get a punch in the nose because they thought you said, “Hush up, you’re boring!” (You couldn’t even say, “Pardon?” to check if you’d heard right because no one understood that word either.)

It wasn’t easy to work together after that, as you can only imagine. People were always quarrelling and fighting and getting in a dreadful muddle and becoming grumpier and grumpier, until at last they were all too cross to keep on building, and just had to stop.





After that, people scattered all over the world (which is how we ended up with so many different languages to this day).

You see, God knew, however high they reached, however hard they tried, people could never get back to heaven by themselves. People didn't need a staircase; they needed a Rescuer. Because the way back to heaven wasn't a staircase; it was a Person.

People could never reach up to Heaven, so Heaven would have to come down to them.

And, one day, it would