"There he built an altar to the Lord" (Gen 12:8) City and Altar Building in Genesis[1]

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines Genesis' depiction of the contrast between patriarchal altar-building (בנה, Gen 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 35:7; cf. 8:20) and pre-patriarchal city-building (בנה, Gen 4:17; 10:11; 11:4). The patriarchal building is qualitatively different because the altars are built in the place where, and after, YHWH appears to the patriarch, in the context of a word of blessing evocative of Genesis 12:1-3. It is suggested that the patriarchal altars of Genesis anticipated the place YHWH would choose for his name to dwell.

KEYWORDS: Genesis, to build, city, altar, there/name (*šam/šem*)

A   INTRODUCTION

On the relationship between the between the Babel account and the first Abram episode, August Dillmann noted that "im göttl. Heilsplan, lag es gegenüber von der zunehmende Verschlimmerung in der Menschheit (11,1-9) kräftigere Gegenmittel anzuwenden und in Abr. den Mann auszuwählen und zu bilden, welcher der Grundstein eines zu bildende Gottesreichs in der Menschheit werden sollte."[2] Hermann Gunkel writes that one strand of J "knows nothing whatsoever of Abraham's home city … the other strand knows of Abraham's home city, but does not mention it by name, calling it only the 'city of Nahor'." Subsequently he writes: "Characteristically, Abraham's home city is not discussed. This is probably no accident. Abraham's ancestors here are not envisioned as city dwellers."[3] Dillmann shows interest in Abraham's unique future among the nations, and Gunkel argues that the narrator went to some trouble not to link Abraham with a city.

Contemporary scholarship continues the conversation about the relationship between Genesis 11:1-9 and 11:27-12:9. Mark Awabdy discusses

[1]   An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Vienna, August 2014.

[2]   August Dillmann, *Die Genesis* (5th ed.; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886), 219.

[3]   Hermann Gunkel *Genesis* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 156, 163.

verbal repetition of "reputation," plot line equivalences and contrasts in terms of migration and settlement. Christoph Uehlinger accepts the importance of *Stichwörter* connections, but advises against overlooking the priestly genealogy in Genesis 11:10-32 because this tradition "steht kontextuell in krassem Gegensatz zur Berufung Abrahams in Gen 12,1-3."[4] In other words, the contrast depends on the priestly material between Babel and Genesis 11:27-12:9, and not the Babel story only.

With respect to the purpose of the Babel narrative, Theodore Hiebert recently argued that hubris is not the problem of Babel's builders, but that the story "is exclusively about the origins of cultural differences and not about pride or punishment at all." Among trenchant criticisms of Hiebert's translations of זמם ("planning," not "plotting") and פוץ ("disperse," not "shatter"), André LaCocque writes: "A paean about wicked Babylon has no place whatsoever in Israel's tradition (especially, I should add, if J was writing during or after the sixth century exile)." Furthermore, LaCocque concedes that Hiebert's thesis might point to a pre-existing document "celebrating Babylon as the original place 'of the world's cultures'." If so, however, LaCocque concludes, "the biblical author then used this text while twisting polemically its meaning";[5] a polemics that would apply to hated Babylon and also to exiled Israel for its failures with the temple/altar city Jerusalem.

Gerald Klingbeil carries the contrast between Babel and Abram to altar-construction in Genesis (12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9-10; 25:12):

> [The] lack of specifics is part and parcel of the literary and religious strategy of the author who wants to establish interaction with YHWH in a context where no other building activity is reported. Clearly, Gen. xii needs be read against the background of Gen. xi and the Tower of Babel story. Abraham—after receiving and accepting the call from YHWH—builds an altar, as an expression of his faith. In contrast to those unnamed builders described in Gen. xi 3ff. Abraham focuses upon interaction with the deity, especially when understanding the altar construction rituals in a functional way.[6]

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4   Mark A. Awabdy, "Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative," *JSOT* 35.1 (2010): 19-20. Awabdy discusses contrasts on pp. 18-23; Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und «eine Rede». Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung [Gen 11,1-9]* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 577-578. Uehlinger does not, however, discuss ירד, בנה, or ראה, because their "Verständnis der Forschung zu keinen besonderen Kontroversen anlass gegeben hat" (Ibid., 345).
5   Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *JBL* 126.1 (2007): 53; André LaCocque, "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert," *JBL* 128.1 (2009): 34-35, 40-41.
6   Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology—Preliminary Thoughts on the Importance of Cult and Ritual for a Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures," *VT* 54.4 (2004): 503-515, 508. Wolfgang Zwickel, "Der Altarbau zwischen Bethel und Ai [Gen

The contrast between Abram and his ancestors, noted by Dillmann and Euhlinger in terms of building projects, and Gunkel's assertion that the narrator kept Abram from being identified with a city, raises the question of the narrative's shift from city construction by the nations, to altars by the patriarchs. It warrants an examination of city and patriarchal altar-construction depicted by בנה in Genesis.

Genesis employs בנה sixteen times to depict four different kinds of construction.[7] First, Genesis uses בנה in connection with three women: God builds Eve (Gen 2:22) in the pre-patriarchal narrative; in the patriarchal narratives Sarah and Rachel express their desire to be built (Gen 16:2; 30:3 [passive]). Second, בנה depicts Cain, Nimrod/Assur[8], and the בני האדם as builders of cities (4:17; 10:11; 11:4, 5, 8) in the pre-patriarchal narrative. Third, בנה describes Noah and the patriarchs as altar (Gen 8:20; 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 35:7), not city builders. Finally, Genesis 33:17 describes Jacob building his house. Of the sixteen incidences, twelve depict city- and altar-construction. Notable among these is the shift from pre-patriarchal city to patriarchal altar building in Genesis 11:27-12:9: city-building is the province of Abram's ancestors, altar-building that of Abram and his descendants. The verb בנה develops this shift from one kind of construction to another, and the occasion of the construction: Abram's ancestors build cities without divine appearance or speech, the patriarchs only build altars at the place YHWH appears and speaks.

For reasons of space this essay will examine only Genesis' depictions of city and altar constructions[9] to demonstrate the thesis that Genesis contrasts patriarchal altar-building to the city constructions of their ancestors with a view to reminding its exilic audience that heaven's blessing ought to be sought only at the place where YHWH chooses to appear. I will briefly describe the ancient world's understanding of the role of city to argue that pre-patriarchal cities, evocative of the ancient world's imperial ideology but built without divine of instruction (i.e., from Israel's Deity), are an undesirable means of connecting

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12]. Ein Beitrag zur Datierung des Jahwisten," *BZ* 36.2 (1992): 207-219, focuses on the dating of the text; his "Die Altarbaunotizen im Alten Testament," *Bib* 73.2 (1992): 533-546, narrows the study of altar-building in Genesis 12, 13, 26 and 35, and elsewhere in OT, to the naming of the places (Ibid., 537).

[7]   The verb עשה appears in Genesis to depict construction as follows: divine creation (1:7-31; 2:2-4; 5:1; 6:6-7, etc.), the construction of the ark (6:14-7:5), depict an already built altar (13:4, followed by בנה in 13:18) instruction to build an altar (35:1, 3, followed by בנה in 35:7).

[8]   The identity of the builder depends on the construal of the verb. For Nimrod, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 497, 517-518, who identifies Nimrod; and, Aššur, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco: Word, 1987), 211, 223-224.

[9]   The other uses of *bnh* in Genesis are examined in Arie C. Leder, "Who builds the house of Israel? The verb *bnh* in Genesis 2:22; 16:2; 30:3." Forthcoming in *Revue Biblique* in 2020.

earth to heaven for heaven's blessing/fertility. Section two will briefly describe the role of the altar and argue that the altars the patriarchs build at the places YHWH chooses to appear provide the desired connection for heaven's blessing/fertility on the earth. Methodologically I will follow the lead of recent studies on narrative analysis.[10]

B   CITIES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

1.   Understanding cities of the ancient world

In his essay on the oriental city Mario Liverani shows that the ancient city has been defined within webs of accompanying ideologies, generally characterized by western-eastern polarity.[11] The western preference for Greek and Roman civilizations tended to understand the ancient city in terms of free citizens and open markets. Lacking such characteristics, eastern cities were understood as places where despots built their palaces and kept their military. Improved excavation techniques, especially the means to detect ancient bricks, led to a better understanding of how eastern cities filled their spaces, but the western mode continued to subordinate the eastern city. Thus, for example, scholarship of the colonial period held "that the ancient Near Eastern city (and civilization in general) became the first chapter in a world history of western authorship and finalization" (99). Post-colonial studies, emphasizing irrigation or the "Asiatic mode of Production" were rejected by western scholarship "mostly for political reasons" (102). Thereafter, however, "it has become impossible to simply counterpose the Oriental and the Western city, and to apply a negative judgment of value to the former—because 'despotic' or because 'immutable'" (102).

Two risky trends characterize recent studies. "The first trend is to think that cities are always alike (through time, through space) …. The opposite danger comes from considering every individual city as a unique case, and every attempt to build an 'ideal type' as a tremendous and unacceptable simplification" (105). Even so, models are necessary for both general historians and those who focus on particular ages of Mesopotamian history (106). Liverani concludes: "Nobody should need any longer a type or model of the 'Oriental' city, as opposed to the Western city, since this type was the product of a Eurocentric view and

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[10]   Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 88-112; Jean Louis Ska, *"Our Fathers Have Told us": Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narrative* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1990); J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis. Specimens of Stylistic Analysis* (Assen-Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 11-45; idem, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999). And P. J. Harland, "Vertical or Horizontal. The Sin of Babel," *VT* 48/4 (1998): 514, 518.

[11]   Mario Liverani, "Ancient Near Eastern cities and modern ideologies," in *Die Orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch*, (ed. W. Gernot; Saarbrücken: 1997), 85-107. Page numbers in the text refer to this article.

colonialist attitude: it was the image of despotism pointed at the contempt of the Western democratic world" (107).

Ömür Harmançarah's study examines how the rhetorical and material culture shapes the memories of ancient near eastern cities. "Building projects," he writes, "are *sites of material elaboration*, where the intensive productive undertaking fosters an unusual spatial context for the exchange of ideas, craft-knowledge, and technical innovation." He goes on to say that "monuments are commemorative in many layers by way of their material qualities," and that technology is more understood "as a means of 'creating and maintaining a symbolically meaningful environment' through practices of material production." [12] Harmançarah's emphasis on the rhetorical-material is to be expected, inscriptions and recovered architectural remains are the stuff of archaeology and, as such, illuminating for the depictions of such cities in biblical texts.

Michael O'Connor argues that biblical studies of the city start with flawed definitions of the Hebrew noun עיר: "the English word 'city' does not describe a biblical category; it is rather a historically conditioned category of ours that needs to be unpacked before it is used in historical or philological study of the ancient world."[13] He offers a crucial distinction between the literary-theological and archaeological modes of studying ancient cities. The literary-theological,

> being determined by the beginning and end of Christian Scripture, has a kind of completeness that discourages adding anything to the mix. … it has a degree of abstractness that leaves one hard pressed to contemplate the archaeological data. … the archaeological account is necessarily incomplete, since archaeology is a scientific endeavor, always seeking more data, revising hypotheses, chary of syntheses. Archaeologists of the historical period are given to a positivism of a sort that has sometimes led them to underestimate the role that written sources have played in their discipline or even to subsume written sources into an archaeological framework (20-21).

Liverani's and Harmançarah's studies illustrate the necessarily incomplete character of the archaeological approach.[14] O'Connor's literary-theological category argues for taking seriously the city building phenomenon of

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[12]   Ömür Harmançarah, *Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 154-155. (Emphasis in original.)

[13]   Michael P. O'Connor, "The Biblical Notion of the City," in *Constructions of Space II. The Biblical City and Other Imagined Spaces* (eds. J. L. Berquist and Claudia V. Camp; New York - London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 25. He discusses the entry in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. Page numbers in the following text refer to O'Connor's article.

[14]   As do the studies by A. R. Thomas, *The Evolution of the City: Urban Theory and the Archaeology of the Fertile Crescent* (Lanham - Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012).

the ancient world as viewed by an Israelite narrator within the framework of the narrative's completeness. Recovery of other ancient texts describing this phenomenon may aid the reader's understanding of the biblical accounts—to that end O'Connor describes a useful taxonomy of ancient cities—but only within the horizons of the textual representation of the biblical account of city building,[15] whose completeness is found in the canonical form. This essay remains within the bounds of Genesis' literary-theological accounts of the cities in the pre-patriarchal narratives, and *mutatis mutandis*, accounts of altar building, in their ancient contexts, within the limitations of scholarly offered reconstructions of the biblical account. O'Connor's taxonomy is helpful in this regard.

Of the ancient city's three crucial features—size, function, natural history—the three functions of the ancient city, as defined by O'Connor, illuminate our discussion. First, the bureaucratic or store city, functions as an administrative centre whose purpose it is to collect taxes, characterized by secondary labour and luxury. The latter two, "key to the denunciations of the city by the eighth-century prophets … may also be behind the Tower of Babel story" (31). Second, the industrial city functions as a centre for the gathering of goods. Third, the ceremonial city, functions as a centre "for the regulation of the symbols that undergird and constitute a society," like Jerusalem (31-32). Jerusalem is both bureaucratic and ceremonial; Dan and Bethel are ceremonial (31, 34). But Babel, according to O'Connor, is bureaucratic, not ceremonial. In accordance with his literary theological mode of studying ancient texts, O'Connor explains his understanding of Babel with Amos' critique of labour and luxury and the store cities mentioned in Exodus 1:11 and 1 Kings 9:19. But is this enough to exclude Babel from the category of ceremonial city?

O'Connor's archaeological mode of studying ancient cities, has argued that Babel's city-with-a-tower evokes a ziggurat-like monument that spoofs Babylon, that it "echoes … the formulas used at the foundation of the city of Babylon" that identifies it with the Mesopotamian ideology of the city: the tower's heavenward direction[16] suggests a desire to touch the divine sphere, to establish a harmonious bond between heaven and earth to secure

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[15]   D. D. Lowery, *Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1-11. Reading Genesis 4:17-22 in its Near Eastern Context* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), defines the genre of Genesis 1-11 as proto-history, and then examines the cognitive environment within which to understand Gen 4:17-22.

[16]   Disputed by Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel," 53; Uehlinger, *Weltreich und «eine Rede»*, 253, concluding his evaluation of ziggurat hypothesis, writes: "wenn sie auch nicht als unmöglich widerlegt und prinzipiell ausgeschlossen werden kann, jedenfalls nicht mehr, wie bisher üblich, fraglos vorausgesetzt werden darf"; Patrick D. Miller, Jr. ("Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," *HTR* 9 [1985]: 242) writes that "city with a tower" is a hendiadys, that therefore the text focuses on the city.

blessing/fertility.[17] Patrick Miller's comparison of Babel with Eridu and Dunnu, argues that Genesis 11:1-9 "is a about a human plan to build cities and cult places," and Walter Bührer, that the builders' desire for a name amounts to a "Verewigungsstrategie."[18] The instruction compliance sequence in creation and tabernacle construction accounts of Genesis 1 and Exodus 25-32 and 35-39, have their analogue in the Samsuiluna B inscription. Lines 96-101 declare "I did that which was good to Šamaš, Adad and Aya//I fulfilled the command of Šamaš and Marduk."[19] Requests for individual buildings were common, but royal inscriptions of city building seldom refer to them. "Divine requests are mentioned by Tukulti-Ninurta and Sargon, yet there is no elaboration of that in their inscriptions," perhaps because "founding a new city was considered to be an act of *hubris*."[20] Esarhaddon restored Babylon upon Marduk's order, but he "described in detail how he was hesitant to undertake the work, and consulted the oracles to see whether the gods were at peace with Babylon", for "the foundation of a city was too important a task to be left to a mere human."[21] O'Connor's characterization of Babel as a bureaucratic-storage city, then, is not wrong, but incomplete, for it also fits the category of a ceremonial city, designed "for the regulation of the symbols that undergird and constitute a society."[22] Moreover, whereas ancient society was militaristic, it was not so without the religio-symbolic underpinnings crucial to the construction and maintenance of the ancient temple-cities emblematic of imperial royal theology.

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[17]   Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 243-244; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 548-549; Victor (A.) Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," *JAOS* 105 (1985): 27; Andrew Giorgetti, "The 'Mock Building Account' of Genesis 11:1-9: Polemic against Mesopotamian Royal Ideology," *VT* 64 (2014): 1-20. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of the Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; New York: Seabury, 1978), 113-114. Lines 15 and 86 of the Samsuiluna B Inscription describe the temple as having "its head like the heavens." "They want to break through the God-given order by means of a tower." Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 17.

[18]   Miller, "Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology," 242-243; Walter Bührer, "'Ich will mir Einen Namen Machen!'. Altestamentliche und altorientalische Verewigungsstrategien," *Bib* 98.4 (2017): 500: "Wichtig für unseren Zusammenhang ist, dass für die *Autoren* dieser Texte die Möglichkeit, sich durch Schriftstücke verewigen zu können *real* war." (Emphasis in original.) Giving the project on the plains of Shinar the name "Babel" in 11:9 would then be an ironic form of "Verewigung durch Schriftstellung."

[19]   Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," 26-27; Miller, "Eridu, Dunnu and Babel," 243.

[20]   Marc van de Mieroop, "City and Countryside: The Mesopotamian View," in *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 55, 59.

[21]   Van De Mieroop, "City and Countryside," 56, 61.

[22]   O'Connor, "The Biblical Notion of the City," 31-32.

In O'Connor's terms, the above studies, based in different ways on archaeology, remain "necessarily incomplete, since," as already discussed, "archaeology is a scientific endeavor, always seeking more data, revising hypotheses, chary of syntheses necessarily incomplete." The literary theological is determined by "the beginning and end of Christian Scripture," and thus complete insofar as the biblical text is canonically fixed. This brings us to O'Connor's literary theological suggestion that Babel is a bureaucratic city, based Amos, 1 Kings 9:19 and Exodus 1:10-14.

Amos' condemnation of luxury in 4:1-3 is followed by ironic satire of the cult in ceremonial Bethel and Gilgal (4:4-5), hardly a support for Babel's bureaucracy. And, while Solomon's store cities are part of a list that describes his bureaucratic luxury (1 Kgs 9:10-22), Exodus 1:10-14 is embedded in a narrative of oppression; Pharaoh forces Israel to build in response to its enormous growth. Furthermore, the language depicting the construction of Pithom and Raamses imitates Babel's builders. Thus, Pharaoh's initial solution to Israel's growth, expressed in and imperative plus cohortative sequence (הבה נתחכמה, Exod 1:10), syntactically resembles the human speech at Babel (הבה נלבנה לבנים and הבה נבנה לנו, Gen 11:3). Israel uses mortar and bricks (בחמר ובלבנים, Exod 1:14) as did Babel's builders (ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחמר, Gen 11:3). And, as YHWH examined the project before expelling its builders (cf. לראות, Gen 11:5), so he sees Israel's harsh servitude (ראה, Exod 2:25), before beginning Israel's rescue. Taken together, the building of the store cities in Exodus is more about their role in depicting Israel's oppression in a manner evocative of Babel, than about the cities as such.[23] That is, Pharaoh's oppressive management of Israel in Egypt illustrates the problem Babel depicts: the contrast between what the בני האדם want, now in Egyptian form, and what the Deity wants/permits. The literary theological language Exodus 1:10-14 does not support understanding Babel as a bureaucratic store city so much as it defines the forced building of Pharaoh's store cities in terms reminiscent of the Babel project. The similarity between the Babel and Pharaonic building projects is that God thwarts both; Babel lies unfinished, Egypt is ten times devastated.

Not the store cities of Solomon or Pharaoh, but the laying of the "first brick" of the future altar at Bethel in Babel's counter-narrative, provides a better understanding of Babel. Matthew Michael argues that in its "literary mapping" Genesis sets "the place" where Jacob slept over against Babel.[24] Repetition of key words link the narratives. First, the Babel project has "its head in heaven"

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[23]   Thus, also Bernd U. Schipper, understanding the text to be non-P of the late pre-exilic period, the historical referent points to the forced labour of late 7th century Judahites. See his, "Raamses, Pithom and the Exodus: A Critical Evaluation of Ex 1:11," *VT* 65/2 (2015): 271-273.

[24]   Matthew Michael, "The Tower of Babel and Yahweh's Heavenly staircase," *HBT* 39/1 (2017): 31-45.

(וראשו בשמים), Jacob dreams of a staircase whose top reaches heavenward (השמימה). Second, Jacob calls this "place" the "gate of heaven" (28:17); Babel in the local language means "gate of god." Third, Babel's builders make bricks (אבן); Jacob finds stones, one of which he consecrates, at the "place" (28:11, 18, 22). Fourth, at Babel YHWH comes down (ירד) to see Babel; at the "place" heavenly messengers "go up and down" (עלים וירדים בו) the staircase. Finally, the ambitious builders on the plain of Shinar *receive* the name "confused"; Jacob *gives* the name Beth-El to the stone. Beth-El polemicizes Babel. Where Babel seeks heaven but is thwarted by the Deity, Bethel reveals a connection between heaven and earth, with God himself standing at the top of the staircase. The literary-theological connections between the Babel, Exodus 1 and Genesis 28:10-22 suggest the biblical narrator emphasizes Babel's ceremonial role.

In Genesis' pre-patriarchal accounts not deities, only humans—Cain, Nimrod, and the בני האדם—build cities, and all do so without the divine instruction the ancient world thought crucial for the welfare of its temple cities. If so, then it is crucial to note that the critique of the third city-building comes from the deity associated with earthly Jerusalem, whose opposition to Babylon is well-known (cf. Jer 51:10, 14, 35-36, 50).[25]

2.   The cities of Genesis 11:27-50:26

Explicit city building in Genesis occurs only Genesis 2:4-11:26, and is the province of pre-patriarchal human culture, beginning with Cain and his descendants, carried through by Nimrod, and ending with the בני האדם's attempt to build Babel. Setting these aside for the moment, the rest of Genesis depicts cities but not their construction: Ur (Harran, 11:27-31), the cities ruled by Kedorlaomer and his allies, and Melchizedek's Salem (14), Sodom and Gomorrah (18-19), Nahor (24), Gerar (26), Beersheba (26:33), Luz (28:19), Paddan-Aram (29-31), Shechem (34:21), Bethel (35:1-7; note, the terror of God on the cities all around), cities of the Edomites (36:31-39), unnamed cities in Egypt (store cities [41:35, 48]; the city where Joseph ruled [44:4, 13]; and the cities where Joseph moved the people [47:21, not LXX, SamPen, V]). With the exception of Beersheba and Luz, named cities in Genesis arguably play different narrative roles. First, the patriarchal family leaves Ur/Harran and Nahor/Paddan-Aram. Like Babel, these cities are a point of departure for the patriarchal family; unlike Babel's people Abram is not scattered but receives a definite goal. Second, some cities threaten the patriarchal community: the Kedorlaomer coalition, Gerar, Shechem which evoke the Canaanite enemy, or, Edomite and Egyptian cities, associated with enmity toward Israel. Third, Salem evokes Jerusalem, Israel's altar-city; Beersheba and Luz/Bethel are associated with divine appearances and the altars patriarchs built there (Gen 12:7-8; 26:23-25; 35:6-7).

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[25]   On the Jerusalem-Babylon opposition, see Deryck C. T. Sheriffs, "'A Tale of Two Cities'. Nationalism in Zion and Babylon," *TynBul* 39 (1988): 19-57.

Patriarchal Genesis does not depict city building, only altars constructed by patriarchs. It is these altars[26] that define the cities crucial to the identity of the exilic audience. Not the temple city constructed by the בני האדם without divine construction, but the altars built where YHWH appears, are recommended to the audience. Patriarchal Genesis, then, depicts a mode of construction different from that of the בני האדם. We turn, therefore to the building of cities in pre-patriarchal Genesis.

3.   The cities of Genesis 1:1-11:26

Three increasingly detailed literary-theological accounts depict city building in Genesis 2:4-11:26. The Cain account,[27] 9 words long, adds only that he named the city after his son, Enoch; the Nimrod narrative, 31 words long, associates him with ancient named cities. Neither of these accounts include human or divine speech. By contrast, the 121 words long Babel episode lavishes detail on the human and divine speeches, all fraught with intentionality (imperative plus cohortative constructions). The builders' first speech expresses their desire to "brick bricks" (נלבנה לבנים, Gen 11:3) and to build a city and a tower with its top in heaven. To this they add a second wish: to make themselves a name in order to avoid being scattered. This city is not only their earthly destiny, its tower will also bring them into contact with heaven, a connection that presumably assures blessing/fertility.[28] Having descended (ירד, Gen 11:5) from heaven, YHWH imitates the בני האדם's syntax of intended result[29] to thwart their desire to construct a cosmic centre and to grant them their wish for a reputation: They will be remembered as confused. The length, detail, and intentionality of the Babel speeches all underscore the climactic function of this last narrative episode of the pre-patriarchal narrative. As the third city-building account the Babel episode may also be construed as a detailed evaluation of pre-patriarchal city-building.[30]

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[26]   Gunkel, *Genesis*, 167: "Abraham founded … during his first sojourn … in the later Northern Kingdom, the two greatest sanctuaries of the ancient period."

[27]   It is generally agreed that Cain is the subject of the present participle בנה (Gen 4:17). Dillmann, *Die Genesis*, 98-99; Gunkel *Genesis*, 53-54. Westermann reads כשמו instead of כשם בנו—"… and bore Enoch, who became the builder of a city, and he called it Enoch, after his own name." Nevertheless, he holds that MT intends Cain to be the builder. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 332. On Cain as the subject, see also Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 111; and, Walter Vogels, "Cain bâtit Hénok-ville (Gn 4, 17)," *Theof* 40 (2009): 164, 166. Lowery (*Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1-11*, 115-119), after a careful review of the major views, also translates "he was building a city" (Ibid. 74), referring to Cain as the subject.

[28]   Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 116-118.

[29]   Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 13-14. Fokkelman notes the repetition of the vowels ב, נ, ה, as they appear in the verb בנה and the phrase בני האדם (Ibid. 28).

[30]   On the third element in a narrative as the definitive episode, see Robert A. Carlson, "Élie A L'Horeb," *VT* 19 (1969): 424-425; idem, "Élisée—le Successeur d'Élie," *VT* 20 (1970): 385-405; Robert L. Cohn, "The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19," *JBL* 101

If so, Genesis views and evaluates negatively[31] the ancient pre-patriarchal city as humanity's autonomous[32] attempt to seek the divine. In contrast to the divine appearance at Babel, the theophanies in the patriarchal narratives will occasion a positive results and demonstrate a crucial difference: "In Babylon, one ascends to the divine; in Israel, God descends from his abode to meet the humans where they are (see Gen 11:5, 7)."[33] The biblical world depicts heaven's descent in Babel's counter-narrative (Gen 28:10-22), which includes the transformation of a Canaanite city, Luz, into Bethel,[34] including a "first brick" (אבן, Gen 28:11, 18, 22; cf. 11:3)[35] that functions like but is not described as an altar, until Jacob builds one in fulfilment of the vow he made at Luz/Bethel (35:7).

That of the three city building accounts Babel alone mentions bricks and mortar, supports its climactic and definitive ideological function. Material cultural elements are mentioned in the Babel account and Cain genealogy, not, however, to record material-rhetorical achievements as such, unlike the emphasis on the material in the construction and commemoration of ancient near eastern cities.[36] Scholarship agrees that Israel locates the origin of human culture outside

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(1982) 333-350. On the formula "the third day", see R. Gradwohl, "Drei Tage und der dritte Tag," *VT* 47 (1997): 373-377; H. Jagersma, "…Ten derden dage …," *Tekst & Interpretatie* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1990), 31-47. O'Connor describes the Babel account as the climax in the depiction of urban life, "The Biblical Notion of the City," 19. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 41, calls the Babel account paradigmatic.

[31]   N. L. deClaissé-Walford ("God Came Down … and God Scattered: Acts of Punishment or Acts of Grace," *RevExp* 103 [2006]: 403-417) argues that the divine scattering is an act of grace that enables humanity to fulfil the divine instruction to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). Similarly, Harland, "Vertical or Horizontal. The Sin of Babel," 527-528. But the phrase "to fill the earth", crucial to Gen 1:28, does not occur in the Babel narrative. Rather, it depicts the extent of violence (Gen 6:11, 13) that leads to the flood. On linking the Babel narrative to Gen 9:19 and not 1:28, see, for example, Euhlinger, *Weltreich und «eine Rede»*, 572-575; C. Houtman, "…Opdat wij niet over geheel de aarde verspreid worden," *NTT* 31.2 (1977): 106; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 41-42.

[32]   Jürgen Ebach, *Weltentstehung und Kulturentwicklung bei Philo von Byblos. Ein Beitrag zur Überlieferung der biblischen Urgeschichte im Rahmen des altorientalischen und antiken Schöpfungsglauben* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979), 288-289.

[33]   LaCocque, "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar?" 36.

[34]   Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 69.

[35]   Matthew Michael, The Tower of Babel and Yahweh's Heavenly Staircase," *HBT* 39.1 (2017): 34.

[36]   Harmançarah, *Cities and the Shaping of Memory*, 154-155. The "architectural meaning is constituted through [the] processes of spatial production and by the rhetorical and elaborate, residue-leaving practices that inscribe themselves onto architectural spaces. Architectural remains are then important records of human interaction with the environment and especially with their own past, in such a way that

the narrative of its own historical formation. Of the 14 different "human arts" he discerns, Gunkel writes that none of them are "attributed to Israelites, (they are) … placed in a time long before the formation of Israel." In contrast to the Phoenicians' detailed cultural history, "Israel does not seem to have developed such a complete system."[37] Von Rad considers the cultic activity of Genesis 3-5 to belong "intimately to culture," and that city building alongside the emergence of smiths demonstrates "man's cultural progress."[38] Westermann writes that "Israel did not regard the foundation of cities and urban civilization as something a priori negative"; rather, this cultural formation indicates that city building began outside of Israel's own history.[39] That is, Genesis depicts city-building as the unique province of the pre-patriarchal peoples. Israel, writes Gerhard Wallis, could not ascribe city building and the accompanying culture to the gods—as did ancient Babylon[40]—because she believed YHWH to be the only God. For that reason, "erlegte es die Enstehung der Erfindungen, Zünfte und Gewerbe in die Urzeit. Die Erfinder sind also Menschen";[41] not gods. Israel would identify itself on the world stage as a people that sought heaven's approbation at the place heaven itself choose, not in terms of the ancient world's urban culture.

Genesis 4:17-24 subordinates its depiction of material culture to the narrative's main interest: Cain and his relative Lamech. Syntactically, the *wayyiqtol* sequence foregrounds[42] only four activities: Cain *builds* a city, he

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architectural spaces appear as material worlds of historical representation" (Ibid., 194). The biblical texts are only rhetorically constructed commemorations of cities; the material culture mentioned is, in general incidental, or subordinate to the theological meaning of the structure, as for example, the tabernacle and the temple of Jerusalem.

[37] Gunkel, *Genesis* 51.

[38] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (trans. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 104, 111.

[39] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 327-328. Wilson denies that the Old Testament is fundamentally hostile to cities: "the Israelite historian places no explicit value on either the creative or the destructive forces within the city (i.e., Babel)". See Robert R. Wilson, "The City in the Old Testament," in *Civitas. Religious Interpretations of the City* (ed. P.S. Hawkins; Atlanta: 1986), 8. Walton argues that urbanization in southern Mesopotamia represented the interests of pagan polytheism. God delayed urbanization at Babel because of its distorted view of the deity. John H. Walton, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications," *BBR* 5 (1995): 155-175. Vogels argues that the city in the Bible is neutral. See Vogels, "Cain bâtit Hénok-ville (Gn 4, 17)," 180-182.

[40] Gerhard Wallis, "Die Stadt in den Überlieferungen der Genesis," *ZAW* 78 (1966): 138.

[41] Wallis, "Die Stadt," 136. He concludes "dass Israel offensichtlich nie ein echtes und progressives Verhältnis zur Stadt und ihrer Gesellschaft gefunden hat" (Ibid. 148).

[42] For the hierarchical organization of the clauses used here, Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (trans. W.G.E. Watson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990, §§ 39, 86-87. The *wyqtl* foregrounds activities, the *x-*

names it after his son, Lamech *takes* wives, and Lamech *utters* a vow of vengeance. The cultural achievements of Lamech's descendants Jabal, Jubal and Tubal-Cain are located in nominal clauses (4:18bcd) subordinate to the main narrative action. Their achievements are more closely associated with their mothers than with Lamech. Because the main verbal sequence links Lamech with Cain and his murderous notoriety (4:8, 23), Genesis 4:17-24 is more interested in Lamech as the perpetuator of that notoriety[43] than in the development of material culture. Cain and Lamech are the main subjects of Genesis 4:1-24's interest in life east of Eden.

The second building account (Gen 10:11-12) does not mention the material culture at all. Rather, it links the city-builder to ancient Assyrian, Mesopotamian and Sumerian cities, thereby evoking the imperial power their deities exercised for millennia, and Assyria and Babel later against Israel. Mary Katherine Hom writes, "… whereas a Babylonian or Assyrian monarch typically presumed to be king of the world, 'before YHWH' makes clear that YHWH is actually king of the world, … [Nimrod] is defined and determined only in relation to YHWH."[44] The third building account, in addition to God's involvement, foregrounds building material by playing on the verb "to make bricks" in the first line of the בני האדם's speech; it could be translated: "Come, let us brick bricks (11:3, הבה נלבנה לבנים)." Although bricks were commonly used in temple and city construction, the word play and alliteration based on the consonants of the noun and verb for "brick, to make bricks" brings unusual attention to bricks. Might it evoke aspects of ancient religious culture: the ritual of the first brick associated with Mesopotamian temple? Or, as Fokkelman suggests, is the language of Babel "a *Fundgrube* for these people … the source of creative thinking"?[45] The explicit mention of bricks expands the evocation of the imperial ideology evoked in the Nimrod account: the city and its tower compose a temple-city. Ancient Near Eastern iconographic depictions of deities

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qtl provides background information. See also, Eep Talstra, "A Hierarchy of Clauses in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," in *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible. Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996* (ed. Ellen Van Wolde; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 85-118.

[43]   Ebach, *Weltentstehung und Kulturentwicklung*, 298, writes, with respect to Adam and Eve's clothing: "das Gewicht liegt nicht auf dem Errungenschaften, sondern auf der *Folge Tat-Ergehen*, wobei mit der Strafe zugleich die Bewahrung vor dem völligen Untergang verbunden ist." (Emphasis added.)

[44]   Mary Katherine H. Hom, "'… A Mighty Hunter before Yhwh': Genesis 10:9 and the Moral-Theological Evaluation of Nimrod," *VT* 60 (2010): 68.

[45]   On the brick ceremony, see Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society & Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 272-274; Van De Mieroop, "City and Countryside," 58. On the repetition of the consonants, Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 15-16, 27. Or, creative building.

seated on mountain-like thrones from which flow waters from which grow trees[46] indicate that Babel's tower evokes the mountain-like temple, specifically the fertility/blessing associated with the ancient world's monumental attempts to ritually express harmony with the cosmos to keep the life forces flowing and disorder at bay.[47] But YHWH prohibits Babel's builders from completing their harmonization with heaven with a self-designed temple-city. Pre-patriarchal city-building with its material culture runs into a *cul-de-sac*.

If the sequential reading from Cain, through Nimrod, to Babel argues for the latter being paradigmatic, reading in the reverse direction is also instructive. Hom argues that the Babel narrative is the point from which the Nimrod account may be retroactively evaluated. Given the repetition of חלל, שנער, and בבל in both narratives, "Nimrod and his activities are retroactively reinforced as rebellious"[48]; his association with ancient cities implies the same imperial theology.[49] Given that the Nimrod repetition foreshadows Babel it is uncertain whether the retroactive reading is primary. The most one can say is that the repetition in the Nimrod account secures a reading in both directions, anticipatory from the Nimrod account and retroactive from Babel. The repetition of בבל, חלל and שנער in the Babel passage also supports its function as the climax of Genesis' depiction and evaluation of the ancient city, in the sense that each of these words further explain what the Nimrod account only hints at. From that narrative point of view, all the ancient imperial cities of Genesis 10:10-12 are subsumed under Babel.

Repetition also frames the east of Eden pre-patriarchal narratives. Cain, the first son of האדם and first city builder,[50] names his city after his son (קרא שם 4:17) and the narrator declares that Babel is called (קרא שמו, 11:9) "confusion" after the Lord's visit.[51] Given the frame formed by the repetition of קרא שם and the climactic function of the Babel story it is also possible to construe Cain's city-building as anticipating the ancient world's temple cities, such as Aššur and Nineveh in the Nimrod account. And then there are the descendants of the third son of האדם in whose days people began to call on the name of the Lord (קרא

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[46]   Keel, The Symbolism of the Biblical World, 47, fig. 42.

[47]   Michael Fishbane, "Israel and the 'Mothers'," in The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics (Bloomington: Oxford Press, 1989), 52, describes this relationship in terms of homologies between gods-men-nature/world which are "most fully present in the rhythms of life itself."

[48]   Hom, "'… A Mighty Hunter before Yhwh'," 67-68.

[49]   Karel van der Toorn, P.W. van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," HTR 83 (1990): 1-29; Arie Van Der Kooij, "The City of Babel and Assyrian Imperialism. Genesis 11:1-9 Interpreted in the Light of Mesopotamian Sources," VTS Congress Volume Leiden 2004 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 11-15.

[50]   See above, note, 26 on Cain as subject of the participle of בנה.

[51]   Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 555, writes that Genesis 11:1-9 "is a continuation of the beginnings of civilization described in 4:17ff." (Emphasis added.)

בשם יהוה, Gen 4:26). In Genesis, no one else exercises this kind of cultic activity at an altar until Abram builds one to the Lord who appeared to him (12:7-8).

C   ALTARS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD AND GENESIS

1.   Altars in the ancient world

מזבח refers to a sacred place or to the thing itself, an object associated with sacrifices or libations for the deity. Fixed altars were rare in Egypt but part of the temple furniture in Mesopotamia.[52] The altar can also represent the deity itself.[53] An Akkadian stepped altar associated with Ishtar, "with its high back turned towards the goddess" and which "stands between her and her worshipper" with walls "recessed to imitate the façade of a temple,"[54] indicates it is an analogue of a ziggurat-like altar.[55] If so, an altar whose steps rise to the place of sacrifice or libation also evokes its religious function of providing a meeting place between heaven and earth.

Temple mounds are typically found in a ceremonial city, a centre "for the regulation of the symbols that undergird and constitute a society,"[56] like Aššur or Babylon. While the Babel episode, with its reference to building a tower with its top in heaven, evokes such an ancient city, the rest of Genesis lacks reference to such an altar-city. In contrast to the builders of Babel,[57] the patriarchs build altars, not wherever *they* settle (וישבו שם, Gen 11:31; cf. 11:2), but where God appears to them.[58]

2.   Altars in Genesis

Patriarchal altar-builders are qualitatively different from pre-patriarchal city-builders. David Clines states that "the patriarchal … narratives … function as the 'mitigation' element of the Babel story." As "the dark side of the primeval history … it may be read as the story of how things go wrong when humans take the initiatives."[59] God appears *after* Babel's builders initiate their project (ראה,

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[52]   C. Dohmen, "מזבח *mzbḥ,*" *TDOT* 7: 209-225, 211-213, 211-213.
[53]   Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 145.
[54]   Elizabeth Douglas Van Buren, "Akkadian Stepped Altars," *Numen* 1 (1954): 232.
[55]   "The (Babylonian) temple-tower is, as it were, a huge altar." William F. Albright, "The Babylonian Temple-Tower and the Altar of Burnt Offering," *JBL* 39/3-4 (1920): 139, citing Toy, *Ezekiel*, 187.
[56]   O'Connor, "The Biblical Notion of the City," 31-32.
[57]   Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 72.
[58]   This includes Isaac and Jacob, who are depicted as going up or journeying to a place (עלה, Gen 26:23; נסע, 35:5), but not as settling (ישב).
[59]   David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (2nd ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 85-86. The only instance of YHWH giving instructions for the building of an altar is Gen 35:1. As with other altar-construction texts, it also occurs in the context of divine appearance.

שב (11:5 to stop their construction; he appears to the patriarchs *before* (ראה, Gen 12:7; 22:8; 26:24; 35:1) they build altars,[60] and reinforces the blessing pronounced in Genesis 12:1-3 (12:7; 13:15; 22:17; 26:24; 35:11). In this way the patriarchs "erhalten ihre Bedeutung im Rahmen des biblischen Geschichtsverständnisses von daher, dass sie den zeugnishaften Aspekt ihrer Sendung zum Segen nicht vernachlässigen."[61]

Wolfgang Zwickel's study of altar-building in the OT focuses on two formulae (ויבן + PN + מזבה ליהוה + שם; and, those that use other verbs to depict construction: עשה, קום, כון, נצב, חדש, and רפא) and concludes that the builders did not establish cultic centers. Rather, "die Altarbaunotizen mit בנה, aber auch zumeist mit den anderen Verben, stellen zu allen Zeiten ein Zeichen der Frömmigkeit des Stifters dar." [62] The construction demonstrates piety in three ways: the giving of the name of YHWH in Exodus 17:15 and Judges 6:24 declare the deity's wonderful deeds; Jacob's confession of God's renown in Genesis 33:20; other altar texts depict the petitioner's pious response to divine activity.[63]

2a   Altar building as piety

The altar constructions (Gen 12:7-8; 13:8) depict Abram's response to God's unexpected appearance, that is, he builds the altar in grateful response to the deity's activity; Noah's construction of an altar responds to salvation from the flood.[64] Although Zwickel does not specifically comment on Genesis 22:9; 26:25; and 35:7, these would presumably belong to the same category because the patriarchs build an altar in response to the deity's appearance (ראה, Gen 26:24; גלה, 35:7) or in response to divine instruction (לך...והעלהו...קח, Gen 22:2; עשה, 35:1, 3). From Zwickel's point of view, therefore, patriarchal altar construction, because it is an expression of piety, contrasts sharply with that of the city builders. Jacob's building an altar at Bethel illustrates this piety in three ways: 1) unlike Abram and Isaac, Jacob builds the altar explicitly in response to divine instruction; 2) this instruction motivates Jacob to remove all "gods" from

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[60]   Although he does not mention God's appearance before the altars are built, Pekka Pitkänen ("From Tent of Meeting to Temple. Presence, Rejection and Renewal of Divine Favour," in *Heaven on Earth* [ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004], 28) points to an important difference: "The ancient Near East gods were usually perceived as dwelling in heaven, Yahweh's 'coming' suggests that he 'comes' to the local altar from heaven and not from another earthly locality. The earthen altar serves as a meeting place between heaven and earth."
[61]   Siegbert Riecker, "Ein theologischer Ansatz zum Verständnis der Altarbaunotizen der Genesis," *Bib* 87 (2006): 530.
[62]   Zwickel, "Die Altarbaunotizen im Alten Testament," 544.
[63]   Zwickel, "Die Altarbaunotizen im Alten Testament," 537-538.
[64]   Zwickel, "Die Altarbaunotizen im Alten Testament," 537.

his household (35:2, 4); and, 3) Jacob builds the altar in fulfilment of his vow at Luz/Bethel (35:3).

The contrast between the two kinds of construction surfaces clearly upon comparison of repeated expressions. Both building accounts employ the phrase "to call a name." Cain gives his son's name to the city and Genesis 11:9 applies the name Babel to the unfinished construction project; in contrast God promises to give Abram a great name (12:2).[65] The builders construct their city and tower for themselves (לנו, Gen 11:4), Abram, Noah before him, for YHWH (ליהוה, Gen 8:20; 12:7; 12:8; 13:18). Abram and Isaac call on the name of YHWH, an extension of the piety that led to building of the altar. Before them Seth's descendants began to call on the name YHWH, but without an altar. By contrast, the city builders do not call the name of YHWH;[66] they lack the piety Genesis recommends. Finally, in the Babel narrative YHWH's appearance responds to humanity's construction, the opposite of the altar accounts where construction follows upon this appearance.

Cities and builders

Cain	ויהי בנה עיר ויקרא שם העיר כשם בן	4:17
Nimrod	וחנוך	10:11
בני	ויבן את נינוה	11:4
האדם	נבנה לנו עיר ומגדל וראשו בשמים	
	ונעשה־לנו שם	11:8
Yhwh	ויפץ יהוהו משם	
	ויחדלו לבנת העיר	11:9
Babel	על־כן קרא שמה בבל	

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65   Bührer, "'Ich will mir Einen Namen Machen!'," 501.
66   They do not even acknowledge YHWH, as does, for example, Abimelech (Gen 20:5; 26:28), or mention his name, as does Pharaoh in Exod 5:2, לֹא ידעתי את־יהוה.

Altars and builders

Noah	ויבן נח מזבח ליהוה	8:20
Abraham	ויבן שם מזבח ליהוה	12:7
	ויבן שם מזבח ליהוה ויקרא בשם יהוה	12:8
	ויקרא שם אברם בשם יהוה	13:4
	ויבן שם מזבח ליהוה	13:18
	ויבן שם אברהם את־המזבח	22:9
Isaac	ויבן שם מזבח ויקרא בשם יהוה	25:26
Jacob	ויבן שם מזבח ויקרא למקום אל בית־אל	35:7

Applying Zwickel's third category of altar building as demonstration of piety to pre-patriarchal city building underscores a sharp contrast in three ways: 1) the giving of a personal name of the builder, 2) the goal of the construction: ליהוה or לנו, and 3) calling on the name the of YHWH.

Klingbeil's study[67] offers three aspects of altar-building in Genesis (12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25) that support this contrast between the two kinds of building activities: the situation, ritual objects, and ritual action. In terms of the situation, Babel's builders do not interact with the deity, Abram does; and, consequent upon God's call, Abram and the patriarchs build altars during their journey as resident aliens.[68] With respect to ritual objects, the relevant altar texts describe neither the material composition nor the manner of building them; Babel requires bricks and mortar. Finally, Klingbeil associates ritual action with the phrase "to build an altar"; it is a "summary statement involving sub-rites of construction, sacrifice and adoration/prayer."[69] I will briefly discuss these three aspects with respect to the two kinds of construction.

2b   The situation of the altars

Klingbeil rightly calls attention to the contrast between the episodes' situations, but it is not interaction that constitutes the contrast. Interaction would require a back and forth of the kind depicted in Abraham's pleas with God before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Neither Genesis 11:1-9 nor 12:1-9 depict such. Rather, it is a contrast between the time of divine intervention: at Babel it follows, with Abram it precedes the construction. That Abram, Isaac and Jacob built altars at the place *where* God revealed himself, adds an important nuance to the contrast with Babel, built at the place where "all the earth" settled (11:2). Terah "settled" in similar fashion (11:31); not Abram (cf. הלוך ונסוע, Gen 12:9). Divine appearance between Bethel and Ai, as unexpected as the speech of 12:1-3, occurs during Abram's compliance with the instruction to undergo a journey

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[67]   Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology," 504-505. Gen 35:7 is not included.
[68]   Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology," 508-509.
[69]   Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology," 511.

(לֶךְ־לְךָ, Gen 12:1; וַיֵּלֶךְ, 12:4) to the land God would show him (אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ, Gen 12:1).[70] Divine intention to show Abram the land coincides with showing himself (ראה, Gen 12:1, 7, 8) at a place of his choosing, there (שָׁם) Abram builds the first of several patriarchal altars during the journey to the promised land.

The different destinations of the builders illuminate the contrast between the two constructions. All the earth travels from the east and, arriving in Shinar, settles "there" (11:1-2). East of Eden, the post-diluvial descendants of Cain, the first son of הָאָדָם, have no place to rest their feet (cf. מָנוֹחַ, Gen 8:9; Deut 28:65) because divine intervention scattered the בְּנֵי הָאָדָם "from there" over "all the earth" (11:8). Like their ancestor Cain, they can only wander aimlessly (נָע וָנָד, Gen 4:13, 14). In contrast, the patriarchs, even as resident aliens, do not wander aimlessly nor build wherever they would settle. Rather, their journey has a definite goal, the divinely promised land. The patriarchal goal-oriented journey belongs to the "situation" of altar-building.

2c   Ritual objects and ritual action

In contrast to Babel, the altar-building texts describe neither the material composition nor the manner of building them.[71] The focus is on the ritual action of Abram's building an altar and calling on the name of the Lord,[72] not on sacrifice (except for 22:9), although Klingbeil thinks it implicit. In the light of the ancient world's ritual-cultic brick ceremony and temple-building, Babel's project may then also be construed as depicting ritual-cultic action. That being the case, the pre-patriarchal narratives end and the patriarchal narratives begin with different ritual-cultic action construction projects, each of which textually

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[70]   On linking Abram's altars with geographical locations, see Karel Deurloo, "The Way of Abraham. Routes and Localities as Narrative Data in Gen. 11:27-25:11," in *Voices from Amsterdam* (ed. M. Kessler; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 95-112.

[71]   From the point of view of the Pentateuch's narrative development, material composition and the manner of building altars is treated later, in Exodus and Deuteronomy. See, for example, Saul M. Olyan, "Why an Altar of Unfinished Stones? Some Thoughts on Ex 20, 25 and Dtn 27, 5-7," *ZAW* 108 (1996): 161-171; and, Daniel I. Block, "'What Do These Stones Mean?' The Riddle of Deuteronomy 27," *JETS* 56 (2013): 17-41.

[72]   Klingbeil, "Altars, Ritual and Theology," 506. John Van Seters, "The Religion of the Patriarchs in Genesis," *Bib* 61 (1980): 231, points to Gen 46:1 which depicts a sacrifice but not an altar. "The altar came to serve as the locus or symbol of God's presence …" probably because "the altars, built in narratives about Israel's ancestors, … contained a permanent residue of the theophany." Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Presence of God and the Coherence of Exodus 20:22-26," in *Sefer Moshe. The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (eds. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz and Shalom M. Paul; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 209.

memorialize[73] their respective eras: one named and characterized by confusion (קרא שמו בבל, Gen 11:8-9), the other by "the name," Yhwh (קרא בשם יהוה, Gen 12:8; 26:25; ויבן שם מזבח ויקרא למקום אל בית־אל, Gen 13:18; and ויבן שם מזבח ליהוה, Gen 35:7). The contrast between the two projects, illuminated by three aspects of Klingbeil's altar-building taxonomy and underscored especially by the extended paranomasia[74] of שם ("name" and "there"), suggests that not sacrifice as such, but location and divine appearance before the altar is built are the major concerns.

2d   A pre-patriarchal altar: Noah

The contrast between Babel and Abram's altar in Genesis 12:7, 8, and the similarity of depiction among the patriarchal altars, suggests that Isaac's and Jacob's altars are also to be understood as Babel's antipodes. Thus, the patriarchal altar building episodes remind their audience that attempts to ascend to the divine meet with divine disapproval and that God himself descended to engage his people at the places he will choose (Deut 12:11). Noah's altar, however, distinguishes itself from the patriarchal altars in several ways: it belongs to the post-diluvial but pre-Babel epoch, and thus can also not be the antipode of a temple-city; God speaks to but is not depicted as "appearing" to Noah; and, Noah offers a victim which satisfies God. Scholars understand the role of the sacrifice variously: in view of loss of paradise it points everything heavenward, expresses gratitude for salvation, reconciliation, and appeasement of wrath.[75]

Although the verb כפר is not used, Noah's burnt offering can be connected to the rupture between heaven and earth, typical of a ritual of maintenance which resolves the disruption of the creation order[76] between heaven and earth, a rupture subsequently depicted by Babel's builders. The divine speech which follows the sacrifice—God's commitment no longer to hold the ground in contempt (קלל, Gen 8:21) and to maintain the regular order of the seasons, despite humanity's wickedness (8:21b-22)—may then be understood as the response to

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[73]   Van Seters ("The Religion of the Patriarchs," 232) suggests that the Genesis altar building stories present "an alternative to the iconoclastic method of Deuteronomy, namely a reinterpretation of these objects of popular piety as witnesses and memorials to Israel's past history".

[74]   Jack M. Sasson, "Wordplay in the OT," *IDB Supplement*, 970.

[75]   Dillmann (*Die Genesis*, 149), writes that "der Altar weist als Erhöhung über die gemeine Erde allerdings himmelwärts," especially because of the loss of paradise and the presence of God; Westermann (*Genesis 1-11*, 452-453) understands the burnt offering to express gratitude for salvation; von Rad (*Genesis*, 121) as indicating reconciliation; and, Wenham (*Genesis 1-15*, 189) that the phrase ריח ניחוח indicates appeasement of God's wrath.

[76]   Frank H. Gorman, Jr. *Leviticus. Divine Presence and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 8, 15, 23-24.

the sacrifice as a mitigation of the rupture between the elemental realms and a return to regular blessing/fertility on the post-diluvial world (9:1, 7). Where, however, God accepts Noah's building an altar with its sacrifice,[77] he rejects the בני האדם's altar-city and place (שם, Gen 11:2, 7), presumably because the builders disregarded the crucial boundary[78] between heaven and earth. The divine scattering from a humanly constructed centre (משם, Gen 11:8, 9bis) echoes the deity's exile of humanity from the divinely constructed garden. Finally, Noah's altar is also a-locative; it distinguishes itself from the other altar constructions by not being built "there" (שם).

2e   Location: Calling on the name (שם) of YHWH there (שם), at the altar

Abram only builds an altar at the places YHWH chooses to reveal himself (וירא יהוה אל אברם, Gen 12:7-8). Then and there, unlike Noah, he calls on the name of YHWH (ויבן שם מזבח ליהוה ויקרא בשם יהוה, Gen 12:8), the first to do so since Seth's descendants began this practice (4:26, but without an altar at a particular location). The importance of the adverb "there" (שם)[79] in the construction episodes depends on its first use in Genesis: a modifier of the space where YHWH places the man (2:8), the Garden as cosmic and cultic centre[80] fundamental for an ordered human life in the divine presence. That the adverb next appears in Genesis 11:2 (they settled "there," in the plain of Shinar), suggest that the place of their construction is Eden's opposite. Built without divine instruction YHWH rejects the project and scatters the builders from there (משם, Gen 11:8, 9bis). Thereafter, the patriarchs build altars where YHWH appears to them and there (שם, Gen 12:8; 13:4; 26:25) they call upon his name.

Calling upon YHWH at an altar built in the place YHWH chose, is a "Gründung eines geistlichen Brückenkopfes in diesem Gebiete," a proclamation of its "Eigentumsrecht auf das vom altar 'kontrolierte' Gebiet. Hier hat er seinen Namen, d.h., seine Macht gefestigt." [81] Thus, even before Joshua distributed the

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[77]   Using language that evokes Leviticus (ריח ניחוח, Lev 8:21; and see Lev 1:9, 17; 2:9, 12; 3:5, 16).
[78]   Richard D. Nelson, *Raising up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 36-38, 57.
[79]   Harmançarah, *Cities and the Shaping of Memory*, 190, underscores the importance of place: "The production of places or place-making involves a negotiation between local cultural practices and *political interventions from above*, and requires a delicate balance between cultural memory and stately narratives of history. The archaeology of place therefore demands attentiveness to the long-term biographies of places and the short-term events that transform them. Monument construction incorporates existing 'places of power,' while opening them to new forms of expression, practice and negotiation." (Emphasis added.)
[80]   Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 118.
[81]   H. A. Brongers, "Die Wendung *b^ešem jhwh* im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 13.

land to the tribes, the patriarchal altars declared YHWH's sovereignty and ownership of the land, including his power to bless the land or withhold its fertility (cf. 1 Kgs 18:30-32, 36-39 and rebuilding of YHWH's altar). Although the altar building formulae do not use the verb בחר (Deut 12:11, 21), the deity's appearance, building at the location of the appearance, and the phrase "to call on the name", together indicate the patriarchal altars' likely anticipation of the mountain place YHWH chose for his name to dwell (1 Kgs 8:18, 19, 44, 48; cf. Deut 12:11, 21; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 6, 11), to fill with his presence (1 Kgs 8:10-11; cf. Exod 40:34-35), and from it bring blessing on Abram and his descendants (Pss 46, 84).

D   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study argues that Genesis contrasts two kinds of construction the ancient world employed to order earthly life in accordance with heavenly will: a temple/altar-city, illustrated by the Babel episode, evocative of imperial royal ideologies associated with cities such as Aššur and Babylon; an altar, illustrated by the patriarchal altars. Even as Abram is not associated with a city,[82] so the altars he, Isaac, and Jacob built are not located in a temple-city of his building. They are built "there" (שם) where the deity appears, in contrast to Babel's builders who built their temple-city where they settled (וישבו שם). Moreover, where the pre-patriarchal city-building takes place under the east of Eden curse (ארר, Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 9:25), the patriarchs build altars in the context of the divine blessing (ברך, Gen 12:1-3), blessings repeated in the altar building episodes as they moved towards the land God promised to Abram (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 26:24; 35:10-12). In contrast, YHWH forces Babel's builders away from the place they selected to settle and build their city-with-a-tower, effectively remaining under the declared curse.

The ironic ending of the Primary History depicts Abram's descendants returning to Ur of the Chaldees/Babylon (2 Kgs 25:5-7), for failure to maintain the temple-city YHWH had chosen for his name to dwell (2 Kgs 23:27). Along with the ruins of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 25 those of Babel frame the PH.[83] As ruins

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[82]   Gunkel, *Genesis*, 163.

[83]   According to Gosse and Edenburg two other events in the pre-patriarchal narrative form a frame with the ending of the Primary History: banishment from the land (אדמה) for doing evil in God's eyes evokes humanity's banishment from Eden for gaining knowledge of good and evil; and, Cain's banishment from God's east of Eden presence for shedding his brother's blood "foreshadows the justification given for the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:3-4)." Bernard Gosse, "L'inclusion de l'ensemble Genèse–II Rois, entre la perte du jardin d'Eden et celle de Jérusalem," *ZAW* 114 (2002): 204, 207; Cynthia Edenburg, "From Eden to Babylon. Reading Genesis 2-4 as a Paradigmatic Narrative," in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (eds. Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 163.

they suggest that Abraham's descendants are no better at conforming to heaven's will than Babel's בני האדם; the inhabitants of both are scattered. In exile from Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel envisions a new temple-city for Israel and the nations, a divinely designed city whose waters provide life wherever they flow (Ezek 47:1-12; cf. Rev 22:1-2).

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