

BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON

Reading Genesis 11:1-9 as myth

by

NEIL T OOSTHUIZEN

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

In the subject

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF P J VAN DYK

February 2002



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ABSTRACT

The story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) has been interpreted in various ways down through the centuries. However, most commentators have ignored the genre of the text, and have not sought to interpret it within its mythological framework – therefore most interpretations are nothing short of babble.

A working text is ascertained, and the complexity of the text investigated. The text is then identified as 'myth': within its mythological framework the tower is seen as a temple linking heaven and earth, ensuring the continuation of the royal dynasty (i.e. 'making a name').

When used by the Yahwist Levites during the Babylonian Exile, our story was inserted in the great Pre-History as polemic against the Babylonian concept of creation, temple, and dynasty; and served as both a warning and an encouragement to the Exiles.

The post-exilic Priestly Writer re-interpreted our story as a warning to the returning exiles that their society, and their temple, should be reconstructed as YHWH determines.

Interpreting the story as myth enables it, finally, to speak clearly into our context today, especially that of South Africa.

KEY TERMS

Genesis 11:1-9, Tower of Babel, myth, mythological framework, *'Enuma Elish'*, ziggurat, creation, Genesis 1-11, Temple, Tabernacle, documentary hypothesis, Yahwist Levites, Priestly writer, South African society.

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יברכך יהוה וישמרך
יאר ויהוה פניו אליך ויחנך
ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום

The LORD bless you

and keep you;

the LORD make His face

to shine upon you

and be gracious to you;

the LORD turn His face towards you

and give you peace.

(Numbers 6:24-26 NIV)

A NOTE ON THE ARTWORKS INCLUDED IN THIS THESIS

Since Hellenistic and Roman days, the Tower-episode has engaged the popular imagination and has been embellished in arts and letters by Jews, Christians, and Moslems (Liptzin 1981:37).

The on-going interest in the story of the Tower of Babel is reflected in popular art through the centuries. The reprints included in this thesis reflect the fascination that this story has held for artists down through the ages¹.

1 I am indebted to *The Virtual Babel Encyclopaedia* (<http://www.cwd.co.uk/babel>) for several of the art works shown.

PIETER BREUGEL THE ELDER
c 1563



BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON

Reading Genesis 11:1-9 as myth

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION - MAKING SENSE OF THE BABBLE	1
1. THE PROBLEM	1
2. JEWISH EXEGESIS THROUGH THE AGES	2
2.1. The Jewish Sibyl (the <i>Sibylline Oracles</i>).	3
2.2. Jubilees	4
2.3. Philo's <i>On the Confusion of Languages</i> .	5
2.4. Josephus.	7
2.5. Pseudo-Philo's <i>Book of Biblical Antiquities</i> .	9
2.6. The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (<i>3 Baruch</i>).	11
2.7. The <i>Mishnah</i> .	12
2.8. The <i>Talmud</i>	13
2.9. The Aramaic <i>Targummîm</i> .	15
2.10. Rashi.	17
2.11. Na'hmanides.	18

3.	CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS OVER THE CENTURIES	19
3.1.	Origen.	20
3.2.	Cyril of Jerusalem.	21
3.3.	Luther.	22
3.4.	Calvin.	23
3.5.	Matthew Henry.	24
3.6.	A critique of Christian exegesis.	25
4.	MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TOWER STORY	25
4.1.	Trust in YHWH alone.	26
4.2.	Encroachment of sin (i e technological).	27
4.3.	The purposes of God will not be thwarted.	28
4.4.	A building-block in a complex narrative.	29
4.5.	Babel and Pentecost.	30
4.6.	A South African interpretation - the foundation for <i>Apartheid</i> .	31
4.7.	A critique of Modern Interpretations.	33

5. HYPOTHESIS	33
5.1. Main Hypothesis.	33
5.2. Secondary hypotheses.	33
5.3. Discussion of hypotheses.	34
6. METHODOLOGY	34
* ENDNOTES to Chapter One	35
<hr/>	
CHAPTER TWO - A CLOSE READING OF THE TEXT	38
1. CLARIFYING THE TEXT.	39
1.1. My base text.	39
1.2. Textual criticism and translation of the text.	40
1.3. Unravelling a complex story.	47
2. A TRUE MASTERPIECE IN STORY-TELLING	49
2.1. A carefully structured story.	49

2.2.	Creative use of phrases.	52
2.3.	Literary devices used in constructing the story.	53
2.4.	The means matches the meaning.	54
*	ENDNOTES to Chapter Two	55
<hr/>		
	CHAPTER THREE - THE MYTHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF GENESIS 11	57
1.	TOWARDS THE GENRE OF OUR TEXT.	57
1.1.	Fairy-tale.	57
1.2.	Legend.	58
1.3.	Saga.	58
1.4.	Myth.	58
1.5.	Understanding myth more fully.	60
	1.5.1. Myth and history.	
	1.5.2. The transmission of a myth.	
	1.5.3. Unstated tradition and understanding.	
2.	THE TOWER OF BABEL AND OTHER ANCIENT MYTHS.	62

2.1.	The Titans ascend to Olympia.	62
2.2.	The Myth of Berossus.	63
2.3.	The '<i>Enuma Elish</i>.	64
2.4.	The 'Eridu Genesis.	65
2.5.	Enmerkar and the Lord Aratta.	67
2.6.	The Epic of Gilgamesh.	68
2.7.	Babel and other myths.	70
3.	THE TOWER STANDS FIRM.	71
4.	CREATION, CITY, AND TEMPLE IN BABYLONIAN MYTHOLOGICAL BELIEF	71
4.1.	Creation in ancient Ugarit.	72
4.2.	Creation in Babylon.	73
4.3.	The ziggurat in Babylonian religious belief.	74
	4.3.1. The great ziggurat of <i>Etemenanki</i> .	
	4.3.2. The purpose or function of the ziggurat.	
	4.3.3. The ziggurat and dynasty.	
*	ENDNOTES to Chapter Three	78

CHAPTER FOUR - YAHWIST LEVITES BUILD A TOWER	80
1. THE AUTHOR/S AND DATING OF OUR STORY	80
1.1. The ‘documentary hypothesis’ of pentateuchal authorship.	80
1.2. Challenges to the documentary theory.	82
1.3. The origin of the <i>Tôrah</i> - a living word.	84
1.3.1. From oral to written to oral to written in the ancient world.	
1.3.2. From oral to written to oral to written in Ancient Israel.	
1.3.3. Oral to written to oral to the written <i>Tôrah</i> .	
1.4. The author/s and dating of our text.	88
2. THE SACRED HISTORY AND THE YAHWIST LEVITES	88
2.1. The challenge of the Exile.	90
2.1.1. The Exile.	
2.1.2. The Crisis of the Exile.	
2.1.3. The response of the Yahwist Levites.	
3. THE YAHWIST LEVITES, THE PRIMEVAL-HISTORY, AND BABEL	92
3.1. The Yahwist Levites and Babylonian myths of origin.	92
3.2. An ancient myth modified.	93
3.3. JL responds in the ‘second’ creation-account.	93

3.4.	Babel used as a ‘building block’ in a complex narrative.	94
3.4.1.	Babel the final ‘prop’ as the stage is set.	
3.4.2.	JL and mythological history.	
3.4.3.	JL and salvation history.	
3.5.	An ancient story speaks a new message.	97
4.	JL, BABEL, AND THE BABYLONIAN TOWER-TEMPLE	97
4.1.	JL modifies an old myth.	98
4.2.	The Hebrew understanding of the Temple.	98
4.2.1.	A place of meeting.	
4.2.2.	The Tabernacle.	
4.2.3.	The Temple.	
4.2.4.	Israel’s understanding of the Temple.	
4.3.	‘Don’t equate our Temple with their tower!’	100
4.4.	The Temple is not a ‘good luck charm’!	101
4.5.	The Temple does not guarantee the kingship.	102
4.6.	Only YHWH can ‘...make a name...’	103
4.7.	YHWH has ‘scattered’ you into Exile.	104
5.	THE SECONDARY MESSAGE OF JL	105
5.1.	An aetiological story.	105
5.1.1.	The origin of multiple languages	

5.1.2.	The origin of the city.	
5.1.3.	The aetiology of Babylon.	
5.1.4.	The origin of the ziggurat.	
5.1.5.	Not (just) aetiological.	
5.2.	YHWH alone is God.	110
5.3.	Keep yourselves separate and holy.	111
5.4.	Trust YHWH and submit to his will.	112
6.	BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON	113
*	ENDNOTES to Chapter Four	113
<hr/>		
CHAPTER FIVE - A MYTH MOVED: THE TOWER OF BABEL SPEAKS A NEW MESSAGE		116
1.	RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION	117
1.1.	Restoration and Reconstruction.	117
1.2.	New challenges demand a new response.	119
2.	A TIMEOUS RESPONSE - THE PRIESTLY WRITERS	119
2.1.	The Priestly call - live the YHWH-life.	120

2.2.	Living ordinances rooted in (divine) history.	121
2.3.	Ancient stories speak a new message.	121
2.4.	New developments demand a new response.	123
2.5.	Rebuilding society by rebuilding the cultus.	124
2.6.	The Temple is rebuilt.	124
3.	DIVINE PLANS FOR THE TEMPLE	125
3.1.	The Tabernacle and Temple.	125
3.1.1.	The Origin of the Tabernacle.	
3.1.2.	Solomon builds a Temple.	
3.2.	Rebuild the Temple YHWH's way!	127
3.2.1.	Divine plans - the Cosmos.	
3.2.2.	Divine plans - the Tabernacle.	
3.2.3.	The Second Temple completed.	
3.3.	Ensuring the continuing presence of YHWH.	130
4.	A MYTH MOVED	131
4.1.	A myth moved.	131
4.2.	Dating P with Babel.	131
5.	THE TOWER OF BABEL SPEAKS A NEW MESSAGE	132

*	ENDNOTES to Chapter Five	132
----------	---------------------------------	------------

	CHAPTER SIX - BABEL, BABBLE, AND SOUTH AFRICA TODAY	134
--	--	------------

1.	THE MESSAGE OF THE YAHWIST LEVITES FOR TODAY	135
-----------	---	------------

1.1.	There is only one name that counts.	135
------	-------------------------------------	-----

1.2.	Beware building a private tower.	137
------	----------------------------------	-----

1.3.	Beware seeing people only as bricks.	138
------	--------------------------------------	-----

2.	THE PRIESTLY THEOLOGIANS SPEAK AGAIN	140
-----------	---	------------

2.1.	Beware how you build your Temple.	140
------	-----------------------------------	-----

2.2.	Never think your Temple is God.	142
------	---------------------------------	-----

3.	IS THERE HOPE AFTER BABEL?	143
-----------	-----------------------------------	------------

*	ENDNOTES to Chapter Six	145
----------	--------------------------------	------------

	CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSION: BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON	146
--	---	------------

APPENDIX I - <i>JUBILEES</i> 10:18-27	150
<hr/>	
APPENDIX II - PHILO'S <i>ON THE CONFUSION OF LANGUAGES</i>	153
<hr/>	
APPENDIX III - JOSEPHUS' <i>JEWISH ANTIQUITIES</i> 1.4.1-3	186
<hr/>	
APPENDIX IV - PSEUDO-PHILO'S <i>BOOK OF BIBLICAL ANTIQUITIES</i>, VI – VII	189
<hr/>	
APPENDIX V - ORIGEN'S <i>CONTRA CELSUS</i> 5.30	194
<hr/>	
APPENDIX VI - <i>TARGUM NEOFITI</i>, 11, 1-9	196
<hr/>	
APPENDIX VII - <i>TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN</i> 11:1-9	197
<hr/>	
APPENDIX VIII - <i>TARGUM ONKELOS</i> 11:1-9	198
<hr/>	

APPENDIX IX - THE SOURCES IN GENESIS 1-12

200

BIBLIOGRAPHY - WORKS CONSULTED

218

SALERNO IVORY

1150



The 11th century Cathedral of Salerno houses a collection of 64 ivories, each tablet containing a scene from the Old or New Testament

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION - MAKING SENSE OF THE BABBLE

The story of the Tower of Babel has not only captured the imagination of children, artists, and scholars alike down through the centuries, but has become a part of the Western world-view. We know the story to be important, for we know that we live in a world reflecting the disharmony described by the author of our story (Atkinson 1990:177) - and yet few people seem able adequately to interpret or explain the meaning of the story.

The ten first verses of Genesis 11, which comprise the story of the Tower of Babel, are perhaps the most problematic verses in the Book (Sherwin 1995:104).

These 'most problematic verses' have been interpreted by God's people for centuries, as they have sought to find a relevant message for various generations down through the ages:

Since Hellenistic and Roman days, the Tower-episode has engaged the popular imagination and has been embellished in arts and letters by Jews, Christians, and Moslems (Liptzin 1981:37).

1. THE PROBLEM

However, the plethora of interpretations offered for the Babel story down through the centuries (discussed below), rather than helping in a clearer understanding of what appears to be a fairly simple and concise few verses of text, have only become a babble of contradictions - perhaps many of them deserving the name 'Babel'!

While the various scholars and interpreters have all tried to come to terms with the 'subtlety of the narrative' (Laurin 1978:142), creatively attempting to define what the '*this*' is that the people are being harshly judged for, the honest reader of our story is left with

the feeling that 'Yahweh is ... an antithetical imp or sublime mischief-maker, in no way morally or spiritually superior to the builders of Babel' (Rosenberg & Bloom 1990:192).

Perhaps the majority of Babel's critics are themselves confused, and have missed the point of the story completely. It is, for example, important to note that traditional literature (eg that using myth) was formed using set schemata, these formulae and frameworks being handed down from each generation to the next (Van Dyk 2000:20). Not only were specific formulae passed on by ancient bards and poets, but a whole body of understanding was passed on by audiences too. Thus, when used by a story-teller, a specific word or phrase may convey not just the literal meaning within the spoken, or written, text, but could convey a whole 'field of meaning' (Foley 1992:282). This will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Therefore, if Genesis 11 should be considered as traditional folklore, that is, classified as mythical in nature, it should be interpreted against a specific mythical world-view, a way of making sense of the present world through an understanding of its origins. The purpose of this Chapter is to investigate to what extent past exegetes have taken cognisance of the genre of the text; and, if they have, to what extent they have tried to relate elements within the text to the larger mythological framework of the Ancient Near East. Failure to do so, or to realise the significance of the story within the primeval context (Gn 1-11), may be an important reason for the misinterpretation or limited understanding of the Tower-story in the past.

A more detailed discussion and definition of myths, and how they should always be interpreted in relation to larger mythological frameworks, will be discussed in Chapter Three.

2. JEWISH EXEGESIS THROUGH THE AGES

Originating within the religious life of the Jewish nation, it is to be expected that the story of the Tower of Babel should feature in their writings from earliest times.

2.1. The Jewish Sibyl (the *Sibylline Oracles*).

First described in Heraclitus (5th century BCE¹), the Sibyl was a Greek prophetess, who wrote 'a kind of Greek history in future form' (Eissfeldt 1966:616), speaking of past events as if she had foreseen them (Liptzin 1981:36). The official Sibylline Books were destroyed in the burning of the Capitol in 82BCE (Lanchester 1913:369).

Based on the Greek Sibyl, the *Sibylline Oracles*, collected in the 6th century CE (Eissfeldt 1966:616) consist of 14 books, although books X and XI are lost to us today:

- Books I & II a Jewish substratum, substantially reworked by a Christian author
- Books III, IV, & V Jewish
- Books VI & VII Christian
- Book VIII a Jewish substratum, with substantial Christian reworking
- Books IX, XII-XIV Jewish

Book III is of particular importance to us in this study.

Writing in the mid-second century BCE (Collins 1984:95-99 dates the Jewish Sibyl to the years prior to the desecration of the Temple in 164 BCE, while Lanchester 1913:372 dates the work to the early years of Maccabean rule, c 140 BCE), an un-named Jewish writer, probably working in Alexandria, had combined Sibylline history with Jewish history, resulting in the beginnings of Jewish apocalyptic.

In describing the fate that awaits Rome for her violence towards Egypt, The Jewish Sibyl states:

But whensoever the threatened vengeance of the Mighty God is brought to pass, that vengeance with which once He threatened mortals when they made a tower in the Assyrian land. Now all were of one tongue and they desired to ascend into the starry heaven. But straightway the Eternal laid great stress upon the blasts: then the winds dashed down the great tower from on high, and incited mortal men² to mutual strife. Therefore men named the city Babylon. But when the tower was fallen and men's tongues divided off with diverse kinds of sounds, then the whole earth

began to be filled with separate kingdoms (*Sib. Or.* III, lines 97-107, Lanchester 1913:380-381).

There are two points of special interest in the Jewish Sibyl's version of the story:

- the inhabitants of Assyria built the tower because 'they desired to ascend into the starry heaven'; and
- YHWH³ (i.e. 'the Eternal') blew down the tower.

Both these concepts were to be taken up by later authors. It must also be noted that no mention is made of the city.

In addition, I believe that it is important to note two further points:

- in using the ancient story the Jewish Sybil does not sufficiently take cognizance of the genre of the text; and
- because of this is not able properly to explain why the Assyrians wanted to build a tower reaching into the heavens, nor why God prevented them from doing it.

I will argue in later Chapters that these two points are central to a full and relevant understanding of this 'difficult text'.

2.2. Jubilees.

This 'original and unique book' (Tedesche 1962:1003) relates the story of Genesis 1 to Exodus 12, as told to Moses by an angel on Mount Sinai. The history is related to stress the centrality of the *Tôrah* in the lives of the ancients. The book is to be dated to the years of Maccabean rule, from 153 BCE to Hycarnus' break with the Pharisees in 105 BCE (Charles 1913a:6). Owing to the number of manuscripts of this book discovered at Qumran (Shanks 1998: 160), and the similarities between it, the Damascus Document, and the Manual of Discipline, the book may have originated at Qumran (Eissfeldt 1966:607).

In Chapter 10 of *Jubilees* Moses recounts his experience of Babel, declaring that the purpose of the tower was to 'ascend thereby into heaven'. While they used baked brick for building, they cemented it together with asphalt, which they got from the sea and the

local fountain-streams. They built the tower for 43 years, the tower eventually reaching a height of 5433 cubits. YHWH invites Moses to descend from the heaven with Him, to investigate, and after a thorough inspection, God confuses their language (thus the plain is called 'Babel'). This not only resulted in the dispersion of the people, but in the formation of city-states and nations. YHWH then caused a great wind to destroy the tower, which is called 'Overthrow'. Moses dates the confrontation and destruction of the tower to taking place in the first year of the thirty fourth jubilee (see Appendix I for a full text).

Once again, there are several points worth noting in this story:

- the purpose of the tower was that they may 'ascend into heaven';
- the duration of the building project is given;
- the measurements of the tower are provided;
- Moses, with the angel, descends with YHWH (thereby determining the plural 'let us go down');
- not just the city, but the whole land of Shinar is called 'Babel';
- the story presupposes that people already lived in various cities and places, and were drawn together by the common goal of a specific city and tower;
- the tower is blown over by YHWH; and
- the tower is called 'Overthrow'.

The above details suggest that the tower was of magnificent proportions, built so as to reach the heavens. The story does, however, not clarify why the Babylonians wanted to ascend into the heavens, or how the story related to the cosmology of its time – both points central to an adequate understanding of the story.

2.3. Philo's *On the Confusion of Languages*.

Philo of Alexandria (c 25BCE - 50CE), a deeply religious Jew, used Platonic philosophy to interpret God's relationship with the world, and that of the inhabitants of the world with their Creator and with each other. Philo saw God as Light, a light that is shone upon His creation through the Logos (Argyle 1974:117). While Philo's Hebrew language-ability is

questionable (Hanson 1967:131), he made extensive use of the Hebrew Scriptures, interpreting them with the help of Greek philosophy. Not only was his concept of the Logos to influence Christian theology immensely (Argyle 1974:115), but his exegetical methods were to determine the early Church's interpretation of Scripture (Stander 1990:34).

Philo published his *De Confusione Linguarum* in response to the apparent philosophical attack on the accuracy and trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Having given the text (Gn 11:1-9), Philo outlines the objections offered by his sceptics: they say that the story is based on the Homeric myth of the Aloeidae, who planned to pile the three tallest mountains on one another, thus providing an easy path to the heavens (discussed more fully in my Chapter Three), and a second myth in which all the animals speak with one voice, their 'common language' being confused through their own presumption and pride. His critics declare that it is obvious that our story is based on these ancient myths. In response, Philo declares the Babel story far more ancient than the myths, a story not to be understood literally, but allegorically. He then proceeds to discuss each verse in turn, referring often to the Hebrew Scriptures and his Greek philosophy.

He argues that the '*one language*' refers to a common propensity for evil, an evil in which the unrighteous choose to dwell. This evil is shaped and made up of evil thoughts, thoughts that eventually become 'hardened' into 'truth'. Thus they build their safety and security in their own intentions (*the city*) and their own subverted theological wanderings (*the tower*), eventually attaining such a sense of false security that they are so bold and depraved as to flaunt their wickedness (*'make a name for ourselves'*)! However, even whilst lost in wicked depravity, they are aware that their actions carry eternal consequences. God '*coming down*' to see the tower emphasizes the fairness and mercy of God, Who investigates fully before passing judgement, no matter how wicked the thoughts and actions. God then sends His angels to confound the wicked, confusing them within their own souls to such an extent that they are incapable of any further mischief against their Creator - they are dispersed. And as God '*dispersed*' the wicked, so He '*gathers*' the righteous. (The full text of *On the Confusion of Languages* can be found in Appendix II).

Philo's allegorical interpretation of the Babel story is a totally new exegetical route from that taken by his predecessors, freeing the story from any mythological scepticism, and allowing it to speak directly into the lives of his readers on a different level (Stander 1990:35).

However, it is clear that Philo did not appreciate the implications of the mythological context of the narrative, but rather chose to remove the story as far as possible from any mythological context. By doing this Philo changed from a full mythological interpretation of the text to a symbolic one, an easy mistake often made by later interpreters who do not share the mythological framework of the text (this will be dealt with later in this thesis).

2.4. Josephus.

The Jewish-Roman historian, having written his apologetic *The Jewish-Roman Wars*, published his *Antiquities of the Jews* in 93/94 CE (Whiston 1981:IX). Patterning his book on Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*, and drawing on his knowledge of Greek and Roman sources (Liptzin 1981:37), Josephus sought to write an all-encompassing history of the Jewish People in order to exalt his nation in the eyes of the Graeco-Roman world. Josephus conflates parallel passages in his retelling of the historical books of the Old Testament, and weaves various oral traditions into his story (Mason 1997:65).

This is particularly noticeable in his telling of the tower story: During the times of the sons of Noah the people lived in the hill country, fearful of the plains. Shem, Ham, and Japhet persuaded some to live down in the plains - the first plain settled was Shinar. YHWH commanded them to move out from Shinar, and populate the whole earth, but two successive generations refused, afraid that if they were dispersed they could be more easily oppressed. Nimrod convinced the people that their good fortune and peaceful existence was not a gift from God, but a result of their own prowess, and so people began to see him as their ruler. He persuaded them to build a tower, so that God would not be able to drown them all in another flood. They set about building the huge tower with great enthusiasm and skill, using brick for stone, and waterproof bitumen for

cement, to keep out the flood-water. Seeing that they 'acted so madly', God confused their languages: therefore the place is called 'Babylon', from the Hebrew 'Babel'. Josephus then quotes the Jewish Sibyl, and the Roman historian Hestiaeus, apparently as added validation to his story. (See Appendix III for the full text).

While it is interesting to note Josephus' reference to both Jewish and Greek traditions (i.e. the Sybil and Hestiaeus), it is of special interest to note that he has retold the story as historical fact, thus totally ignoring the 'new' interpretation offered by Philo (Liptzin 1981:37), as well as ignoring the context of the author of the story. It is also interesting to note the interpretation that he has added to the traditional story:

- he provides the reason for building the city and, therefore, for the punishment - YHWH gave a direct command to move out from their plain to populate the earth (possibly a midrash on Gn 9:1 '*Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth'*'), a command which the people expressly broke by choosing to gain security in populating only the Plain of Shinar;
- he also gives the reason for the building of the tower - for protection should YHWH send another flood upon the earth, no doubt an interpretation gleaned from the use of bitumen for mortar;
- this all happens at the instigation of the evil Nimrod. According to Gn 10:8-11 Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, a mighty warrior; it was he who founded several cities, the first of which was Babylon. Not only has the text then opened up the possibility of this interpretation, but the fact that the name נמרוד may be related to the root מרד = 'to rebel' invites this interpretation (Sherwin 1995:105);
- there is no direct mention of the city, although it is implied in the naming of the 'place wherein they built the tower' as Babylon; and
- it is significant to note the grace and understanding exhibited by God in this story. He gives the command to populate the earth for a second time, and then, aware that near-total destruction in the flood did not teach sinful humanity much, decides only to confuse their language.

It will be argued later that this interpretation constitutes a retelling of the original Biblical story; thereby shifting the focus away from the building of the tower to the dispersal of

the people, and so giving an entirely different reason for building the tower - not to reach the heavens, but to protect them from a possible future flood. By doing this Josephus succeeded in divorcing the story almost totally from its original mythological context.

2.5. Pseudo-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities*.

The *Philonis Judaei Antiquitatum Biblicarum Liber* was published in Palestine, just before 70CE (Murphy 1993:6). Although only extant in Latin, the original language was undoubtedly Greek, although the author made extensive use of Hebraic word-play (James 1971:28). Attributed to 'Philo' in the title, the unknown author compiled a haggadic midrash on Genesis to 2 Samuel (Charlesworth 1985:25). While some scholars see the *Biblical Antiquities* as simply a 'retelling of the Biblical narrative apparently for the primary purpose of interesting and edifying the reader and strengthening his faith' (Wright 1965:175), this retelling and extending of the Biblical text stresses the evil of idolatry, and the need for good leadership to keep the nation faithful to her God (Murphy 1988:275).

Pseudo-Philo's treatment of our story is quite unique (Murphy 1986:5):

Having been scattered across the earth, all the people gathered together in Shinar. Deciding to build a tower as a future monument to their unity, they each wrote their names on bricks before firing them. Twelve men refused to comply, for they were righteous, and worshipped only one God. They were tried by the princes, and sentenced to be burned in the furnace with the bricks. Jectan, a righteous prince, persuaded the people to give them seven days' grace, in the hope that the twelve would change their minds. He then gave them provisions, and a guard, and told them to flee for their lives. Abram refused to go, declaring his faith in the faithful God. After the week the people discovered the eleven missing, and so built a special furnace for Abram, and threw him in to it (with a whole pile of bricks – why waste a good fire?!). An earthquake broke the furnace in half, the flames killing 83 500 bystanders, but Abram was unhurt. Abram was joined by his eleven faithful friends, who named the place after him.

However, the people of the land continued with their plan to build a city and the tower. Upon inspecting their endeavours, God decided to confound their speech, and place His

favour upon Abram, His servant. So God changed their speech, and their appearances, so that they even appeared as strangers to each other. And so God scattered them over all the earth, naming the place 'Confusion' (for a full text of *Biblical Antiquities* VI-VII see Appendix IV).

Not only is Pseudo-Philo unique in using the story of Babel to introduce and validate the call of Abraham, perhaps basing his story of Abraham on that of Daniel (Nickelsburg 1980:52⁴), but he adds certain other 'new' features to our story:

- the people, aware of the possibility for disunity and oppression inherent in their being scattered, decide to build the tower as a monument to the unity they once enjoyed. While several scholars see the building of the tower as an attempt to ensure unity (Murphy 1993:42), that is not how I read the text;
- Pseudo-Philo's intriguing interpretation of the phrase '*Come, let us make a name for ourselves*' - the people inscribe their names on bricks before baking them, thus ensuring that their names would live as long as the tower stood;
- God not only confused their speech, but changed their appearance too. This not only ensured total confusion, but stresses the alienation caused by the building of the tower;
- however, Pseudo-Philo's biggest contribution to the interpretation of our story is his comparison between the faithfulness of Abraham, and the sinful arrogance of the people. Abraham is the one who trusts in, and obeys the will of God, while the tower-builders are those who deny the plans of God, regardless of how well-intentioned their own ideas may be (Murphy 1986:10).

Pseudo-Philo continues along the route of reinterpreting the story, thereby separating it from its original mythological context. He interprets the purpose for building the tower in a literal way by explaining that the people actually inscribed their names on to the bricks that they used for building the tower. In this way the Babylonians literally made a name for themselves by building a monument with their names on it. In Pseudo-Philo's interpretation the mythological notion of the tower as a temple, as well as the original meaning of what it meant to 'make a name for oneself', was therefore lost.

2.6. The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 *Baruch*).

This late-Jewish apocalypse bears strong evidence of Christian redaction. Written in response to the destruction of the Temple, most scholars date it to early in the 2nd century CE (c 136CE, Eissfeldt 1966:631, Hughes 1913:530).

Whilst mourning the destruction of the Temple, Baruch is taken on a tour of the five heavens (an earlier version than ours referred to seven heavens, Eissfeldt 1966:630), where he is convinced that YHWH is in control of history. Upon his return he gives thanks to YHWH for His love and gracious will.

In chapter 3 of the apocalypse the seer is shown the Second Heaven:

And the angel of the Lord took me and led me to a second heaven. And he showed me there also a door like the first and said, 'Let us enter through it'. As we entered, being borne on wings a distance of about sixty days journey. And He showed me there also a plain, and it was full of men, whose appearance was like that of dogs, and whose feet are like those of stags. And I asked the angel: 'I pray thee, lord, say to me who are these.' And he said, 'These are they who gave counsel to build the tower, for they whom thou seest drove forth multitudes of both men and women, to make bricks; among whom, a woman making bricks was not allowed to be released in the hour of child-birth, but brought forth while she was making bricks, and carried her child in her apron, and continued to make bricks. And the Lord appeared to them and confused their speech, when they had built the tower to the height of four hundred and sixty-three cubits. And they took a gimlet, and sought to pierce the heaven, saying, 'Let us see whether the heaven is made of clay, or of brass, or of iron'. When God saw this He did not permit them, but smote them with blindness and confusion of speech, and rendered them as thou seest (Hughes 1913:534-535).

There are six important points to note in this version of the Babel story:

- no mention is made of the city;
- the addition of the sin of forced labour. The description of the urgency of the work

reminds one of a similar story to that of the pregnant woman in Rabbinic literature, with reference to the Israelites in Egypt (Hughes 1913:535);

- the height of the tower is emphasized;
- the purpose of the tower was to see if they could pierce a hole in heaven, and discover what it is made of. The text does not make it clear whether this was scientific curiosity or simply grotesque arrogance;
- the fact that YHWH not only confused their language, but blinded them as well, and then transformed them into strange beasts in the second heaven; and
- they were not dispersed over all the earth, but deposited in the lower heavens.

In 3 Baruch the tower story is therefore reinterpreted in terms of an apocalyptic framework, and the reason for building the tower 'reduced' to arrogant curiosity. The original mythological implications of the story are therefore lost, and substituted by an interpretation of the story in terms of crossing technological boundaries, an interpretation that would be taken up by later exegetes (discussed below). In the process the original link between the temple and the city has also been lost.

2.7. The *Mishnah*.

This ancient collection of legal material, dating from 160-200CE (Lipman 1970:18), is divided into six divisions:

<i>Zera'im</i>	the Law of Agriculture
<i>Mô'ed</i>	the Law of Appointed Time (or Festivals)
<i>Nashîm</i>	the Law pertaining to Women
<i>Nezîkîm</i>	the Order of Damages (i e civil and criminal law)
<i>Kôdashîm</i>	the Law of Holy Things
<i>Tohôrot</i>	the Law of Ritual Purity

Each division is, in turn, made up of several tractates, each being a rabbinic discussion on some small point of ceremonial and liturgical interpretation and observance. While many of these tractates may appear to us to be no more than 'ceremonial trifles' (Schechter 1998:2), they were the foundation upon which the Talmud would be constructed in later centuries. In addition, they do give us a glimpse into early Jewish interpretation of Scriptures, and particularly of the Babel story.

In the *Nezîkîm*, in the tractate *Sanhedrin*, section 10, a long discussion takes place regarding those who share in the world to come, and those who will be excluded:

The generation of the dispersion has no share in the world to come, since it is said '*So the LORD scattered them abroad from there upon the face of the whole earth*'.

'*So the LORD scattered them abroad*' - in this world;

'*And the LORD scattered them from there*' - in the world to come.

(Neusner 1988:605)

In fact, those responsible for building the city and the tower will not even be judged, for they stand condemned by their actions (*Sanh.* 10:3.III).

By interpreting our story in a purely 'theological' way, and ignoring the genre and context of the text, the authors of the *Mishnah* have once again ignored the mythological basis of the text, and so have missed out on the significance of the tower, the reason for building it, and why YHWH reacted as strongly as He did.

2.8. The *Talmud*.

As the *Mishnah* gained in popularity, so a collection of similar teachings and discussions grew out of, and parallel to, the *Mishnah*. These *Tosefta* were eventually collected together, and 'canonized' into the *Talmud* by the 7th century (Neusner 1973:88).

The *Babylonian Talmud* contains almost all of the *Mishnah* on *Mô'ed*, *Nezîkîm*, and *Kôdashîm*, omitting much of *Nashîm*, and most of *Zera'îm* and *Tohôtrot* (as these were not particularly relevant to the late Jewish community in Babylonia).

The *Palestinian Talmud* lacks *Kôdashîm* and *Tohôtrot*, and has omitted much of *Nezîkîm*. This slightly later writing 'did not enjoy the benefit of the sophisticated editing and critical development evident in the Babylonian one' (Neusner 1973:171).

In the Tractate *Sanhedrin*, the *Babylonian Talmud* deals with the Babel story under the *Mishnah* on those who will not be included in the everlasting life of God:

The Generation of the Dispersion have no portion in the future world, as it is written, '*so the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of*

all the earth': 'so the Lord scattered them abroad' refers to this world, 'and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad', to the world to come (Epstein 1935:737).

It is interesting to note that almost the entire debate is about attempting to identify the 'sin' of the tower-builders:

Rabbi Shilah taught: They said, 'Let us build a tower, ascend to heaven, and cleave it with axes, that its waters might gush forth.' In the West [i.e. the Palestinian academies] they laughed at this: If so, they should have built it on a mountain!

Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eleazer said: They split up into three parties. One said, 'Let us ascend and dwell there;' the second, 'Let us ascend and serve idols;' and the third said, 'Let us ascend and wage war [with God].' The party which proposed, 'Let us ascend and dwell there' - the Lord scattered them; the one that said, 'Let us ascend and wage war' were turned to apes, spirits, devils, and night-demons; whilst as for the party which said, 'Let us ascend and serve idols' - for there the Lord did confound the language of all the earth.

It has been taught, Rabbi Nathan said: They were all bent on idolatry. [For] here it is written, let us make us a name; whilst elsewhere it is written, and make no mention of the name of other gods [Ex 23:13]; just as there idolatry is meant, so here too (Epstein 1935:748).

Whilst Rabbi Shilah's comments will be discussed further in Chapter Three, it is worth noting the various interpretations given to the 'this' the people had begun to do.

Commenting on the tower, Rabbi Jonathan notes that a third of the tower was burnt, a third sunk into the earth, and so only a third is still standing. Rabbi Joseph identifies the tower as that erected in the Chaldean astrology centre of Borsippa, a place devoid of any wisdom or life.

As with previous commentators, the Talmud ignores the mythological foundation of the story, and so offers various ingenious reasons for the tower being built – none of these reasons really helping in our understanding of why the tower was built.

2.9. The Aramaic *Targummîm*.

The *Targummîm* are translations of the MT into Aramaic, and include halakhic midrash woven into the text. While much of the thought and interpretive process in the *Targummîm* can be traced back to before the turn of the era (fragments of *Targummîm* found at Qumran bear much similarity to the texts we have today: McNamara 1992:43), the earliest probably dates to the 'first centuries of the Christian era' (Metzger 1962:750). However, these important witnesses to the development of the Hebrew Scriptures cannot be dated with any certainty at the moment (McNamara 1962:860).

Three *Targummîm* are of relevance to the development of the interpretation of the Babel story:

Targum Neofiti is generally accepted as the most ancient of the *Targummîm* (Metzger 1962:750). It is quoted frequently in fourth century CE Mishnaic writings, as several passages of 'scripture' quoted by the ancient rabbis are undoubtedly from *Targum Neofiti* (McNamara 1992:3). The rabbis begin to refer to the *Targum* by name by the tenth century.

There are several interesting midrashic additions to the traditional text (for a full text of *Targum Neofiti*, 11, 1-9, see Appendix VI):

- the one language spoken in the beginning is Hebrew;
- the people moving to Shinar was a result of sin. In response to the question 'From where?', Rabbinic tradition stated that their hearts had moved away from YHWH, and so they moved away from Eden (McNamara 1992:84);
- the tower is built with its top 'reaching toward' the heavens', as it was unthinkable for the tower to actually reach heaven;
- the people planned to put an armed god at the top of the tower, to make war on YHWH; and
- care is taken to avoid any anthropomorphisms of God. Instead of God 'coming down', the 'Glory of the Shekinah' is revealed, and God does not decide to go down, but rather declares '...and I will be revealed'.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, also containing material dating back several centuries, can safely be dated to the late seventh- or early eighth century CE (Maher 1992:12). Also referred to as the *Targum Yerushalimi*, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* probably originated in Jerusalem (Metzger 1962:750), although the language used is a hybrid of Palestinian- and Eastern-Aramaic.

Once again, several interesting and informative additions and alterations have been made to our story (a full text has been appended as Appendix VII):

- the people spoke with one language 'and one counsel' (according to Rabbinic tradition 'few words' could be interpreted as 'one plan');
- not only is an idol with a sword to be put at the top of the tower, but the warring statue is to 'draw up battle formations' against YHWH;
- instead of YHWH 'coming down', the author simply states 'The LORD revealed Himself...' (i.e. no anthropomorphism of God here);
- the plural of God is explained by YHWH addressing his 'seventy angels', who descend with Him (*Pseudo-Jonathan* has a highly developed angelology and demonology: Metzger 1962:750, cf. *Jubilees*, etc);
- however, *Pseudo-Jonathan* does not avoid the anthropomorphism in verse 7;
- interestingly, though, the anthropomorphism is avoided again as it is the 'Memra of the Lord' that descends and confuses the languages (from the Aramaic root אמר 'to say', often used as a command or word). McNamara (1992:37-38) suggests that the Memra is used here to avoid the difficult question as to God actively destroying unity;
- the scattered people are divided into 70 language groups, one for each senior angel. These 70 angels had become a significant feature in apocalyptic writing (e.g. *Testament of Naphtali*, etc); and
- after their language was confused, they began to kill one another; this is taken up in later Rabbinic interpretations (Maher 1992:50).

A 'proto' version of **Targum Onkelos**, using older material, was known in the first century BCE, and this material was reworked in Palestine in the third century CE. *Onkelos* was later edited in Babylon, and achieved its final form by the 10th century CE (Grossfeld 1988:32-25). The 'most restrained' (Metzger 1962:750) of the *Targummîm*

with regard to added interpretation, this work became the official Targum of the synagogue.

This version of our story remains remarkably similar to the traditional text, only differing in a few places (see Appendix VIII):

- the name of the plain is not given, but we are told it is in 'Babylonia' - the 'modern' name for Shinar - *Onkelos* prefers the well-known name, offering an interpretation in its translation (Grossfeld 1988:61);
- the tower is to have its top reaching 'toward' heaven; and
- the terms 'the Lord revealed Himself' and 'Come, let us be revealed...' are used as circumlocutions for the difficult anthropomorphisms used of YHWH in the text.

As seen in earlier exegesis of our text, each of the *Targummîm* view the story as an historical narrative, and offer an interpretation without acknowledging the genre, context of the original author, or attempting to understand how it was used within the wider text. In doing so the authors were unable to glean the mythological truth within the story.

2.10. Rashi.

Rabbi Schlomo Itshaki (1040-1105) taught at the Jewish Academy in Mayence, Germany, under the name Rashi. He published commentaries on almost the entire *Tanakh*, as well as on the *Talmud* (Rashi 1970:13-15).

In his commentary on Genesis Rashi makes three interesting comments about the Babel story:

Verse 5: '*And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower...*' reflects on the grace and fairness of God - while He most certainly didn't need to 'come down' to see what the builders were up to, He did this as an example to earthly judges, that they should not judge a case until they have investigated it and understood it fully (Davis 1993:107). This humility in YHWH is again demonstrated in verse 7, where the Creator of all the universe confers with His angelic court before taking action (Rashi 1970:38).

In his comments on verse 7 '*...so that they will not understand one another...*' Rashi resorts to the level of the absurd to explain the text:

One asks for a brick and the other brings mortar.

The first one attacks him

and splits his brain open (Davis 1993:109).

However, his midrash on the final verse of our story '*...and from there that He scattered them over all the earth*' is of particular interest, as he sees this passage as showing that the builders have 'no place in the World to Come' (Davis 1993:109). He then asks which were worse, the sinners before the Flood, or our builders, and answers that it was obviously the builders, for while the pre-Deluge generation were sinners indeed, their sin was against each other, and not against YHWH. In answer to the logical question as to why the Flood generation were killed, while the more-wicked Tower builders were simply dispersed, Rashi states that it was because the builders were in unity, while the Flood victims committed acts of violence against each other (Davis 1993:110) – 'Hence we learn how hateful to God is strife, and how great is peace' (Rashi 1970:39).

Here, too, a 'theological' interpretation is offered, totally ignoring the important mythological truths with regard to the relationship between the tower and the city, the understanding of 'making a name', and why being scattered was so catastrophic to the tower-builders, and to the hearers/readers of the story

2.11. Na'hmanides.

The Spanish doctor and philosopher Moses ben Nahman, better known as Na'hmanides (born c 1195), became known as a religious-thinker of note amongst the Jewish population of Europe for his attempts to bring about reconciliation during the Maimuni-controversy in 1232. It was this public stand that led him to be challenged to defend his Faith in a public debate with the Jewish Christian-convert Pablo Christiani before King Jayme I of Aragon in 1263. Following the five-day debate, which both 'sides' claimed to have won, Na'hmanides published his full argument. This work was declared 'heresy', and he was expelled from Spain. He eventually settled in Acre in Palestine, where he published his great commentary on the *Tôrah* (Newman 1960:1-3).

Na'hmanides begins his commentary on the Babel story by noting the illogicality of the story describing the dispersion of the nations, when it had already been described in Genesis 10:31. He notes that this story should be read as an insertion in the previous chapter (Na'hmanides 1971:154).⁵

Commenting on the apparent sin of the builders, noting that the ancient commentators declared this as the desire of the people to form an unnatural unity, he notes that

...the men of the dispersion were fools, for how could one city and one tower suffice for all people of the world (Na'hmanides 1971:155)?

He then states that the 'sin' can only be understood with reference to the play on 'name'. He notes that God is referred to as אלהים throughout the Flood narrative, but here He is referred to by the holy tetragrammaton יהוה; while the people wish to make a שם for themselves, it is the 'name' (i.e. the divine שם) that 'comes down' and confuses their language. This play on letters and names is easily understood by the student 'learned in the mystic lore of the Cabala' (Na'hmanides 1971:155).

In terms of the numerical value of the letters, the gematria value of the holy tetragrammaton (יהוה) is 26 (י = 10, ה = 5, ו = 6, ה = 5), while the value of the 'name' the people wish to make (שם) is 340 (ש = 300, מ = 40). Therefore, in the Kabhalistic interpretation of this verse, the people wished to make their name greater than that of YHWH.

By reverting to Kabhalistic mysticism, Na'hmanides has totally ignored the genre of the text, the mythological context of the story, and the significance of the tower, the making of a name, and the awfulness of the scattering.

3. CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS OVER THE CENTURIES

As with early Jewish interpreters, the story of the tower and city of Babel also appealed to various early Christian scholars; and their treatment of the text and its meaning was as creative as their Jewish predecessors. In fact, many of their treatments of the Babel story can be traced back to the Jewish writers who came before them (Stander 1990:33).

3.1. Origen.

Origen (c 185-251), the great apologist and Biblical commentator, wrote his *Contra Celsum* in c 246 (Chadwick 1965:xiv). This great theological treatise was written to refute the attack on Christianity by Celsus the Epicurean, who declared Christians to be barbarians, who had twisted and warped the wisdom of the ages through their Christological musings. As such they ought to be banned within the Empire. Origen set out to counter Celsus point-for-point, and in so doing refers to the Babel story on several occasions.

As stated earlier, the Church fathers adopted Philo's allegorical method of interpretation. Origen became 'a master of this method' (Stander 1990:38), declaring that Celsus was wrong to discuss the story historically, for it is obvious that it is to be understood mystically, for therein lies its truth (*Ce/s.* 4.21). In writing the story Moses did not simply corrupt the Homeric myth of Aloeus, for the sacred text precedes not only Homer, but the creation of the Greek alphabet (*Ce/s.* 4.21).

In explaining the true, 'mystical', meaning of our story, Origen interprets the east as the place of enlightenment and fellowship in the light of God. As people chose sin, i.e. moving away from the 'east', they eventually settled in Shinar, the place of 'the gnashing of teeth'. Their movement away from the light of God was evident in their deciding to gather material things ('making bricks'), believing that these material things could bring them closer to spiritual fulfillment. Thus they were entrusted to angels, each angel leading people to a different part of the earth, where their judgement was lived out in cold, heat, attacks from wild animals, etc. The angels also gave each people a different language (*Ce/s.* 5.30. See Appendix V for a full text of this passage).

It is interesting to see how Origen built on the platform laid by Philo, stressing that the allegorical interpretation is the only way to interpret this ancient story: 'He indeed regarded the figurative interpretation of the Scripture as a doctrine fundamental to the Christian faith' (Stander 1990:39). It is also important to note how Origen introduced the angelic means of God's punishment, thus side-stepping the difficulty of the anthropomorphism of our story. Elsewhere (*Ce/s.*4.12.) He states that the term 'God came down' cannot be understood anthropomorphically, for God is all-present and all-

knowing, nor is it to be understood as referring to Christ doing the work of the Father, but it is simply to be understood as a parent 'coming down' to the level of a child.

Origen encapsulates his interpretation of our story by declaring that Celsus is just like the tower builders of old, thinking that his philosophical musings can enable anyone to reach the throne-room of God (*Cels.* 4.1.).

However, Origen (like most ancient exegetes) did not limit himself to only one interpretive method. In his Commentary on Jeremiah he employs the Babel story as analogous to Jer 13:13-14:

*And the priests, the prophets, Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem
He shall fill with drunkenness and He shall scatter them, each one and his
brother, and their fathers and their sons.*

Origen interprets this verse in the light of the tower story:

And we understand this thus: God gathers the righteous, but He scatters sinners (*Hom. Jer* 12.3, in Trigg 1998:183).

Just as God did not scatter the Babel-generation until they sinned by deciding to build the tower, so He draws people together, but scatters them as soon as they sin against Him. Origen concludes his discussion on this passage in Jeremiah by stating that the same thing happens to the righteous and the sinful today (back to analogy?).

3.2. Cyril of Jerusalem.

Cyril (c 315-386), Bishop of Jerusalem, delivered his Lenten catechetical lectures in 349, although existing texts show a reworking, so possibly our lecture comes from a later year (or the texts were developed in previous years, being delivered in their present form in 349, McCauley & Stephenson 1968:2). In these eighteen lectures the revered bishop outlined the various doctrines and practices of the early Church.

In referring to our story he moves away from the allegorical method, seeing the confusion of Babel as a typological foreshadowing of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:

It was a second confusion, in contrast to the first evil confusion at Babylon.
In that former confusion of tongues there was a division of purpose, for the

intention was impious; here there was a restoration and union of minds, since the object of their zeal was pious. Through what occasioned the fall came the recovery (*Cat.* 17.17, in McCaukey & Stephenson 1970:106-107).

This typological interpretation of Babel-Pentecost is still popular in many Christian circles today (as discussed more fully below).

3.3. Luther.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), the great German Reformer, committed the last years of his life to 'an exposition of the Books of Moses' (Luther 1958:IX). Luther began these lectures in July 1535, delivering the lectures on the text of Genesis 11 later the following year. Unfortunately the texts of these lectures that are available to us are not from the pen of Luther himself, and so may not be 'pure-Luther' (Luther 1958:X), although they certainly are strongly based on his thoughts and ideas.

Luther begins his comments on the Babel passage by asking what the sin is that the people engage in:

I believe their motive is expressed in the words: 'Come, let us build *ourselves* a city and a tower.' These words are evidence of smug hearts, which put their trust in the things of this world without trusting God and despise the Church because it lacks all power and pomp (Luther 1960:211, emphasis by the author).

While the building of a city was not evil in itself, the fact that they decided to do it without first consulting God, as a way of exalting themselves, rather than attributing all praise and glory to God alone, was particularly hateful to the Creator. According to Luther this pride and arrogance is a result of the scheming of Satan within their hearts. Luther, ever the pastor, notes with awe the long-suffering of the patriarchs - imagine being surrounded by all this evil, and living for hundreds of years.

In commenting further on verse 4, Luther notes that this arrogant rejection of God, and the embracing of the pride and evil of Satan, is the result of not following the Word of God, as commanded by Moses⁶. It is this same sin, according to the great reformer, which has led both the Pope and the Turks (i e Moslems) to reject God and His true Church.

Commenting on verse 5, Luther stresses that God is always 'coming down', not only to see what people are up to, but to enter into true relationship with His followers. For the sinful, however, this gracious approach becomes a moment of judgement, as it did for Adam in the Garden, and the builders of the tower.

The effect of the confusion of languages is still felt in Luther's time, he says, as the Pope had 'confused' the meaning of words given by God, therefore leading astray many of those who would follow His Word closely. Luther concludes his discussion on our story by noting that the author of the Babel story always refers to God in the plural - an obvious reference to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (Luther 1960:228).

However, once again it is worth noting that the Reformer ignores the three elements, I will argue later, that are crucial to an accurate and true understanding of our text.

3.4. Calvin.

The Swiss Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) begins his commentary on the Babel story by noting that while Moses⁷ has already mentioned Babylon, he now interjects to explain the origin of the name more fully (Calvin 1948:323).

Calvin, in his detailed discussion of each verse of our story, describes the sin of the builders as lust:

This is the perpetual infatuation of the world; to neglect heaven, and to seek immortality on earth, where everything is fading and transient (Calvin 1948:327).

And so they build the tower, not to house the nations (for they have already dispersed), but as a reminder that they all share a common name (Calvin 1948:328). While he doesn't use these exact words, he intimates that that name would be 'Arrogant Humanity'.

A further point of interest in Calvin's thoughts is his interpretation of the first person plural used by God to refer to Himself - he denies that it refers to any angelic host, for it quite obviously (for Calvin, as for Luther) refers to the God Who is always a Trinity (Calvin 1948:331).

3.5. Matthew Henry.

Adopting the same exegetical understanding as Luther and Calvin, Matthew Henry, in his landmark English commentary (published in 1708), sees the Babel story as factual. Although YHWH God had dispersed the nations in Chapter 10, they came together again, preferring the safety of numbers to the adventure of YHWH-obedience.

For Henry, their sin was three-fold (Church 1960:25):

- they chose to build a tower '*with its top in the heavens*' - this was an affront to God, as they thus declared their rivalry with Him;
- they wanted to leave their name behind in history; and
- they did it to prevent their dispersion. The commentator notes that Nimrod was probably behind this, wanting to be the king of all the earth, and thus denying YHWH, the King of all the universe.

Henry notes further that the response of God is clothed in grace, for He allowed them plenty of time to repent, and only ensured their dispersion, whereas they deserved death.

In concluding his commentary on our story, Henry closes with a wry thought: the tower-builders did get a part of their wish fulfilled... a name that has survived the centuries, albeit infamously!

3.6. A critique of Christian exegesis.

Each of the various interpretations discussed above shows one of three different points of focus for our story:

- dispersion of the people;
- the building of the tower; and
- the confusion of languages.

In addition, various understandings are given for the purpose of the tower:

- a temple to the god/s;
- protection against future flooding; and
- a secular building designed to reach the heavens.

Further, we note the various interpretations given to 'making a name':

- arrogance;
- a rejection of God; and
- a desire for immortality.

However, all of these commentators have ignored the genre of the story. This means that they have missed various important mythological understandings.

4. MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TOWER STORY

As with the earlier commentators, the difficulty of the Genesis 11:1-9 story has resulted in several interpretations being offered by modern scholars:

In Christian tradition the story has been seen as one of human pride, of people wanting to take power from God or to reach heaven. Jewish exegesis has focused more on the theme of dispersion. Instead of wanting to reach heaven, the people were trying to stay in one place and avoid being scattered over the earth. The story is then about not upward but horizontal striving (Harland 1998:515).

While Harland's summary is pertinent, the interpretation usually falls into one of five categories (I have added a sixth, peculiar to my South African context), each an attempt to come to terms with a fundamental flaw in the ancient story: the actual reason for God's displeasure is not clearly defined (Farmer 1995:18). To quote our text, the interpretation offered is determined by the scholar's decision as to exactly what the *'this'* is that the people attempt to do.

4.1. Trust in YHWH alone.

The first interpretation given to the apparent 'sin' of the city builders is that of an arrogant rejection of YHWH God: *'Come now ... so that we may make a name for ourselves...'* (Farmer 1995:19). Here we are to understand 'name' as 'fame' - fame among all the earth, and the generations to come (Westermann 1987:81). Rather than trusting YHWH alone for their 'fame', they choose to 'reach for the stars' (Boice 1982:340), by building a city, a society, and a world without God (Maher 1982:83) – for they are now the masters⁸ of their own destiny. Their sin is therefore not in 'storming heaven' (Harland 1998:525), but in denying the Very One Who had given them life. The tower is then not a heavenly battle-engine, but a means of guarding and protecting their new society, and a symbol of its self-sufficiency (Marcin 1984:110).

Their 'sin' is therefore that of *hubris*.

This interpretation certainly is supported by Scripture:

- it sits reasonably comfortably with the judgement meted out by YHWH;
- in Gn 3:4 the אדם and his companion are condemned for wanting to be 'like God';
- it is YHWH alone Who promises a name (Gn 12:2); and
- the name He gives will last forever (e.g. Isa 56:5).

According to this interpretation, the story is told as a warning to people to ensure that YHWH God is at the centre of their society, for any society built on human ideals is bound to collapse eventually. While people may think that their idealistic world is indeed 'Babylon' - a gateway to heaven - it is in fact nothing but 'Babel' - confusion (Sherwin 1995:106).

4.2. Encroachment of sin (i.e. technological).

Some scholars see the 'sin' of the people as the over-reaching of technology: '*Come now, let us build a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens...*' (Sherwin 1995:109). Closely related to the first interpretation, in that YHWH is rejected, in this interpretation the misplaced trust of the people is transferred, not from YHWH to themselves, but from YHWH to their technology.

This interpretation sees a development in the encroachment of sin in the Prehistory of Gn 1 - 11:

Gn 3:1-10	Adam & Eve	Sin crosses personal barriers
Gn 4:1-9	Cain & Abel	Sin crosses familial divides
Gn 4:23-24	Lamech	Sin corrupts social relationships
Gn 6:1-4	Sons of God	Sin crosses over the spiritual divide
Gn 11:1-9	Babel	Sin corrupts technological advancements

As the crossing of spiritual boundaries causes YHWH God to destroy the earth in the Flood, so the corruption of technology causes Him to acknowledge that an out-of-control technology will enable humanity to fulfil their wildest imaginings (Harland 1998:524), and so He acts to ensure that technology will not allow humanity to become all-powerful again.

While this interpretation explains YHWH's strong reaction to the building of a simple city and tower, the encroachment of sin is not logical, as the corruption of technology should have occurred prior to the 'Sons of God' episode in Gn 6⁹ (this will be discussed more fully in a later Chapter).

According to the proponents of this interpretation, the 'this' that YHWH reacts to so decisively is the corruption of technology through the encroachment of sin. With technology now beyond control, both His and its creators, '*nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them*'. So God reacts, not in punishment, but in loving protection of those whom He loves (Gowan 1988:119):

- YHWH banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden, to prevent them sinning further,

- and obtaining immortality (Gn 3:21-24);
- God puts a protecting 'mark' on Cain (Gn 4:15-16); and
- here YHWH confuses the language of the people, ensuring that they are unable to overstep their boundaries technologically again.

4.3. The purposes of God will not be thwarted.

The third common interpretation offered by scholars today is that the sin of the people was driven by anxiety (Gowan 1988:118):

Since the story has the trappings of a judgement narrative in which Yahweh interrupts mankind's misguided activities and scatters them abroad, it may be assumed that the antithesis of this scattering must be the sin. The major error was not the building of a city, but the attempt of the race to live in one city (Ross 1981:119).

Since the very beginnings of Creation, YHWH God has given a two-fold command :

God blessed them (i e the newly created male and female אָדָם) and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gn 1:28).

This command was reiterated to Noah and family:

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth' (Gn 9:7).

Thus the very idea of the people being 'scattered' across the earth is an integral part of God's creation-plan (Brueggemann 1982:98).

However, the people perceive the command to 'scatter' as a threat (Smith 1996:176):

'Come now ... and so avoid being scattered over the face of the whole earth.'

God has had to take corrective action because humankind has tried to avoid carrying out the very mission for which they were created in the first place (Farmer 1995:23).

God created humanity to live in unity (Gonzalez & Gonzalez 1993:23), but it was to be a unity in Him, and in His purpose. The city-builders attempted to find their unity in the protection offered by the walls of a city - thus their sin was one of disobedience.

Knowing that their disobedient reliance on their own culture would prevent them growing in His creative will (Houtman 1977:102), YHWH fulfils His creative purpose by scattering the people across the earth (Brueggemann 1982:99).

The narrative then is a protest against every effort at oneness derived from self-sufficiency and autonomy (Brueggemann 1982:100).

4.4. A building-block in a complex narrative.

A number of scholars, acknowledging the difficulty in determining the 'this' in our story, see its true message as a part of the larger structure of the Prehistory, Genesis 1 - 11. Various scholars offer different constructions of these eleven chapters.

Wink (1992:77) outlines this construction simply as alienation and sin experienced through:

- human sin (Gn 3);
- spiritual sin (Gn 6); and
- social structural sin (Gn 11).

Seeing the structure as far more complex, Sasson (1994:456) outlines these chapters as follows:

<u>From Creation to Noah (10 generations)</u>	<u>The Flood to Abram (10 generations)</u>
i. <i>Creation(s)</i> (Gn 1:1 - 2:14)	a. <i>The Flood and its Aftermath</i> (Gn 6:9 - 9:2)
ii. <i>Warning and Covenant with Man</i> (Gn 2:15-24)	b. <i>Warning and Covenant with Man</i> (Gn 9:3-17)
iii. <i>The Fall</i> (Gn 3)	c. [no equivalent]
iv. <i>Cain and Abel</i> (Gn 4:1-16)	d. <i>Curse of Canaan</i> (Gn 9:18-27)
v. <i>Mankind's Ancestries</i> (Gn 4:17 - 5:32)	e. <i>Nations of the Earth</i> (Gn 10)
vi. <i>The Nephilim</i> (Gn 6:1-8)	f. <i>Tower of Babel</i> (Gn 11:1-9)

Therefore, the Babel story can only be fully understood in terms of the bigger story of which it is not only an integral part, but the final straw for a God Who created a world to fulfil His purposes:

One way of retelling this history is as a narrative of sin and decline. After the burst of incandescent goodness come sin and degradation in growing measure, rendering human existence increasingly broken and problematic. At the end of a series of dead-ends comes the Babel story, a full stop at the end of a sentence which, despite its arresting opening, has degenerated into incoherence, bringing ‘the end of communication’, the ‘deconstruction of language’. ... Here, hope comes to an end: the years roll on without a hint of renewal. The last word is Babel (Smith 1996:171).

Our storyteller has now prepared the way for God’s chosen source of blessing to the world. The story of Babel has prepared the listener / reader for the call of Abram (Plaut 1981:83), discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

4.5. Babel and Pentecost.

We have already noted that several scholars have seen the report of the first Christian Pentecost as referring directly to the events described in the Babel story.

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language (Acts 2:4-6).

Exemplified by Martin Luther (Luther 1960:215), this interpretation sees the post-Babel situation as untenable - the only hope for estranged humanity is ‘the hope for a mode of understanding that will transcend linguistic boundaries’ (Westermann 1987:83). This hope was experienced in its fullness as God poured out His Spirit on the Christian Believers gathered in fear, uniting them, and all people, in the power of the Spirit:

As mere cultural phenomena their different languages remained, but in Christ and His Spirit they were united in a way that transcends and overcomes all such differences and all divisions resulting from them (Bax 1983a:57).

While the interpretation certainly appears to be valid, the exegete should be wary of relating the story of Acts 2 back to the Tower of Babel, and thus ignoring its relationship to the feast to which it is indivisibly linked, the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. Also, by referring back to Babel, the story is removed from its context, and so loses much of its meaning (De Villiers 1988:123).

4.6. A South African interpretation - the foundation for *Apartheid*.

... certain theologians and churchmen in South Africa ... interpret the sin of the builders of the tower on the Plain of Shinar as being defiance of God's command that mankind should split up into different peoples (Bax 1983a:52).

At the Annual Synod of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in 1957 a report was presented by an *ad hoc* committee, entrusted with examining closely the Church's response to race relations. As their 'basic principles' they declared that while all people were created by God in His image, He had created them as diverse peoples in order to fulfil His will upon the earth. When they rebelled against His direct commands, He responded once again in love and grace:

Ook ná die sondeval handhaaf God, terwille van die eer van Sy Naam, die eenheid en verskeidenheid in die skepping deur Sy algemene genade. Hy verorden selfs grotere verskeidenheid, ten einde die magsvorming van die mens in sy afval van en opstand teen Hom aan bande te lê en sodoende die deurwerking van die sonde te stuit. Hy het genadiglik 'n veelvuldigheid van tale en volke gewil en die mensheid oor die hele aarde verstrooi en laat woon (NGK 1961:17).¹⁰

In 1966 the General Synod of the NGK adopted a modified version of the 1956 report (published under the title *Studie Stukke oor Rasse Aangeleenthede*, and in English as *Human Relations in South Africa*).

In response to this report a special commission was constituted in 1970, its report being adopted by the Synod of 1974. The report was published the following year as *Ras, Volk*

en Nasie en Volkereverhoudinge in die lig van die Skrif (in English as *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture*).

In dealing with our text, the report reiterates the viewpoint of the 1956 *ad hoc* committee, stating that it was within God's creative plan that there be different peoples and nations. Thus the tower-builders were rejecting God's express will and creation-purpose in gathering together on Shinar, rather than moving out to populate the whole earth.

Thus the response of God was in punishment for their rebellion, a punishment that turned what was originally a blessing into a source of conflict and separation:

As gevolg van die feit dat die een die taal van die ander nie kon verstaan nie, word wat anders 'n natuurlike differensiering sou gewees het, nou 'n splitsing wat tot gevolg het die gedurige spanning en stryd tussen die volkere, wat volgens die Skrif tot die einde sal voortduur (NGK 1975:16).¹¹

However, this act of God, far from being vengeful punishment, must be understood as an act of grace, for it ensured that sinful humanity would fulfill the purpose for which it was created:

Aan die ander kant is die spraakverwarring ook 'n daad van genade en seën, vir sover daarmee die verdere voortbestaan van die mensheid verseker word, en God sy skeppingsdoel met die menslike geslag bereik (NGK 1975:16).¹²

Thus the story of the Babel-builders became the 'cardinal text' (Bax 1983:117) for the theological underpinning of *Apartheid*:

Die rasse- en volkereverskeidenheid waartoe die spraakverwarring sy bydrae gelewer het, is 'n aspek van ons werklikheid wat kenlik deur God vir hierdie bedeling bedoel is. Om hierdie feit te ontken, is om jou aan die kant van die toringbouers te skaar. 'n Beleid wat dus in algemene trekke (afgesien dus van die konkrete implementering daarvan) met hierdie werklikheid rekening hou, is in die goeie sin van die woord Bybels-realisties (NGK 1975:16-17).¹³

It is easy to see how this unique (and abhorrent) interpretation was arrived at:

- firstly, the basic premise that God's creative will was many '*volke, tale, en nasies*' (i.e. 'peoples, languages, and nations', Dippenaar 1988:71);
- secondly, the sin of the people is identified as being described in verse 1, rather than in later verses (Bax 1983:121); and
- thus, for the compilers of the report, it was God's will that we live a 'life after Babel', and that the Church work to create a 'society-after-Babel' (Cloete & Smit 1994:84).

4.7. A critique of Modern Interpretations.

However, each of these interpretations primarily attempts to extract theological meaning from the text without properly investigating the genre and mythological context of the text, thereby rendering a cacophony of conflicting interpretations.

5. HYPOTHESIS

It is arising out of this common shortcoming that I offer my hypothesis.

5.1. Main Hypothesis.

The genre of the story of the Tower of Babel should be understood as myth, and therefore derives its meaning in terms of its function within a larger mythological framework.

5.2. Secondary hypotheses.

- a) The rationale for building the tower of Babel (a tower that would reach the heavens) should be interpreted against the cosmology of the Ancient Near

East;

- b) The tower of Babel should be seen as a temple, and therefore should be interpreted in terms of the possible theological function of temples in the Ancient Near East;
- c) The term 'making a name' should be understood as an attempt of the Babylonians to establish a dynastic kingship, legitimized by the god/s, and closely linked to the cult (i.e. the temple);
- d) The story of the Tower of Babel functioned within the exilic period (JL context) to explain the reason why the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Judeans were taken into exile (i.e. against so-called Zion theology); and
- e) The story of the Tower of Babel functioned in the post-exilic period (P context) to prevent the returning exiles from misunderstanding the function and purpose of the new temple (which they were to build), and the nature of the Davidic kingship.

5.3. Discussion of hypotheses.

The main hypothesis should be seen as an overarching framework that includes the secondary hypotheses. When taken together, these hypotheses should be successful in establishing an integrated framework of understanding that is plausible within the possible meanings and context of the narrative. They should further be able to increase our level of understanding of the story by exposing the gaps in previous readings of the text.

Hypotheses (d) and (e) are attempts to explain the way in which an ancient mythological narrative (when interpreted within its proper mythological context) can be used by composers of written texts (i.e. the J and P authors) to gain new theological significance.

6. METHODOLOGY

An eclectic approach will be followed when analyzing the text of Gn 11:1-9, i.e. the text will be read in various appropriate ways to be able to answer the questions posed to it:

- firstly, a close reading of the text will be undertaken to clarify the meaning and possible translation of the text, and to deal with aesthetic and narrative structure of the text (Chapter Two);
- secondly, the genre context (i.e. the mythological framework) of the text will be investigated. For this a folkloristic approach to the text will be utilized to investigate the first three secondary hypotheses regarding the cosmology, the significance and function of temples in the Ancient Near East, and the meaning of the term 'making a name' in Gn 11:1-9 (Chapter Three);
- thirdly, the historical-critical method of exegesis will be utilized to investigate the origin and possible historical and literary contexts of Gn 11:1-9 (i.e. hypotheses d and e). It will be argued that the story may have functioned differently within its original Yahwistic context (Chapter Four) and its later Priestly context (Chapter Five); and
- finally, the understanding previously arrived at will allow the text to speak into my South African context today (Chapter Six), after which a brief summary will be given (Chapter Seven).

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1. Throughout this thesis I will use the more scholarly-accurate (and politically correct!) BCE ('before common/Christian era') and CE ('common/Christian era').
 2. While I attempt to make my language as inclusive as possible (within the grammatical constraints of the English language), for the sake of ease of reading I have left gender-specific language as is when quoting from others.
 3. In the Hebrew Text (MT) of the Old Testament the holy name of God is represented by the holy tetragrammaton יהוה = YHWH, usually translated LORD in English. Out of respect for the text, and the tradition behind it, I will use the English transliteration 'YHWH'.
 4. A story taken up by several later commentators.
 5. This 'concern' will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Five of this study.
 6. Ever a child of his time, Luther sees Moses as the author of all of the Pentateuch.
 7. Like Luther, Calvin attributes the whole of the *Tôrâh* to the pen of Moses.
 8. I purposefully use a gender-specific masculine noun here, for I cannot imagine women being so stupid.
 9. For a full discussion of this pericopé, see my unpublished Master's dissertation *The 'Sons of God' episode in Genesis 6:1-4 and South Africa Today*. Pretoria: UNISA, 1998.

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10. A full English translation of this report is to be found in Paton 1958:94-101. There, this paragraph is translated:

After the Fall, too, God, for the honour of His Name, maintained the unity and diversity of creation by His universal grace. He decreed even greater diversity in order to restrict the expansion of power of mankind in its apostasy and insubordination to Him, and to check the effect of sin in these ways. In His mercy He decreed a multiplicity of tongues and peoples and dispersed and established the human race over the face of the earth (Paton 1958:100).

11. In the English version of the report:

As a result of the fact that the one could not understand the language of the other, what would have been a natural differentiation became a division which resulted in continual tension and conflict among peoples, something which, according to the Scriptures, will endure to the very last (NGK 1975a:17).

12. In English:

On the other hand the confusion of tongues was also an act of mercy and blessing in as much as it guaranteed the continued existence of the human race and in as much as God achieved His purpose with the creation of the human race (NGK 1975a:17-18).

13. In the English translation:

The diversity of races and peoples to which the confusion of tongues contributed, is an aspect of reality which God obviously intended for this dispensation. To deny this fact is to side with the tower builders. Therefore a policy which in broad terms (as distinct from its concrete implementation) bears this reality in mind, is Biblically realistic in the good sense of the word (NGK 1975a:18).

LA BASILICA DI SANTA MARIA NUOVA

1180



The 12th century Cathedral of Santa Maria la Nuova in Monreale, Italy, contains over 6 340m² of mosaics, the 130 scenes all being from the Bible.

CHAPTER TWO

A CLOSE READING OF THE TEXT

The narrative popularly called the 'Tower of Babel' story is short and sweet (only nine brief verses in modern versions and 121 words in the Hebrew text), but it is far from being simple. In fact, the text of Genesis 11:1-9 is a carefully crafted and highly polished narrative artefact. Close analysis of the rhetorical, stylistic, and structural elements of the text provides ample evidence that the story is a tightly woven work of art (Farmer 1995:17).

While this story is well-known by every child who has attended Sunday School, the scholar is confronted with four major problems when addressing this 'work of art' critically:

- the author and origin of our passage is not clearly stated, neither is its purpose;
- the story appears to contain various repetitions;
- the modern reader is uncertain as to how to read the text: is it to be taken literally, dismissed as a 'fairy story', or read in some other way?
- The author of our story appears to be aware of a specific understanding behind the text, and, without this understanding, the story is nonsensical.

This means that the exact 'message' or 'meaning' of the text is not overtly clear.

However, it is vitally important to provide an 'answer' for each of these 'problems' in order to ascertain the 'message' of the text.

Before turning to the genre of our text, or its author/s and origin/s, it is imperative that a clear 'working text' is ascertained.

1. CLARIFYING THE TEXT.

In studying a modern literary work the critical student can be sure that the printed text is reasonably accurate, presented as the author/s intended. This is not the case with texts as ancient as ours, where there are several 'versions' of the text, and the oldest manuscripts are separated from the 'original autographa' by several centuries (Würthwein 1979:xviii). It is obvious that over these centuries, with each successive copying of the text, errors, alterations, and new interpretations may have occurred.

Therefore, when studying the Old Testament, it is important to ascertain a clear, concise working text (Deist 1978:249), ensuring that the interpreter is aware of the various difficulties and alternatives offered for the text. It is only once I have constructed a firm textual foundation that I may then begin to study our text in more detail.

1.1. My base text.

The starting point of any textual criticism is the choice of which textual tradition to focus on (Würthwein 1979:112). I have chosen to focus on that tradition represented by the *Codex Leningradensis*¹ as my base text. This textual witness is best represented by the Hebrew Text as published in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1983, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).

Aware of the shortcomings of the BHS (notably within the critical apparatus, Deist 1988:76-83, who actually states that BHS is 'not really fit for any truly scholarly work.' 1988:205), and that this edition follows the *Codex Leningradensis* closely (thereby largely ignoring the many other witnesses to the OT), I have chosen it as my base text for a single, important reason: the majority of Bible Societies throughout the world have chosen BHS as the base text for their translations of the Old Testament. This means that the BHS has become 'canonized' by the Church as its major OT witness *today* (this may well change with the discovery of new texts, etc, in the future - but *for now* BHS is the 'canonized text' of the OT within the Western Church).

1.2. Textual criticism and translation of the text.

While scholars differ as to the accuracy of the Masoretic Text (MT), the vast majority agree that the text of Genesis 11 is 'accurate' - Hendel states that there '...is nothing new to suggest that M of Genesis is an imperfect text' [Hendel 1998:40], while Aalders declares that the Hebrew text of Genesis is 'amazingly reliable' [Aalders 1981:48] - the MT of our story is remarkably similar to that found in other ancient textual traditions. However, I will note the only two significant variations between MT and the other textual witnesses to our story.

As stated by Farmer above, the MT, as well as the other major witnesses to the text of our story, is uncomplicated and fairly straightforward.

I translate our story as follows:

Genesis 11

1. *Now all the peoples of the earth had a common speech, were of one language^a.*
2. *And it was that as they migrated from the east they came to a plain in the land of Shinar, and settled there.*
3. *And they said to one another: 'Come now, let us make bricks, and fire them thoroughly.' And so they had bricks with which to build, and used bitumen for cement.*
4. *And they said: 'Come now, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves, and so avoid being scattered over the face of the whole earth'.*
5. *And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower that the people were building.*
6. *And YHWH said: 'Look now! If as one people all speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.*
7. *Come now, let us go down and confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech.'*

8. So YHWH scattered them from there over all the earth; and they ceased building the city^b.

9. That is why the place is called 'Babel', because it was there that YHWH confused the language of all the earth, and from there that He scattered them over all the earth

^a (verse 1) the LXX adds $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$ = לַכֹּלִים = 'for all of them'²

^b (verse 8) the Samaritan Pentateuch adds וְאֶת־הַמִּגְדָּל = 'and the tower'³

Verse 1

כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

all the peoples of the earth

lit. 'all the earth'

שִׁפְהַ אֶחָת

a common speech

lit. 'one speech'

- שִׁפְהַ = n.f. (seld m.)
'lip, speech, edge'
- אֶחָת = pausal f. of
אֶחָד adj. num. 'one'

וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים

were of one language

lit. 'and few words'

- דְבָרִים = pl of דָּבָר
n.m. 'speech, word'
- אֶחָדִים = f.pl. of אֶחָד

Verse 2

בְּנִסְעָם

as they migrated

lit. 'as they journeyed'

- pref. בּ = 'in, as' + Qal
inf. const. of נָסַע 'to

		pull out, pull up, set out, journey' + suff. 3.m.pl
מקדם	<i>from the east</i>	prep. בִּן 'from' + n.m. 'front, east, afore time' • several different translations have been offered for this phrase; these will be noted later
וימצו	<i>they came to</i>	lit. 'and they found' • cop. w + 3.m.pl. מִצָּא 'to attain to, find'
בקעה	<i>a plain</i>	n.f. 'valley, plain', from the root בקע 'to cleave, break open, or break through'
וישבו שם	<i>and settled there.</i>	lit. 'and they dwelt there'

Verse 3

ויאמרו איש אל-דרעהו	<i>And they said to one another</i>	lit. 'and (each) man said to his neighbour' • cop. ו + 3.m.pl. אָמַר 'to utter, say' • איש n.m.sg. 'man' • n.m.pl. apoc of רַב
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			'friend, acquaintance' + 3.m.sg. suffix
הבה	<i>Come now!</i>		Qal imp. s.m. with emph ה, from יהב 'to give, grant, permit', coll. 'Come now!'
נלבנה לבנים	<i>let us make bricks</i>		lit. 'let us brick bricks' • 1.c.pl. Qal imp. of לבן 'to be white', therefore 'to make white (clay bricks)' + emph. ה • n.f.pl. of לבנה 'brick, tile', root לבן
ונשרפה לשרפה	<i>and fire them thoroughly</i>		lit. 'and let us burn them with burning' • cop. ו + 1.c.pl. qal imp. of שרפ 'to burn' + emph. ה • prep. ל + n.f.sg. 'burning'
ותהי להם הלבנה לאבן	<i>and so they had bricks with which to build</i>		lit. 'and the brick was (used) as stone for them'
ותחמר היה להם לחמר	<i>and used bitumen for cement</i>		lit. 'and bitumen was for them (used) as cement' • cop. ו + def. art. +

- n.m.sg. 'asphalt, bitumen'
- prep. ל + n.m. 'cement, mortar, clay'

Verse 4

נבנה־לנו	<i>let us build for ourselves</i>	1.c.pl. Qal impf. of בנה 'to build' • prep ל + 3.c.pl. suffix
עיר	<i>a city</i>	n.f. 'city, town'
ומגדל	<i>and a tower</i>	waw conj. + n.m. 'tower', from גדל 'to grow up, become great'
ונעשה־לנו שם	<i>so that we may make a name for ourselves</i>	lit. 'and let us make for ourselves a name'
פן־נפוץ	<i>and so avoid being scattered</i>	lit. 'lest we be scattered' • conj. 'lest' • 1.c.pl. Qal imp. פוץ 'to be dispersed, scattered'

Verse 5

בני האדם	<i>the people</i>	lit. 'the sons of Man'
----------	-------------------	------------------------

בני

were building

lit. 'they had built'

- 3.c.pl. Qal perf. of בנה 'to build' (ו before labial)

Verse 6

עם אחד

If as one people

lit. 'the people (are) one'

ושפה אחת לכלם

all speaking the same language

lit. 'and one speech (is common) to all of them'

וזה החלם לעשות

they have begun to do this

lit. 'and this is their beginning (of all the things they begin) to do'

- החלם = Hiph. inf. of חלל 'to pollute, defile, profane' - in Hiph. 'to begin, start' + 3.m.pl. suffix
- prep ל + Qal inf. const. of אשה 'to make'

לא יבצר מהם לעתה *will be impossible for them.*

lit. 'and now it will not be withheld from them'

- ועתה = waw conj. + adv of time, used proverbially 'and now' [BDB 774a]
- יבצר = 3.m.sg. Niph

imp. of בצר 'to cut off,
make inaccessible'

כל אשר יזמו לעשות *nothing they plan to do* lit. 'all which they devise
to do'

- יזמו = 3.m.pl. Qal
imp. of זמם 'to
consider, purpose,
devise'

Verse 7

נרדה *let us go down* 1.c.pl. of ירד 'to go down,
descend' + emphat. ה

- I have purposefully
left this in the plural in
my translation, and
will discuss it more
fully later

ונבלה שם שפתם *and confuse their language* lit. 'and let us confuse
there their speech'

- ונבלה = waw conj. +
1.c.sg. Qal impf. of
בלל 'to confuse,
confound'

לא ישמעו איש שפת ריהו *so that they will not
understand one another's
speech* lit. 'in order that a man will
not hear his neighbour's
speech'

- ישמעו = 3.m.pl. Qal
perf. of שמע 'to hear'

Verse 8

ויפץ יהוה אחם	<i>So YHWH scattered them</i>	3.m.sg. Hiph impf of פּוּץ 'to disperse, scatter'
ויחדלו לבנות העיר	<i>and they ceased building the city</i>	lit. 'and they ceased to build the city' <ul style="list-style-type: none">waw conj + 3.m.pl. Qal impf of חדל 'to cease, stop'prep ל + Qal inf constr of לבנה

Verse 9

בבל	<i>'Babel'</i>	n.pr.loc. - connected with בבל
יִלְפְנֵי שְׁלֵה־הָאָרֶץ	<i>over all the earth</i>	lit. 'upon the face of all the earth'

1.3. Unravelling a complex story.

The great German scholar, Herman Gunkel, saw the Babel story as a skilful weaving together of two distinct stories, both by the same author : one focussed on the building of a city (for which YHWH confused their speech), and the other describing the erection of a great tower:

The Babel (or City) Recension

And it was, when all the earth had one speech and one vocabulary, that they said to one another, 'Come! Let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.' And they said, 'Come! Let us build us a city, and make ourselves a name.' And Yahwe said, 'Behold it is one people, and all of one language. Come! Let us go down and confound there their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech, and that they may cease to build the city.' Therefore is its name called 'Babel' (Confusion), for there Yahwe confused the speech of the whole earth.

The Tower Recension

And when they broke up from the East, they found a plain in the land of Shin'ar, and settled there. [And they said, 'Let us build] a tower, with its top reaching to heaven, lest we disperse over the face of the whole earth.' And they had brick for stone and asphalt for mortar. And Yahwe came down to see the tower which the sons of men had built. [And He said, '...] and this is but the beginning of their enterprise; and now nothing will be impracticable to them which they purpose to do.' So Yahwe scattered them over the face of the whole earth. [Therefore the name of the tower was called 'Piz' (Dispersion), for] from thence Yahwe dispersed them over the face of the whole earth (Skinner 1910:223).

Generations of scholars have agreed with Gunkel's thesis, seeing our text as having been made up of two separate stories, woven together by a later redactor; 'however, such minute dissection of the text begins to strain credibility' (Harland 1998:517). While there is a possibility that this text, in its earliest form, was actually two shorter stories, I will argue later that this story is related by the *Yahwist* author, a master-storyteller; who portrays far greater skill in constructing a story than to leave the 'seams' as apparent as they are in Gunkel's construction.

It is unnecessary to enter into elaborate arguments in order to show that no intelligent Hebrew writer would have produced such insipid texts (Cassuto 1964:236).

I, therefore, prefer to see it as a skilfully composed single story, the complexity of which is purposefully designed to reflect the nature of the action. This will become clearer as we look at the structure of the story in more detail.

2. A TRUE MASTERPIECE IN STORY-TELLING

As the story is about the careful erection of a brick city and tower, it is not surprising that the story is constructed as carefully and meticulously as the tower it describes:

Brief as it is, this text has been carefully put together, making use especially of stylistic, phonetic, and lexical features to highlight certain ideas. Nothing is wasted (Croatto 1998:205).

2.1. A carefully structured story.

‘In this short narrative we have a fine example of Biblical literary art’ (Cassuto 1964:231-232). The majority of scholars have noted the careful, and skilful, structure of the story.

In its simplest form, the story can be seen to consist of two paragraphs, the latter offsetting the first (Cassuto 1964:232):

<i>first</i>	vs 1	<i>the situation at the outset</i>
<i>paragraph</i>	vv 2-4	<i>the action of the people of the earth</i>
offset and balanced by		
<i>second</i>	vv 5-8	<i>the action of YHWH</i>
<i>paragraph</i>	vs 9	<i>the situation at the end of the episode</i>

Both paragraphs are characterised by the central exhortative הִבֵּה - ‘Come now!’, as the enthusiasm and ambition of the humans is matched by the deliberate response of YHWH, the story-teller making use of ‘subtle, corroding irony’ (Fokkelman 1991:14).

Croatto (1998:219-220) suggests a slightly more complex structure:

- a the whole earth had one language (vs 1)
- A
 - b the land of Shinar, and they settled there (vs 2)
 - B construction project: city and tower (vv 3-4a)
 - a not to become dispersed
 - C
 - b over the face of the whole earth (vs 4b)
 - D came down to see the construction (vv 5-6a)
 - X *'now it will be impossible to prevent them from doing whatever they wish to do'* (vs 6b)
 - D' let us come down to confuse their language (7)
 - a' He dispersed them
 - C'
 - b' over the face of the whole earth (vs 8a)
 - B' they ceased building the city (vs 8b)
 - a' He confused the language of the whole earth (vs 9a)
 - A'
 - b' from there He dispersed them over the whole earth (vs 9b)

Croatto (1998:220) acknowledges that, while this construct is plausible, it is 'without excessive uniformity'. However, this structure does stress that the central motif of the story is not the building of the city and tower, but the arrogance and self-sufficiency symbolized by these projects (in later chapters I will argue against this simplistic interpretation).

O'Connell (1988:413) identifies a concentric, twelve-element, structure in the Babel story:

- A 'all the earth had one language' (vs 1)
- B 'there' (vs 2)
- C 'one another' (vs 3a)
- D 'come, let us make bricks' (vs 3b)
- E 'let us build for ourselves' (vs 4a)
- F 'a city and a tower' (vs 4b)
- AXIS 'and YHWH came down to see' (vs 5a)
- F' 'the city and the tower' (vs 5b)
- E' 'which the sons of men began to build' (vs 5c)
- D' 'come... let us confuse' (vs 7a)
- C' 'everyone's language' (vs 7b)
- B' 'from there' (vs 8)
- A' 'confused the language of all the earth' (vs 9)

In support of this structure, Fokkelman notes that the more complex the structure, ...the more difficult it is to break away from the iron grip of such a principle of composition, the easier it is to be convinced of the objectivity of such a pattern and the more readily we can recognize the dominance, the structural significance of such a double, continuous thread (Fokkelman 1991:22).

Thus, in terms of this structure, the story hinges on one single truth... YHWH is actively involved in the world and people that He has created, and responds to their erection of the city and (more specifically) the tower.

I find the structure outlined by O'Connell more feasible, as it stresses the central point of the story – the building of the tower. In later Chapters it will become apparent why this is the dominant theme in these nine verses.

However, this elaborate construct is not the only example of the story-teller's craft found in our story.

2.2. Creative use of phrases.

Not only has our narrator structured his story carefully and creatively, but he has included an ingenious 'play of language' (Croatto 1998:205); even in the English our story 'exhibits an intricate antithetical symmetry' (Alter 1996:47).

The human actors in our drama call one another to action:

'Come now (הבֹּה), let us...'

which is met by YHWH's echoing response:

'Come now, let us...'

This antithetical structure contrasts the actions of humans against the action of God. It emphasises the fact that the human attempts to reach the heavens were not very successful, because God still had 'to come down', or alternatively it may have the meaning that God intervened before the humans could reach their goal.

In a similar way, the people of the plains decide on their ambitious building plans

'... and so avoid being scattered over the face of the whole earth.'

to which the Divine responds

'So YHWH scattered them from there over all the earth...'

In a wonderful twist of irony *all the peoples of the earth*, bound together by a common language and a common goal, end up truly as *all the peoples of the earth*. As will be argued later, this scattering of the people by YHWH in fact is a negative comment on the Babylonians' idea of linking their dynasty directly with the gods in such a way that the kingship was permanently supported by God and was therefore not open to criticism or comment, a concept harshly criticised by the authors of our text.

As discussed earlier, this 'antithetical symmetry' is reflected in the 'antithetical parallelism' (Ross 1981:121) of the story as a whole.

2.3. Literary devices used in constructing the story.

While most commentators note the pun played out between בבל and בלל, this is not the only word-play used by our author:

What more appropriate place for a plethora of puns than in a passage which describes the confusion of language itself? (Klein 1981:64).

The story-teller uses creative repetition as a rhetorical device early in the story to give the hearer / reader the feeling of a tower being built... brick by steady brick. Thus in verse 3 we read:

נלבנה לבנים	<i>let us make bricks</i>	lit. 'let us brick bricks'
ונשרפה לשרפה	<i>and fire them thoroughly</i>	lit. 'and let us burn them with burning'
הלבנה לאבן	<i>bricks with which to build</i>	lit. 'the brick (was) as stone for them'
והחמר לחמר	<i>and bitumen for cement</i>	lit. 'and bitumen for mortar'

However, this play on words and sounds is even more creative and enlightening when seen as *paronomasia*, i.e. using words that are different in origin and meaning, but similar in sound and appearance to emphasize them both through the similarity of sound. Ross (1981:121) notes that:

Once the eye has caught the two words and the attention concentrated on them, then one discovers that an interpretation is put on the one by the other.

Thus there is a clear repetition on the letters ל - ב - נ:

נלבנה לבנים *let us make bricks*

הלבנה לאבן

bricks with which to build

This repetition is reversed in vs 7, as the author uses the letters ל - ב - נ:

ונבלה

let us confuse

This 'sound chiasmus' (Fokkelmann 1991:15) draws the reader's attention to the climax of the story - YHWH's response to the great building of bricks.

This play on words relates to the building activity, or the attempt to link earth and heaven, and may therefore serve the function of emphasising this section of the story as the intended focus of the author. This may suggest that the story should be understood basically as a story about the attempt to link earth and heaven, and that the other elements, that is, the making of a name, the arrogance of the people and the attempt to avoid dispersion, are all themes secondary in their importance to the narrative as a whole. These secondary elements should therefore be appreciated in terms of their relationship to the main focus: the building of a structure that would reach the heavens.

2.4. The means matches the meaning.

In creating our story, the author has used all the stylistic and literary devices at his command:

Alliteration and assonance of sound combine with symmetry of construction in communicating the meaning of the whole (Farmer 1995:18).

Nowhere in ancient mythology is the structure and language of a myth used so creatively and completely to convey the meaning of the ancient tale (Klein 1981:64).

I will argue in later chapters that this structure of the narrative is important in focusing the attention of the reader and, therefore, is important in constituting meaning. The 'full' meaning of the text can, however, only become clear when its references to the larger mythological framework of the Ancient Near East have been investigated. This implies a proper appreciation of the genre context of the narrative (Van Dyk 2000:52).

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- 1 A brief, but informative, discussion on *Leningradensis* is Beck & Sanders 1997.
 - 2 Hendel (1998:92) sees this as an attempt to harmonize vs 1 with **לְכַלֵּם אֶחָד** in vs 6. As such, it does not impact on the translation or meaning of our text.
 - 3 While Hendel (1998:144) sees this as simply another harmonization, this time with **וְאֶת־הַמַּגִּדֹל** in vs 5, I will argue later that it reflects an important theological stress within the text.

THE BEDFORD BOOK OF HOURS

1424



CHAPTER THREE

THE MYTHOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF GENESIS 11

It has to be recognized ... that these ... scriptures display the distinctive marks of their own time: the revelation to which they bear witness was recorded by men who had a world-view very different from our own and had of necessity to interpret it in terms of their own culture. In particular, they lived in a time of mythological thinking and frequently used the language of myth (or mythology) to express their God-given religious insights, i.e. they sought to express truth, and more especially the ultimate truth about God, in the form of narrative, using concepts and terms proper to the thought-form of their generation, in an attempt to disclose its inner meaning (Russell 1993:356).

1. TOWARDS THE GENRE OF OUR TEXT.¹

While the majority of scholars agree that Genesis 11:1-9 is an ancient myth, albeit one that has received much 'reworking' by its present author (Skinner 1910:227), several scholars have insisted that this specific text (and all of the prehistorical Genesis 1-11) is history and not myth (Oswalt 1977:168). Positions such as that adopted by Oswalt are taken because 'myth' is equated with 'fairy story'. The study of myth, and the development of myth, has shown that this is far from the truth (an excellent summary on the study of myth in relation to the OT is to be found in Rogerson 1974). To gain a clearer understanding of myth, I refer briefly at the other genres often equated with myth (a more detailed study is beyond the scope of this thesis).

1.1. Fairy-tale.

A fairy-tale is a work of fiction, although it may often appear to be rooted in history. The purpose of the fairy-tale is 'primarily to satisfy the ordinary human impulse to entertain,

and to be entertained, by a good story' (Otzen 1980a:6). While the fairy-tale may be used to convey a moral truth, it is not useful for expressing deep spiritual truths. Those who believe the OT to be of religious significance will agree that it does not contain this genre of literature.

1.2. Legend.

A legend is a story of a famous hero (or heroes), rooted in a known historical and geographical framework, which 'presents the hero in a favourable and biased way and is strongly coloured with fantastic and unbelievable deeds performed by the hero' (Van Dyk 1987:56). The legend always has an 'edifying thrust' (Otzen 1980a:7). There are several stories in the Old Testament which can be classified as 'legend' (e.g. the fantastic exploits of Elijah and Elisha, the stories of Daniel in captivity, etc).

1.3. Saga.

A saga is also a story of a famous ancestor (or ancestors), but is rooted in a time before recorded history, although the author usually attempts to 'historicize' the story by placing it in a certain time and geographic location. Thus 'a saga attempts to be history' (Otzen 1980a:6). While the saga often includes the supernatural and the divine, the 'hero' is a human (Van Dyk 1987:55). The saga is usually explanatory, and is told to give later generations an understanding of their ancestral roots, and of important phenomena in the natural world (Otzen 1980a:6). Sagas in the OT are plentiful (e.g. Lot's wife, the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, etc).

1.4. Myth.

A myth is a story told of the gods (or God), and is set in a time long before recorded history. The myth is told to explain the origin of things. Van Dyk (1987:55) has defined a myth as:

It is a story:

- which (although unhistorical) is the highest expression of a people's religious, social, and economic truths;
- in which God (or the gods) are the chief character(s);
- which is usually enacted at the dawn of time. That is, it deals with 'primeval' events which are of decisive importance in the situation of ancient (and modern) man.

Swiggers (1999:188-189) goes further in his definition:

- myth is a narrative, which usually involves a certain degree of literary elaboration;
- myth is a true story about the holy, about a transcendental experience of man;
- the mythical story is situated in non-historic times: it is 'meta-historical' or 'extra-temporal', since it is precisely the myth that installs the conditions for human reality;
- a myth is an anonymous narrative and belongs, as a collective property, to the community; each member of the community is introduced to the mythical universe through the stories that are told within the community;
- the mythical content is paradigmatic: it sets an example for the conduct of man, or intends to show how man has to behave before God/the gods. The paradigmatic nature of the myth, its message being repeated over and over again, is intimately tied up with its 'extra-temporal' character.

Therefore, the myth, while rooted in the distant mists of time, is developed for the time of the author, and is faithful to his/her understanding of events or phenomena. However, simply categorizing mythical thought as a 'primitive' or 'prescientific' attempt to understand the intricacies of existence is restricting (Rogerson 1974:176). The myth is developed as a means for the person with a certain (mythical) worldview, i.e. that the world is always in the 'process of becoming' as the God/s act on the life and world of the devout believer (Childs 1960:18), to understand, and exist in, a changing world. In so

doing the myth 'stabilizes and orders, or regenerates and gives meaning to, what is seen as the chaos of human ... existence' (Moye 1990:579).

In addition, the myth is also firmly rooted in the world of the cult (Soggin 1976:47), as a retelling or re-enactment of the myth enables the worshipper to enter into the 'factual reality' (Usher 1981:558) of the primeval event, and enables the truth of that original event to impact on his/her life in the present (Childs 1960:19). However, Rogerson (1974:177) warns against seeing the myth as only linked to the cult.

According to this definition, there are several myths within the Old Testament (e.g. the creation accounts, Adam and Eve, Noah), as well as distinct mythical elements in several Psalms and in the Major Prophets.

From the above discussion, I assert that the Babel text be classified as 'myth':

- it is enacted in the dawn of time;
- it involves God/s as the main character/s; and
- it is an attempt to explain the origin of certain phenomena, and convey the highest truth that its author was capable of understanding.

1.5. Understanding myth more fully.

It is obvious from the above discussion that the mythological understanding is simply a specific world-view, a way (albeit largely ancient) of making sense of the present world through an understanding of its origins. This world-view is no less relevant than my own scientific understanding (Russel 1993:359).

However, in seeking more fully to understand the mythological world-view, there are three points that must be addressed:

1.5.1. Myth and history.

While it is obvious from our definitions of the genre that a myth was told because it was found to contain certain fundamental truth, Van Dyk (2000:107) refers to this as 'fictional truth', as it was believed to be historically true by the storyteller and his/her audience. Thus, the myth was not simply told in order to convey a specific moral teaching or understanding, but was seen as an integral part of the history of the people whose world-view it formed (this will become clearer in my next Chapter).

1.5.2. The transmission of a myth.

In the majority of myths it is possible to discern the social and cultural practice of storytelling, as the myth went through several stages of oral development (in the case of the tower story this will be dealt with in our next Chapter). I have already noted that, like all genres of literature, myths were formed using set schemata, these formulae and frameworks being handed down from each generation to the next (Van Dyk 2000:20). This, too, will be discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

1.5.3. Unstated tradition and understanding.

In outlining the problem in past interpretations, I noted that not only were specific formulae passed on by ancient bards and poets, but a whole body of understanding was passed on by audiences too, referred to in the study of linguistics as a 'script' (Richards *et al* 1997:324). Thus, when used by a story-teller, a specific word or phrase may convey not just the literal meaning within the spoken, or written, text, but could convey a whole 'field of meaning' (Foley 1992:282). This will be discussed further later in this Chapter.

2. THE TOWER OF BABEL AND OTHER ANCIENT MYTHS.

[The Tower of Babel] is one of the few early tales in Genesis that has no exact parallel in neighbouring civilizations (unlike the sagas of creation or the flood) (Beck 1995:13).

While there is no Babylonian version of the story of the city and tower of Babel (Skinner 1910:230), or other Near Eastern parallels to this myth (Cassuto 1964:227), there are several ancient myths with similarities to it.

2.1. The Titans ascend to Olympia.

We have already noted that Philo of Alexandria defended our story against the attack that Babel was based on the Homeric myth of the Aloeidae.

In telling of his journey to the underworld, Odysseus relates a remarkable story:

After I saw Iphimedeia, wife of Aloeus, and she told me how she had been joined in love with Poseidon and borne two sons to him: Otis like a god, and the far-famed Ephialtes. And these were the tallest men the grain-giving earth has brought forth ever, and the handsomest by far, after famous Orion. When they were only nine years old they measured nine cubits across, but in height they grew to nine fathoms, and even made threats against the immortal gods on Olympus, that they would carry the turmoil of battle with all its many sorrows against them. And were minded to pile Ossa on Olympus, and above Ossa, Pelion of the trembling leaves, to climb the sky. Surely they would have carried it out if they had come to maturity, but the son of Zeus whom Leto with auburn hair had borne him, Apollo, killed them both, before ever the down gathered below their temples, or on their chins the beards had blossomed (*Od*, XI, Lattimore 1965:176).

While there is an important similarity between this story and Babel, the desire of the Titans was to wrest power from the gods, while the Babel-builders were seeking immortality, even if only in name and monument (Liptzin 1981:35). However, it is interesting to note that the semi-divine giants had stormed the heavenlies, to wage war against the gods, an interpretation of Babel reflected in several ancient interpretations of our story (as discussed in Chapter One).

2.2. The Myth of Berossus.

Not only did Philo note the similarity of the Babel story to that of Berossus, but Calvin also saw it as related to the myth of Berossus (Calvin 1948:324).

Writing in the early Hellenistic period, the Chaldean Berossus combined various Near Eastern myths, history, and religious literature into a continuous story (Baumgarten 1974:313), obviously for a Greek audience. In his *Babylonika*, he tells of the origin of language:

Together with the first human population, the creator god Bel constructed the wall of Babylon, its Temple (Esagila), and the tiered tower of the temple (Etemenanki). Under the rule of Bel, people were united and monolingual, and without cities. Nabu, the inventor of writing, however, intervened and taught the inhabitants various languages, thereby causing the first conflict (Block 1984:336).

This story, while not a parallel to the Babel myth, contains several points of interest (each of which will be investigated further in later chapters):

- the origin of various languages is linked to Babylon;
- Babylon is seen as the first city ever built;
- the city is seen as containing the tiered-tower of Etemenanki; and
- the 'various languages' resulted in conflict (i.e. division).

However, it is also important to note the differences between Babel and Berossus:

- the city and temple are built by the creator god Bel (this will be discussed later in

this Chapter);

- the various new languages are brought about by Nabu², and not by Bel; and
- these languages appear to be introduced, not as a punishment, but as a result of divine rivalry (Block 1984:336).

2.3. The '*Enuma Elish*.

The Akkadian creation epic '*Enuma Elish* ('When on high') was recited 'with due solemnity on the fourth day of the New Year's festival' (Speiser 1969a:60). Consisting of seven tablets, the oldest extant version of which is dated no earlier than 1000BCE, the epic probably originated during the Old Babylonian period (Speiser 1969a), although such an early date has been questioned (Lambert 1994:100, Grayson 1969a:501).

This myth tells of the epic battle with which the earth, and all her inhabitants, came into being, as various lesser deities struggled with Apsu (the creator god of the deep) and Tiamat (the mother-goddess), as they gradually brought order out of the cosmic chaos which surrounded them.

In Tablet VI we read of Marduk creating humanity, and setting the lesser Anunnaki to watch over his creation. As a token of thanks to their master they build a city with a temple at its centre - the great city of Babylon:

When Marduk heard this,

Brightly glowed his features, like the days:

'Like that of lofty Babylon, whose building you have requested,

Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it 'The Sanctuary.'

The Anunnaki applied the implement:

For one year they moulded bricks.

When the second year arrived,

They raised high the head of Esaglia equalling Apsu.

Having built a stage tower as high as Apsu,

They set up in it an abode for Marduk, Enlil, Ea;

In their presence he adorned it with grandeur (Speiser 1969a:68-69, lines 55-64).

There are a number of similarities between these lines and the text of Babel:

- the tower is not built by the god, but by lesser beings;
- bricks are used;
- the grammatical construction for 'they molded bricks' is similar to that in our text; i.e. cognate accusative (*libittasu iltabnù* = 'they bricked bricks' (Ross 1981:124);
- the building process consists of two phases: making bricks, and building with them; and
- the tower reaches the heavens. Ross (1981:124) suggests that, rather than reading 'Apsu' as referring to the heavens as well as the deep, the phrase 'as high as Apsu' should be interpreted to mean 'as high towards the heavens as the sea is deep beneath us'.

Of course, there are some differences:

- the temple-tower is built by the Anunnaki, not by created people;
- the tower is built as a sanctuary for the god/s, and not as simply a monument and symbol of humanity's greatness; and
- the tower reached the heavens, whereas our story mocks the puny height of the tower.

However, there can be no doubt that the two myths are similar in too many ways to be accidental. This is because the story of Babel is specifically told as a counter to that of the *'Enuma Elish'* (Croatto 1998:206). This will be dealt with further in the next Chapter.

2.4. The 'Eridu Genesis.'

This Sumerian text, extant in three sources, dates from 1600 - 600BCE (Jacobsen 1994:129). It bears a remarkable similarity in structure to the Biblical story of the city and tower of Babel.

The text probably begins with the story of how the gods Enki and Nintur created humanity (there are some 36 lines missing). Nintur then takes pity on the people she has

helped create, seeing them as living in arid deserts, naked, uncivilised, and without any purpose or direction:

Nintur was paying attention:

Let me bethink myself of my humankind, (all) forgotten as they are;
and mindful of mine, Nintur's, creatures, let me bring them back,
let me lead the people back from their trials.

May they come and build cities and cult-places,
that I may cool myself in their shade;

may they lay the bricks for their cult-cities in pure spots, and
may they found places for divination in pure spots!

She gave directions for purification, and cries for quarter,
the things that cool (divine) wrath,

perfected divine service and the august offices,

said to the (surrounding) regions: 'Let me institute peace there!'

(Miller 1994:160-161).

There are again 35 lines missing from the text, during which the myth probably describes the failed attempts of the humans to build their cities, and the eventual appointment of a king over them. The building of the cities now takes on purpose and direction:

... and let him advise;

let him oversee their labour,

and let him teach the nation to follow unerringly like cattle!

When the royal sceptre was coming down from heaven,

the august crown and the royal throne being already down from heaven,

he (i.e. the king) regularly performed to perfection

the august divine services and offices,

laid the bricks of those cities in pure spots (Miller 1994:161-162).

After a lengthy kings-list, the text then tells of the gods' irritation with noisy humanity, and their decision to wipe out the nuisance in a great flood. The king Ziusudra builds a boat, saving himself and all the small animals. The gods swear never to destroy the earth and its creatures again, and reward Ziusudra with immortality.

While this myth is of extreme interest in the study of the formation of the Pre-history of Genesis 1-11, there are also several points that impact on the understanding of the Babel story (each to be discussed later in this Chapter):

- the people are gathered together by Nintur;
- they are commanded to build cities;
- the cities are designed around cultic worship-places; and
- the city serves as a divine/royal home.

2.5. Enmerkar and the Lord Aratta.

Similar in a number of lines to the *Eridu Genesis* are several lines from the Sumerian epic 'Enmerkar and the Lord Aratta'. Dating from the early post-Sumerian period, possibly as far back as 3000 BCE (Walton 1995:175), this fragmentary text tells of the power struggle between the hero Enmerkar and an un-named ruler of the city Aratta. In the story Enmerkar attempts to persuade his foe that it is only right that he become a vassal to Enmerkar, and so help him enrich the god Enki's sacred city, Eridu.

Once upon a time there was no snake, there was no scorpion,
There was no hyena, there was no lion,
There was no wild dog, no wolf,
There was no fear, no terror,
Man had no rival.
In those days, the lands of Šubur (and) Hamazi,
Harmony-tongued (?) Sumer, the great land of the decrees of princeship,
Uri, the land having all that is appropriate (?),
The land of Martu, resting in security,
The whole universe, the people in unison,
To Enlil in one tongue spoke.
Then a-da the Lord, a-da the prince, a-da the king,
Enki a-da the lord, a-da the prince, a-da the king,
A-da the Lord, a-da the prince, a-da the king
Enki, the lord of abundance, (whose commands are trustworthy),

The lord of wisdom, who understands the land,
The leader of the gods,
Endowed with wisdom, the lord of Eridu,
Changed the speech in their mouths, [brought(?)] contention into it,
Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.

(Kramer 1994:279&281, lines 139-155).

Once again, this passage bears several similarities to the Babel story:

- it hearkens to a golden age when humanity had no foes, and all people spoke a common language. Kramer (1994:279) refers to this passage as the 'Golden Age passage';
- the episode is placed in the land of Sumer (Babel's Shinar?); and
- Enki confuses their speech.

The fact that the god Enki is seen as the god of the city Eridu will be discussed further below.

2.6. The Epic of Gilgamesh.

While not containing as obvious a similarity to the tower story as the other myths already discussed, the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, originating c 2000 BCE, was certainly in the mind of the author of our story.

In this story the hero, Gilgamesh, two-thirds god and one-third human, is a great king. He befriends Enkidu, a subhuman monster sent by the gods to kill him. After several great adventures with Enkidu, Gilgamesh is wooed by the goddess Ishtar, whose favours he declines. Enkidu adds insult to injury by threatening Ishtar with death. For this Enkidu is struck down, and dies. In mourning for his friend, Gilgamesh decides to discover the secret of immortality, and so journeys to the 'far-away place' to see Utnapishtim, who (with his wife) is the only mortal ever to have achieved immortality. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh his story: the gods decided to destroy the earth, and so planned a great flood. However, the god Ea warned Utnapishtim, who built a large ship,

and rode out the flood, thus achieving immortality. Utnapishtim promises Gilgamesh just such immortality if the exhausted king can stay awake for six days and seven nights. Gilgamesh dozes off immediately, but is given a second chance, and so collects the 'plant-of-life' from the bottom of the sea. Gilgamesh is afraid to eat of the plant, and so hesitates, during which time a snake eats the whole plant. The Epic ends with Gilgamesh returning home, and recounting his adventures to his adoring subjects.

In the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh is introduced to us as the founder and builder of the great city of Uruk:

Of ramparted Uruk the wall he built,
Of hallowed Eanna, the pure sanctuary.
Behold its outer wall, whose cornice is like copper,
Peer at the inner wall, which none can equal!
Seize upon the threshold, which is from of old!
Draw near to Eanna, the dwelling of Ishtar,
Which no future king, no man, can equal.
Go up and walk on the walls of Uruk,
Inspect the base terrace, examine the brickwork:
Is not its brickwork of burnt brick?
Did not the seven [Sages] lay its foundation?

(Speiser 1969b:72, Tablet I, lines 9-18).

Upon returning from his failed quest, Gilgamesh realises that he does have immortality after all, for his name will live on forever in the great city he had founded (Sacks 1990:74):

When they arrived in ramparted Uruk,
Gilgamesh says to him, to Urshanabi, the boatman:
'Go up, Urshanabi, walk on the ramparts of Uruk.
Inspect the base terrace, examine its brickwork,
If its brickwork is not of burnt brick,
And if the Seven Wise Ones laid not its foundation!
One 'sar' is city, one sar orchards,
One sar margin land; (further) the precinct of the Temple of Ishtar.

Three sar and the precinct comprise Uruk.'

(Speiser 1969b:97, Tablet XI, lines 303-311).

Once again, there are several points of interest to us in this epic:

- Gilgamesh builds a city of monumental proportions;
- the city is focused around a temple/sanctuary to Ishtar;
- he uses burnt brick; and
- his name will live forever in his handiwork.

As with the other myths discussed, these points will be examined further below.

2.7. Babel and other myths.

Various scholars make reference to several other myths relating to Babel:

- in an Armenian myth giants build a high tower; a violent wind destroys the tower, and casts strange words on the people, so that they can no longer understand one another (Aalders 1981:252);
- in an African version the gods destroy the tower, but it says nothing about the confusion of languages or the dispersion of the nations (Westermann 1987:80); and
- in Mexico a saga tells of only two persons surviving the Deluge, a giant and a human named Coxcox. The giant builds a tower, which the gods destroy with fire. A dove teaches the descendants of Coxcox to speak, but they all learn the dove's language differently, and so are spread out throughout the earth (Aalders 1981:253).

However, these stories can only be traced back several centuries, and so are quite possibly the result of the 'indigenisation' of the Christian/Biblical story of Babel (Aalders 1981:252).

3. THE TOWER STANDS FIRM.

While there are some 'minor traces of a common tradition' (Aalders 1981:253) in the myths discussed and the Babel story; these are probably due, not to a 'common patrimony' (Oden 1981:27), but to the use made of this 'common tradition' by our author.

It is of great significance that the story of the Tower of Babel has no parallel in any of the narrations of the Near Eastern civilizations, which moved the Biblical Encyclopaedia to remark:

האלה עצם הסיפור אינו אלא מחאה על השקפותיה של העמים

'This narration is a protest against the views and thoughts of these peoples' (Bakon 1982:29).

It is to an examination of the 'views and thoughts' intrinsic in Babylonian mythological thought that I now turn; before examining the resultant 'protest' (Chapters Four and Five).

4. CREATION, CITY, AND TEMPLE IN BABYLONIAN MYTHOLOGICAL BELIEF

For the Babylonians, the worship of their gods was inexorably tied to the building of their great city.

The *Enuma Elish* herein recounts the fundamentals of the origin of the city and its purpose. The earthly equivalent is justified because the gods have done so in the heavenly realm already. The terrestrial images in a real and mythical way what is divine (Halligan 1975:168).

To understand the purpose and meaning of the city and the temple in Babylonian culture it is imperative to examine their cosmological beliefs, and the earlier beliefs upon which their theology and cosmology were built.

4.1. Creation in ancient Ugarit.

The cosmogonies of Ugarit (c 1300 BCE, just north of Canaan) give us the clearest glimpse into cosmological beliefs of the ANE (Van Dyk 2000:36). However, this fact is often denied by scholars, as the *Ras Shamra* texts (from Ugarit) do not seem to contain the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (Kapelrud 1980:2).

In these fragmentary texts, the god *El*, with his consort *Ashirah*, are seen as the 'originators' (Kapelrud 1980:4) of all the other gods and creatures. On behalf of *El*, the lesser god *Ba'al* fights the chaotic god *Yamm*, and on defeating *Yamm*, is declared 'king of all the cosmos'. This victory brings peace and order to the cosmos, and the world. To celebrate and proclaim his victory and kingship, *Ba'al* immediately builds a 'house' for himself, although the work is done by a lesser god.

Thus, in ancient Ugarit, creation consists of four key elements (Fisher 1965:316):

- conflict within the heavenly realm;
- one god is declared king;
- this god orders the chaos (therefore Castellino 1994:92 refers to these as 'organizational texts'); and
- a temple is built for the king-god.

In Ugarit, 'divine kingship and temple were inseparable' (Kapelrud 1980:9), as the cosmic temple built for *Ba'al* by the other gods was a 'microcosm' of the newly-ordered creation (Fisher 1965:318). The human king of Ugarit, who ruled on this earth on behalf of *Ba'al*, was therefore required to build a temple for *Ba'al* as the centre of his world. This earthly temple was seen as a 'microcosm' of the heavenly temple of the god (Fisher 1965:319).

Therefore, just as the cosmic kingship of *Ba'al* was declared by the building of his cosmic temple in the heavenlies, so the building of an earthly temple, mirroring the heavenly one, declared his kingship, and that of his earthly deputy, here on earth (Kapelrud 1980:10).

4.2. Creation in Babylon.

The four elements identified in the Ugaritic creation accounts (above) are clearly evident in the Babylonian cosmological myth, the *'Enuma Elish'*:

- the lesser god Marduk wages war on the great god Tiamat, eventually killing her;
- he is declared king by the other gods;
- using the dead body of Tiamat, and that of her general, Kingu, Marduk creates the earth and all her inhabitants; and
- the lesser gods build a temple and a city for their new king.

The temple tower was understood to be the 'navel of the earth'... the tower being the first part of the earth to appear out of the primeval chaotic waters (Blenkinsopp 1971:59). However, here the temple cannot be separated from the city of which it is a part, as the city is seen as a part of the earthly reflection of the heavenly realms (Block 1992:27). Thus, to ensure that the earthly representation of the king-god's heavenly home was fully representative, the city of Babylon was centred around a 'royal complex' (Van Dyk 2000:56), consisting of:

- a temple (the microcosm of the heavenly temple);
- a royal palace (a home for the king-god's representative on earth); and
- a royal garden (the famed 'Hanging Gardens of Babylon'), representing the ordered world over which the god was king, and his deputy on his behalf.

The king, ruling from his royal complex, not only represented his god on earth, but represented the people to the god (Van Seters 1989:337). Thus the state and the temple were inseparable (Vermaak 1992:54), as the existing state was a direct result of the creative action of the god whom the temple represented (Talmon 1980:239).

The *'Enuma Elish'* contains the 'fullest literary expression' (Sheriffs 1988:22) of this understanding of the relationship between creation and the city, a relationship that was encapsulated in the great temple-tower at the heart of the first great metropolis.

4.3. The ziggurat in Babylonian religious belief.

While Smith (1996:172) argues that the מגדל refers to an acropolis, most scholars agree that the 'tower' referred to is the ziggurat in ancient Babylon (Parrot 1955:16). However, it must be noted that several scholars have argued that מגדל cannot refer to a ziggurat, as it is not used in this context anywhere else in ancient Hebrew (Walton 1995:155). Of course, this is to be expected, as the ziggurat was not a part of Israelite culture, and so they would not have a ready word for these foreign structures³. It can be argued that the word מגדל, derived from גדל 'to be high', has the same etymological root as the Akkadian *ziqqurat* (from *zaqaru* 'to be high' (Walton 1995:156).

Although ziggurats are referred to in the Early Dynastic period in Babylonia (2900-2350 BCE, Walton 1995:157), of the thirty four 'staged-towers' (Parrot 1955:26) identified by archaeologists, the oldest is at Ur, dated to early in the 21st century (Van Mieroop 1992:125). While these ziggurats were of various sizes and styles⁴, the greatest was undoubtedly in Babylon.

4.3.1. The great ziggurat of *Etemenanki*.

While the ziggurat at Babylon is usually seen as having been built during the reign of Hammurabi (18th - 17th century BCE, Cassuto 1964:228), a text of Sharkalisharri, king of Agade about 2250 BCE, mentions that he restored the 'temple-tower at Babylon' (De Witt 1979:20). Thus the ziggurat at Babylon could be dated at least a century earlier than that at Ur. Of course, we have already seen that in the *Enuma Elish* the ziggurat of *Esagil* (in Sumerian known as *Etemenanki*) was credited to the lesser deities at the beginning of time.

This ziggurat had fallen into disrepair by the 7th century BCE. Nabopolassar, king of Babylon (625-605 BCE) describes how he rebuilt the tower:

The Lord Marduk commanded me concerning *Etemenanki*, the staged-tower of Babylon, which before my time had become dilapidated and

ruinous, that I should make its foundations secure in the nether world and make its summit like the heavens. I caused baked bricks to be made. As it were rains from on high which are measureless or great torrents, I caused streams of bitumen to be brought by the canal Arahtu' (Davidson 1973:105).

The king describes how he was given the measurements for the tower, and measured out the foundations himself. Having buried various statues and oblations in the foundations, he, and his son Nebuchadnezzar, took off their outer robes, and worked as labourers on the tower (Parrot 1955:19).

The Esagil tablet (while dating from 229 BCE, is a copy of a much older text) gives the exact measurements of each stage of the ziggurat: each side of the base of the ziggurat of *Etemenanki* was just over 100m in length, while the topmost level reached to the same height (Parrot 1955:20-21).

Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BCE), describing how he completed the tower, notes that he made use of a number of indentured foreigners (Parrot 1955:19). He decorated the top stage with blue-glazed enamel tiles - the top of this tower looked like the sky itself (Block 1992:34).

A travelogue description of *Etemenanki* was given by the Greek Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who visited Babylon in c 460 BCE. While he attributes the temple to the Babylonian version of Zeus, his description supports archaeological and textual evidence:

In the midst of the temple a solid tower was constructed, one stadium in length and one stadium in width. Upon this tower stood another, and again upon this another, and so on, making eight towers in all⁵, one upon the another. All eight towers can be climbed by means of a spiral staircase which runs round the outside. About half way up there are seats where those who make the ascent can sit and rest. In the topmost tower there is a great temple, and in the temple is a great bed richly appointed, and beside it a golden table. No idol stands there. No one spends the night

there save a woman of that country, designated by the god himself; so I was told by the Chaldeans, who are the priests of that divinity (Parrot 1955:22-23).

4.3.2. The purpose or function of the ziggurat.

As the archaeological remains of ziggurats are badly destroyed and weathered, and the extant writings about them sketchy, scholars are divided as to the actual purpose or function of these ancient staged-towers:

- earlier scholars saw the ziggurat as a funerary temple (a Babylonian 'pyramid'), no doubt due to the similarity in shape with the pyramid. While it was claimed that textual evidence was found to support this interpretation, this is highly doubtful (Parrot 1955:58-60).
- as the ziggurat at Borsippa was named the 'House of the Seven Guides of Heaven and Earth', a reference to the seven spheres in which it was believed the planets moved, some scholars see the tower as a religious observatory (Parrot 1955:60), some even guessing that the top tier contained a representation of the zodiac (Boice 1982:341). However, scant textual reference has been found to support this theory.
- others have suggested that the ziggurat is simply a 'stairway to heaven'⁶, a means for the gods to 'come down' to the mortals they control, and a way for the worshipper to ascend to the presence of the gods (Walton 1995:169). This theory is given support by the name of the mighty ziggurat at Sippar ; 'Temple of the Stairway to Pure Heaven' (Walton 1995:159). If this theory is correct, then the tower may have had a temple or altar on the top structure (Parrot 1955:61), a small rendition of the temple-complex of which it was a part; as the priest communicated with the gods on the upper stage, so the worshipper could experience the gods in the great temple below.
- while various names were given to ziggurats, in my opinion the clearest description of the function of the staged-tower can be seen in the naming of the great ziggurat of Babylon - while the tower was originally named *Esagila* ('the House whose Head is Raised Up'), it came to be known in Sumerian as

Etemenanki - 'the House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth' (Cassuto 1964:228). Thus the ziggurat was seen to be the 'navel of the earth' (Sarna 1989:82), while the temple complex was seen as a representation of the heavenly temple, which in turn was a microcosm of the universe (as discussed earlier), the tower at its centre was the means whereby the god kept contact with his people, and his people with their divine ruler. Thus the ziggurat, through the cultus and its king, linked all of society to its gods (Bakon 1982:24).

Thus the great temple-tower was seen as a direct link between the god Marduk and his earthly king-representative. As long as the king kept the tower and cultus in good repair he was assured of the ear of the god, and divine favour and assistance as required.

4.3.3. The ziggurat and dynasty.

However, the maintenance of the temple and the correct observance of the cultus would do more than simply keep 'channels of communication' open between the god and his earthly ruler; it would ensure that the king remained in favour with his god. Of course, if the king served the god adequately, this divine favour would be passed on to his successor/s. It was vital for the average citizen to support the king fully in ensuring the favour of the god, for it was the rule of the king that ensured the ongoing survival of civil society. Without the divine law and guidance appropriated through the king society would disintegrate.

This concept of the (divine) establishment of the dynasty is an intrinsic part of the cosmological mythology of the Ancient Near East (Van Dyk 2000:49), as is the ensurance of civil society through correct cultic observance by that dynasty.

It is these mythological concepts that the author/s of the story of the city and tower of Babel are 'protesting' against.

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- 1 Parts of this section are taken from my unpublished Master's dissertation *The 'Sons of God' episode in Genesis 6:1-4 and South Africa Today*. Pretoria, UNISA, 1998.
 - 2 It is particularly interesting that Berossus links the multiplication of languages with writing.
 3. However, after the Exile these 'links' between the earth and the heavenly realms were more prominent in Israelite worldview - surely the 'ladder joining heaven and earth' in Jacob's dream (Gen 28:10-22) is a reference to a ziggurat (Houtman 1977a).
 4. For a brief, but informative, discussion of the ziggurat, see Parrot 1955.
 5. It is interesting that Herodotus describes eight stages, while all other records mention only seven. Was Nebuchadnezzar's blue-room simply the decorating of the top stage, or did he erect a 'bedroom' on top of the seventh level?
 6. To quote the greatest rock band of all time: Led Zeppelin.

ALBRECHT DÜRER

c 1490



CHAPTER FOUR

YAHWIST LEVITES BUILD A TOWER

In order to understand the history, it is imperative first to understand the historian (Brettler 1995:115). Therefore, having clarified our text, and examined it from a literary perspective, I now address an equally fundamental question: 'Who wrote our text, and when?' Having examined the question of authorship and dating, I will then ask 'Why was this text written?'

While the Biblical text claims Mosaic origin for the first five books of the OT in several places (e g Nm 36:13, Dt 1:1, 3), the tradition soon grew that Moses was not only the originator of the contents of the books that bore his name, but was the actual author (e g Ex 24:4, MI 4:4). In the first century CE Philo of Alexandria, soon followed by the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus, declared Moses to be the actual author of all five books of the *Tôrah* (Schmidt 1984:46). This viewpoint was soon assimilated by both Judaism and Christianity, where this great body of literature is often referred to as being of Mosaic authorship (e g Jn 1:17), and is often simply referred to as 'Moses' (e g Lk 16:29).

Unswerving belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch continued for several centuries. This position was first questioned by the Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra in the twelfth century, who noted that certain parts of Deuteronomy obviously refer to events which only occurred long after the death of Moses (Blenkinsopp 1994:308). Gradually more and more scholars began to agree with Ibn Ezra, until only the most conservative of Jewish and Christian Scholars still held the Philonic view.

1. THE AUTHOR/S AND DATING OF THE BABEL STORY

1.1. The 'documentary hypothesis' of pentateuchal authorship.¹

Developed over three centuries, the 'documentary hypothesis' was articulated in its 'classic' form by the great German scholar Julius Wellhausen, in the late nineteenth

century². While several scholars rejected the theory, the vast majority embraced this viewpoint. It must be noted, however, that several new theories of authorship challenge this view today (discussed briefly in Blenkinsopp 1992:19-25, and below).

The theory, as developed by Wellhausen, can briefly be explained as follows: Nomadic Israel gradually drew her various oral traditions, histories, and laws together as she developed from twelve loosely-linked tribes into a more-organized confederation. These oral traditions eventually began to take on a set form, used for remembrances at cultic festivals. These traditions reached a 'fixed form' in the twelfth/eleventh century BCE (scholars refer to this body of tradition as **G** = *Grundlage*).

When drawn together as a nation by King David (a movement reaching its culmination under David's son, Solomon) during the tenth century BCE, court theologians set out to interpret **G** for a new national, political, and religious situation. These theologians (referred to as **J** = *Jahwist*, for they use the name יהוה = *YHWH* to refer to God prior to the giving of the divine name in Ex 3) not only re-interpreted **G**, but rewrote many of its stories, in order that the ancient traditions might speak afresh into their new situation (making use of some very creative interpretation, Rosenberg and Bloom 1990:36-48 see **J** as an individual, probably a daughter or niece of King Solomon). Some scholars argue for a **J** recension (**Jr**) after the division of the kingdom (Simpson 1952:445-448), but before the northern exile.

While **J** re-interpreted **G** in Jerusalem, the ancient traditions, in **G** form, continued to circulate in the north of the kingdom. Theologians in this part eventually began to re-interpret this oral tradition, a process completed once the united kingdom had split after Solomon's death. These northern theologians (called **E** = *Elohist*, as they use the divine name אלהים = *'elohim* prior to Ex 3) rewrote **G**, stressing the importance of God reaching His people through dreams and prophets (as Jerusalem was no longer accessible to them). **E** probably reached its final form during the ninth century BCE.

After the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile in 721 BCE, **E** was brought south, and a *Jahwist* redactor wove **J** and **E** together, using **J** as the main text (this enlarged document is referred to as **JE** = *Jehovistic*).

In the eighth century BCE Levites in the Northern Kingdom compiled a book of cultic laws and observances (Soggin 1976:121-122). This book, an early version of *Deuteronomy* (therefore referred to as **D**), was 'saved' after the northern kingdom went into exile in 721, and, having been brought south, was 'discovered' during the Josianic Reform in 622 BCE. It was added to JE, with only some minor reinterpretation occurring (**JED**).

During the next two centuries Levites in Jerusalem developed and collected the various cultic laws and traditions. This body of work is referred to as **P** (= *Priestly writer*).

During the Exile (mid sixth century BCE) Deuteronomic theologians were faced with the spiritual crisis caused by the political upheaval, and so (utilising earlier historical recollections) wrote down the great history of Israel (Joshua - II Kings), adding a few chapters to Deuteronomy. This great historical epic is referred to as **DtrH** (= *Deuteronomistic Historian*).

During the latter years of the Exile, or (more probably) soon after the return to their devastated homeland, the Levitical authors of P added their work to the great collection JED. Their addition and redaction rendered the Pentateuch into the form we have today (**JEDP**).³

It is important to note that while it is convenient to talk of 'books' and 'documents', and whilst these collections were most probably written documents, they were written for oral presentation (Niditch 1996), i.e. 'scripts' to be used in public readings.

1.2. Challenges to the documentary theory.

In recent decades several scholars have (of course) suggested certain modifications to the 'classic' theory:

e.g. Schmidt (1984:51) suggests that D existed parallel to JE and the later JEP, and that the final redactor (rD) finalized the Pentateuch in the light of Deuteronomy.

Others have suggested variations in the dating of the Pentateuch:

Several modern scholars state that J shows later developments (e.g. the universality of YHWH in Genesis 2 and 3, allusion to the great Ziggurat of Babylon in Genesis 11, etc), and should rather be considered exilic or post-exilic (Blenkinsopp 1994:313).

Yet others, whilst substantially modifying the documentary hypothesis, still rely on the traditional structure:

Levin (2001) dates the *Yahwist* to early in the Exile, followed by Deuteronomy and the *Deuteronomistic History*. These writings were loosely used by Jeremiah, whose writings led to the completion of J and D/DtrH by the adding of the Decalogue and Deut 6-9. Towards the end of the Exile, Ezekiel addressed his book to those both in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora. In the mid 5th Century BCE, motivated by Ezekiel, the Priestly writers edited and compiled their collection, stressing that the Temple was the centre of all Judaic belief⁴.

However, in recent years several scholars have challenged the entire documentary hypothesis:

Rendtorff (discussed briefly in Blenkinsopp 1992:23-24) has argued for a 'fragmentary hypothesis' - seeing the Pentateuch made up of large blocks of collected oral material, collated by DtrH during the exile, or soon afterwards. Van Seters (1972:459), while earlier acknowledging a Deuteronomic J2 redaction during the Exile, more recently sees the entire J-strand as having originated at the hand of a Deuteronomic writer during the Exile, this compiler simply using older blocks of material (of which E may have been such a 'block') to piece together his great history (Van Seters 1992). This 'J-compilation' was used as the foundation for the later Priestly writers, who simply added their material to that of the *Yahwist*. Van Seters refers to this theory as the 'supplementary hypothesis' (Van Seters 1994:42).

While one is often left with the feeling that some scholars who reject the documentary hypothesis are arguing 'from a vacuum', i.e. they have rejected the one theory, and are now desperately trying to postulate a theory to fill the vacuum, often arguing from the

silence of the text (as noted a scholar as Joseph Blenkinsopp, 1992:27, reinforces my uneasiness in this regard), the one fact that the documentary hypothesis (in whatever modified form it is explained) fails to come to terms with, is that the pre-Exilic prophets do not refer to any written body of work even vaguely resembling what has been traditionally known as J.

This means that the '*Yahwist*' must be dated during the exile, or even post-exilic (Blenkinsopp 1994:315), but before P did the final redaction.

The vast majority of modern scholars agree that the documentary-hypothesis (in its traditional form) is no longer tenable: consequently it is time to look for an alternative theory as to the development of the Pentateuch.

1.3. The origin of the *Tôrah* - a living word.

Susan Niditch, noting that 'an oral aesthetic infuses Hebrew Scripture as it now stands' (Niditch 1996:24), argues that large parts of the Hebrew Bible (especially the narrative sections of the *Tôrah*), were originally transmitted orally, and while often existing side-by-side with written versions of the 'oral-text', only achieved their final written form much later (Niditch 1996:134).

She offers several models exploring the growth of the Hebrew Scriptures (Niditch 1996:117-129) - just how did a written word develop in an oral world? I find her second model ('Oral to written and written to oral - the Pan-Israelite story', Niditch 1996:120-125) not only plausible, but excitingly possible.

1.3.1. From oral to written to oral to written in the ancient world.

An understanding of the development of Hebrew historical prose and poetry needs to be understood in the light of the development of other ancient poetic prose.

In his excellent study of the development of Greek poetry, Nagy argues that the great Homeric and Hesiodic poems were never composed as a finalised (i.e. written) text, but were developed over two centuries. Originally, each public performance of the epic allowed for new interpretation, as the rhapsode responded to the values common to each audience (Nagy 1990:41). At various stages such a performer may write a 'script' for ease of future use, this 'oral-text' being passed on to the next generation, where it underwent yet more reinterpretation and modification. However, eventually such 'oral-texts' became more 'fixed' over time, until, having remained unchanged for several generations, they were finally written down (Nagy 1990:42).

I believe Nagy provides a model which delineates the development of Ancient Israel's poetic prose, especially that found in the *Tôrâh*.

1.3.2. From oral to written to oral to written in Ancient Israel.

Niditch argues that while Ancient Israel's oral history was probably originally collected and transmitted by clan-patriarchs to family-members gathered around the supper-fire under desert stars, the formalization of the cult in Canaan meant that there was now a sacred opportunity for the recollection of the history of YHWH's dealings with His People. Such stories would be retold at all major religious feasts, as the People were reminded of YHWH's gracious salvation, and the covenant-response entered into on their behalf by their famous ancestors. Over time these oral histories developed, reflecting the values and beliefs of the community they helped to shape. At times parts of this sacred story may have been written down for the next generation, who in turn may have reinterpreted and modified the ancient story as they made it relevant to their hearers. Gradually these oral stories became 'fixed', and were written down.

Who were the 'rhapsodes' of Israelite oral-retelling? Niditch suggests:

The likely candidates would be Levites, traditionally considered the teacher clan, more portable and less territorially bound than the members of other tribes (Niditch 1996:122).

As decreed by YHWH, the Levites were not allocated any territory (e.g. Deut 18:1-2, Josh 14:3-4), but were to be an integral part of the community on which they relied (e.g. Deut 12:12). An integral part of the Levitical Priesthood, they were subordinate to the priests, entrusted with the menial work of caring for the sanctuary (e.g. Num 3:31-32). Later they became the teachers (e.g. II Chron 17:7-9) and the praise-singers of YHWH (e.g. Ezra 3:10-11). While it is possible to postulate that the 'singing of praises to YHWH' included the retelling of the ancient stories, this is made much clearer in Deut 31:9-13, where the writers of D recount their divine imperative to read the sacred *Tôrah* to all Israel. This is described in Neh 8:7-8, where the Levites not only read the Law, but explain it carefully.

These Levites would have collected various traditions (including those from the Northern Kingdom), and been motivated to write them down in a 'fixed form' by the destruction of the Temple, and the challenges encountered by their fellow Believers in Exile.

1.3.3. Oral to written to oral to the written *Tôrah*.

'Israel' had been formed as a few small tribes, bound together by a common tribal-lineage and the worship of the unseen god YHWH. They entered into Canaan over (through?) the Jordan River, where they joined up with existing familial-tribes of Hebrews (who also worshipped YHWH). Over a period of time this loose confederation of tribes subdued almost all of the land between the Jordan and the coast, from the Galilean Sea to the deserts of the Negev. They then 'formalised' their relationship, covenanting themselves to each other and YHWH at the cultic centre of Shiloh⁵.

These closely-bound tribal groups continued to live separately, ruled by their traditional tribal rulers or 'judges'. However, they were beholden to one another through their familial connection, worship of the One God, and common cultic celebration, and so regularly rallied to arms when an individual tribe was threatened. It was during their joint cultic celebrations that they experienced the need to remember their sacred history, and so the Levites were commissioned to collect, collate, and retell their sacred stories at each such gathering.

Under immense political and military pressure the cry went up to '*be like the other nations*' (1 Sm 8:5), and so Saul was appointed king. Under Saul the tribal confederacy became a 'nation' for the first time, as their king attempted to unite not only the tribes, but their traditions too.

Saul's successor, David, ushered in a new age for the fledgling nation: he declared Jerusalem the political and religious capital, extended her borders, and ushered in a golden age of peace and prosperity. Solomon continued the reign of his father, permanently determining the nation's capital by building a magnificent temple to YHWH. The final years of Solomon's reign were plagued by apostasy and rebellion; and the nation was torn in two shortly after his death.

Under David (1000-961 BCE) and Solomon (961-922 BCE)⁶ the work of the Levites became even more important, for the ancient traditions were no longer mainly to unite the disparate tribes within a loose confederation, but were now reinterpreted to speak afresh to a united nation under an established monarchy with a centralized cultus.

These Levitical theologians continued to narrate, reinterpret, and re-narrate, the ancient stories as Israel's history changed over the years, adding Northern traditions after the Northern Exile in 722BCE. As discussed above, at times parts of these traditions were written down for the next generation, who re-interpreted these texts for their community, once again transmitting them orally.

At some stage a 'written-down version' of this great collection was 'lost', and discovered again during Josiah's great reform during the 7th century BCE. This collection (**D**) would later become an early version of the book of Deuteronomy.

Confronted by the crisis of the Exile, and the destruction of the Temple, the Levites (motivated by the collection **D**), wrote down their collected sacred history, basing much of their understanding on the Deuteronomic writings before them. This final writing-down included a reinterpretation of the ancient stories, and the inclusion of several mythical passages. This Levitical corpus (I will call it **JL**) is what used to be called **J**.

In an attempt to encourage the Exiles to remain faithfully obedient to their God, JL was written to stress that throughout their history YHWH had blessed those who had walked in obedient fellowship with Him, and punished those who had disobeyed.

However, with the reconstruction of the Temple, and the reintroduction of cultic sacrifices, Priestly theologians combined the ancient D and the exilic JL, adding numerous passages stressing that an obedient covenant-relationship with YHWH had to be lived out in correct cultic worship (P). This great collection of writings formed the basis of the great reforms under Nehemiah during the Restoration

The *Tôrah* was finally complete (D JL P).

1.4. The author/s and dating of our text.

The Babel text, together with most of the pre-history (Gen 1-11) was added to the great Yahwist-Levitical collection (JL) during its final collation and writing-down during the Exile (discussed in more detail below).

It was then re-interpreted by the Priestly Writer soon after the Restoration (see Chapter Five).

2. THE SACRED HISTORY AND THE YAHWIST LEVITES

The early faith of Ancient Israel was encapsulated in its 'ancient Credo' (Von Rad 1975:122), repeated at the great festivals, and when various offerings were presented to the Levites:

Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: 'My father was a wandering Aramaean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour.

Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey...' (Deut 26:5-9).

Gradually the Levites began to collect and collate the various traditions that accompanied this creed, weaving them into a sacred history of the People of YHWH. However, each story was included because it spoke not only of the past, but was relevant to the time of the collation;

The material he [i.e. JL] selected for inclusion in his history was selected because it had bearing upon the period in which he was living. He was not so much interested in collecting and relating random traditions about Israel's past as in arranging events into a ... scheme that had meaning for the present (Coote & Ord 1989:14).

From generation to generation this great history was enlarged and re-interpreted, as the Israelites gathered to celebrate their relationship with YHWH.

The Levitical message was simple and clear: 'YHWH has blessed us by entering into a covenant with us'. First spelt out in the call of Abram, YHWH covenants Himself with Abram and his descendants forever, to bless them (Gen 12:1-3, reiterated in Gen 17:1-22). This covenant-blessing involved a three-fold undertaking by YHWH

- a promise of descendants, that He would make Abram into a great nation (Gen 12:2, Gen 15:5, etc);
- a promise of a land of their own (Gen 12:7, Gen 17:8, etc); and
- a promise to use them to bless all peoples (Gen 12:3).

The response called for from the people was simply to 'walk before me and be blameless' (Gen 17:1).

Down through the years, therefore, the sacred history was passed down by the Levites, enabling each generation of faithful worshippers to hear the covenant-call and assurance afresh. However, this 'simple theology' of covenant-blessing and response was thrown into crisis by the Babylonian Exile.

2.1. The challenge of the Exile.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile mark the great watershed of Israel's history. At a stroke her national existence was ended and, with it, all the institutions in which her corporate life had expressed itself ... The state destroyed and the state cult perforce suspended, the old national-cultic community was broken, and Israel was left for the moment an agglomeration of uprooted and beaten individuals, by no external mark any longer a people. The marvel is that her history did not end altogether (Bright 1981:343).

2.1.1. The Exile.

After a brief siege, Jehoiachin surrendered to the Babylonians in 597. The Temple was plundered, as were the palace and treasury, and several thousand people taken into exile in Babylon (II Kings 24:10-17 // II Chron 36:9-10). Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah to the Judaeen throne, renaming him Zedekiah. After 9 years on the throne, the puppet-king rebelled against his overlords: the Babylonian response was quick. After an horrendous two-year siege, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (587BCE). Zedekiah was punished, the city was razed, and all the ruling class and artisans were deported to Babylonia (II King 25:1-21 // II Chron 36:11-21). Gedaliah was put on the throne to rule over the few peasants left behind to work the land. Following his assassination in 582BCE, the last skilled people were removed from Judah (Sanders 1962:187), although a sizeable contingent managed to escape to Egypt (II King 25:25-26).

For the exiles in Babylon, life 'was not too harsh' (Hinson 1973:150). While some members of the Judahite royal family and aristocracy were imprisoned, the majority of the people were settled on deserted agricultural land, with the intention that they should be assimilated into the life of Babylon (Purvis & Meyers 1999:205). This was aided by the prophetic injunction to settle down and contribute to their new (albeit temporary) homeland (Jer 29:5-7).

The most serious challenge facing the exiles was a religious one (Anderson 1978:418).

2.1.2. The Crisis of the Exile.

The Babylonian Exile plunged the exiles into a three-fold crisis...

- **The Theological Crisis - *Has YHWH been defeated?***

Israel's faith had always been monotheistic (in theology, if not always in practice), seeing YHWH as the only true God - all other so-called 'gods' were in fact 'no gods' (Bright 1981:348). But now their God had been soundly defeated by the 'no gods' of the heathen Babylonians! Was it possible that there were other gods beside YHWH? If so, have these gods defeated Him? And if that be the case, do you continue to trust in a defeated God?

- **The Cultic Crisis - *Can YHWH be worshipped in a foreign land?***

For four centuries YHWH had been worshipped in His Temple on His holy mountain - could He be worshipped in a foreign country where other gods appeared to be in control (c f Psalm 137:4)? If so, how?

- **The Cultural Crisis - *How can we prevent assimilation?***

These first two crises, as well as the wealth and magnificence of Babylonia, contributed to the third crisis - how to prevent the exiled Israelites from turning their backs on their heritage, religion, and sacred covenant, and from being assimilated into Babylonian society.

2.1.3. The response of the Yahwist Levites.

It was to these crises that the Yahwist Levites were able to respond, once again drawing on their sacred historical traditions; reinterpreting and adding to them, so that they spoke again into the life of the People of YHWH.

The writing down of these 'reworked traditions' can be attributed to four key factors:

- the Yahwistic Levites no longer being able to preside over cultic celebrations, when people gathered to hear the ancient stories being told;
- the need to ensure that these stories were accessible to people throughout the Diaspora (in Babylon and Egypt) and those left behind in their decimated homeland;

- the publication of the prophetic 'Deuteronomic corpus' early in the Exile (Blenkinsopp 1992:235); and
- the interaction between the 'oral' Exiles and their 'literate' captors (discussed further below).

3. THE YAHWIST LEVITES, THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY, AND BABEL

The Genesis narrators ..., particularly J[L], draw upon a common stock of religious ideas from the world of the ancient near east, yet they present us with material which is distinctly their own (Davidson 1973:107).

3.1. The Yahwist Levites and Babylonian myths of origin.

While many scholars attempt to show that the tower in our story was a particular ziggurat in Babylon (eg Walton 1995:157, De Witt 1979, Parrot 1955:57, etc), 'what inspired the present Biblical theme in the first instance was not monumental architecture but literary tradition' (Speiser 1964:75).

I have already noted that the JL context was a world in which cosmological and other aetiological myths abounded, each nation (and often each sectarian group within each nation) developing its own cosmologies (Lambert 1994:100). The Levitical authors would no doubt have been aware of these primeval myths, and possibly even have developed early versions of the Primeval History, these myths arising from the general religious and anthropological milieu of the day (Oden 1981:27). It is probable that Israel's myths could have been based on similar thoughts to those originating in Babylonia, for not only did the nation have a Sumerian origin (it was later believed that Abram was from Ur), but her religious thought was closer to that of the Sumerians/Babylonians than the Egyptians or Canaanites (Kelly 1992:40).

However, as these myths were not directly concerned with the Salvation History of YHWH, they were not included in the great religious tradition of JL for several centuries

(Von Rad 1975:136) - until the exiled Levites found themselves, and those they sought to serve, confronted by various Babylonian cosmological texts.⁷

3.2. An ancient myth modified.

It is generally acknowledged that, rather than supplanting a present population, a mass movement of people usually results in the new arrivals absorbing and assimilating elements of the culture and beliefs of the existing peoples (Redford 1992:395). This would have been quite true of the exiled Israelites arriving in Babylon, and being settled amongst their captors. JL, unavoidably confronted with various written Babylonian myths-of-origin, re-examined their ancient cosmological tales, re-interpreting them for the new challenges they faced.

However, while ethnopoetry seldom morphs from one genre to another, there is a change in 'genre repertoire' in the literature of Ancient Israel (Jason 1977:11), as her ancient myths are not only re-examined and re-interpreted by JL, but re-used in a new way, so as to better address the faith-crises being encountered by the exiled Israelites.

3.3. JL responds in the 'second' creation-account.

No doubt utilizing an ancient Canaanite myth (Meier 1991:19), JL responds to the cosmology of Babylon by offering a 'YHWH version' of creation (Genesis 2:4b - 3:24). While containing certain motifs common to other creation-accounts, no parallel exists for the story of the city and the tower of Babel in the ANE (Fretheim 1994:349).

JL describes the creation of the world as the planting of a garden in the desert - an evocative picture for all their readers (Van Dyk 2000:95 sees the narrative as describing the divine laying-out of a royal garden, a clear response to the Babylonian context of JL).

Since detailed discussion of this story is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is sufficient to note the specific claims made by this story, both about YHWH and His creation:

- 'YHWH is the only active character' (Boomershine 1980:115). The creative ordering of the universe is the work of the One God, and not the result of heavenly-squabbling;
- all humans are created by YHWH, and breathed with His life, and are therefore the pinnacle of this creative process, rather than an afterthought of a lonely or lazy god;
- YHWH is a 'caring gardener' (Van Dyk 2000:106), ensuring that all of His creation is alive and sustainable; and
- the creative process of YHWH is on-going in the life and obedience of the humans He has created in His image, to fulfil His creative will in the world (Welker 1991:59).

Thus, by beginning the great salvation history of YHWH with the loving planting of a garden by YHWH, JL has refuted the cosmogonic claims of the Babylonian pantheon.

3.4. Babel used as a 'building block' in a complex narrative.

However, JL did not set the cosmological tale on its own, but used it, along with the rest of the Pre-History, and the Babel story, to progressively construct a wider narrative.

This consoling preservation, that revelation of God's hidden gracious will, is missing ... at one place, namely at the end of primeval history. The story about the Tower of Babel concludes with God's judgement on mankind: there is no word of grace. The whole primeval history, therefore, seems to break off in shrill dissonance... (Von Rad 1972:153).

However, the 'shrill dissonance' of YHWH's punishment in Gn 11:9 is not the final word for JL, sinful humanity is not left to live in the confusion and confrontation of 'life after Babel' (Cloete & Smit 1994:84). The text immediately moves into the call of Abram – 'the final word about primeval history is transformed by the initial word about sacred history' (Mauldin 1983:42).

3.4.1. Babel the final 'prop' as the stage is set.

I have already noted (in Chapter One) that the final redactor of the *Tôrah* - although his 'final redaction' continued to be modified as it was reinterpreted by later generations - uses our story as a building block in a complex narrative; so, too, does JL. JL weaves together the Primeval History, as an introduction to the sacred history of YHWH's salvation of all creation through His chosen People.

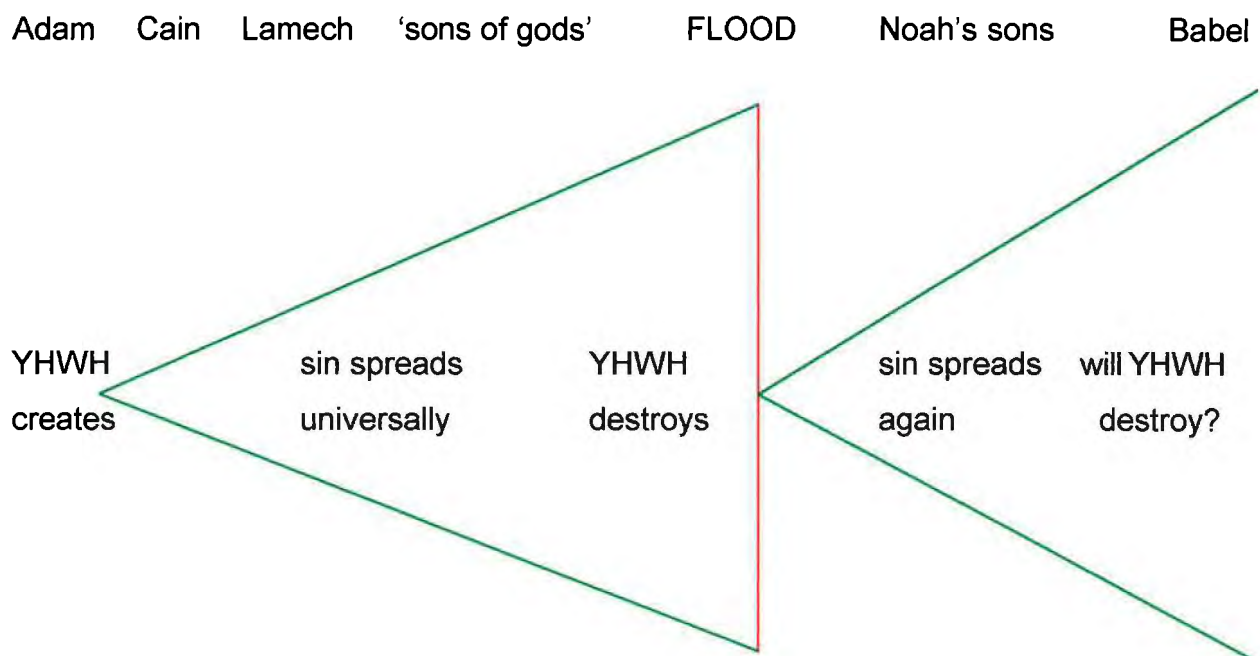
Undoubtedly basing their myths of beginning on the structure 'provided' by the *Atrahasis Epic* (Oden 1981:32), and relying heavily on myths having a common patrimony to, or at least coming from the same cultural and social milieu as, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Lambert 1994:102) and, to a far lesser extent, the *'Enuma Elish* (Halligan 1975:168), JL has structured a clear, concise introduction to the beginning of salvation history:

- 2:4b-25 YHWH creates the אָדָם, male and female, and the world
- 3:1-24 Humanity separated from YHWH through the Fall
- 4:1-18 Cain and Abel - sin spreads to the family
- 4:19-26 Lamech murders - sin now infects the whole community
- 6:1-4 The בני־האלהים miscegenate with humans - sin corrupts even the heavenlies
- 6:5-8 YHWH decides to destroy the earth in an attempt to wipe out sin
- 7:1-5, 24 YHWH sends the Flood, but saves a remnant (both human and animal)
- 8:18-22 YHWH covenants never to destroy His creation again
- 9:18-27 Noah's sons sin - the world is still fallen!

- 11:1-9 All the world sins in their rejection of YHWH⁸
- 10:1-32 Sin spreads throughout the world as people populate the earth
- 12:1-3 YHWH calls Abram - His People an answer to the world's malaise⁹

3.4.2. JL and mythological history.

As outlined above, JL arranged the 'historical' accounts of the origins of humanity – and the origins of sin – by weaving together several ancient myths. Each separate story forms an integral part of Israel's origin-stories from her earliest times (Levin 1993:127¹⁰), allowing them to speak an 'historical' message:



This 'mythological history' was then linked to 'salvation history' through the inclusion of the genealogies and narratives of chapter 10 (10:1-32 and 11:1-9 'do not stand in chronological order' Fretheim 1994:410), thus ensuring that the reader / listener was quite aware of the need for YHWH's salvation history, the universal importance of His call of Abraham, and, thirdly, the importance of the Exiles living out the covenant entered into by their great ancestor and their God.

Thus, in response to the cosmological myths of Babylon, and the theological challenge of the *Enuma Elish* (discussed in Chapter Three), JL modified an ancient story of the building of a mythological city and tower. It was possibly a 'positive' story, in which YHWH is 'proud' of the great achievements of his created people (Pinker 1999:98). JL added verse 9 (also discussed below) in order to turn the story into 'a satire on paganism' (De Witt 1979:18), and to construct a mythological-historical introduction to the salvation-history of YHWH.

3.4.3. JL and salvation history.

Therefore, for JL, the Primeval History does not end with 11:9, but with 12:1-3 (Krašovec 1994:28), the Babel story being a key text in the 'kerygmatic construction' (Croatto:1998:223) of the great Primeval History of JL;

As the final downfall of sinful primeval humanity begins with a journey from the East, so too does the salvation of that sinful humanity, as Abraham journeys westward from Ur - into an unknown land (Mauldin 1983:49).

3.5. An ancient story speaks a new message.

By including the Primeval History in their great historical traditions, JL enabled these ancient traditions to speak a new message, with renewed authority, in the lives of their people.

By his presentation of the origins of humanity and that of the people's ancestry, the Yahwist has given a radical revision and reinterpretation of the national tradition (Van Seters 1992:332-333).

4. JL, BABEL, AND THE BABYLONIAN TOWER-TEMPLE

However, JL does not only respond in giving a YHWH-oriented account of creation, stressing the special (soon to be covenantal) relationship between Himself and humanity,

but uses the tower story as a direct counter to the Babylonian claims about their great city, the temple at its centre, and the royal dynasty it ensured.

4.1. JL modifies an old myth.

JL makes use of an old myth, no doubt circulating within Israelite tradition for centuries (Westermann 1987:80), modifying it to speak against Babylonian religious arrogance. While it would be easy to surmise that JL simply constructed a story to counter and 'correct' the *'Enuma Elish*, it is apparent that our story is myth (discussed in the previous Chapter), probably of Babylonian origin (Davidson 1973:105). In addition, the fact that YHWH is referred to in the plural in the story is undoubtedly due to the ancient story being taken over from a polytheistic neighbour at some stage. Mafico (1996:171) argues that the use of the plural in the Babel myth shows that, prior to the Exile, Israel believed in 'polytheistic monotheism': however, while the average Israelite, and several of their kings, certainly did assimilate other gods, I see this plural as an anomaly inherited with the myth in time long past.

Halligan (1975:168) sees J[L] as 'recasting' the *'Enuma Elish*, adding a 'recast' version of *Enmerkar and the Lord Aratta*, and in so doing having created a story that is strongly polemical against the beliefs underlying both these myths. However JL put the story together, they made sure that their readers would be left with no doubt about the relationship between the Tower of Babel and the *'Enuma Elish* by stressing the building methods used in the old Babylonian myth.

While several scholars have noted an 'anti-city' bias within the J[L] corpus (e.g. Harland 1998:528, Kass 1989:48, Gowan 1988:117) - a few even going so far as to see the city as the embodiment of evil (Ellul 1970:167) - the writer of the Yahwist tradition does not decry urban town-planning and building as wrong in themselves (Halligan 1975:173), but denounces the city, and the temple complex at its heart, for what it stands for in Babylonian religious belief.

4.2. The Hebrew understanding of the Temple.

While the Babylonians understood their temple-tower as a stairway to the gods, thereby ensuring that the god ruled directly through his royal representative on earth, and so enabling the earthly king direct access and contact with the god, ancient Israel's understanding was vastly different.

4.2.1. A place of meeting.

The earliest understanding of a Temple is probably to be seen in the 'Tent of Meeting' erected by Moses in the wilderness (Ex 33:7-11).

Initially the Tent is simply a place where Moses can meet with YHWH. The Divine does not live in the Tent, nor does this simple structure determine the presence of God. When Moses enters the Tent, so does YHWH, Whose presence is experienced in a dark cloud. The clear understanding is that when Moses left the Tent, so did YHWH.

4.2.2. The Tabernacle.

When YHWH issues Moses with instructions to build the Tabernacle, it is to build a carefully described sanctuary, so that God may 'dwell among' His people (Ex 25:8).

Having described the exact plans for the Tabernacle, and then repeated these instructions as the new Tent is constructed and erected (to be discussed in more detail in our next Chapter), the writer of Exodus finally describes the erection and acceptance of the new Tent of Meeting:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the Tabernacle.

In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they

did not set out – until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels (Ex 40:34-38).

It is apparent that the original understanding of the Tent being a ‘place of meeting’ between God and His human (priestly) representative is carried over into the Tabernacle.

4.2.3. The Temple.

This understanding, that the tent is merely a ‘place of meeting’, is clearly seen in the construction and dedication of the Temple by Solomon.

Having taken seven years to build the Temple, and another thirteen to complete the accompanying palace and garden, Solomon eventually dedicated the Temple. Acknowledging that no Temple could ever contain the Creator of All (1 King 8:27), the wise king dedicates the Temple as a place ‘for the Name of the LORD’ (1 King 8:20). This traditional understanding is further emphasised as the cloud of YHWH enters the newly-dedicated Temple.

4.2.4. Israel’s understanding of the Temple.

Thus, for Israel, the Temple is not a place to ‘house’ their God, nor a guarantee of the presence of YHWH, but is a place where YHWH God can meet with His human priestly representative on earth. In a wonderfully picturesque way, the writer of Chronicles has David describe the Temple as ‘a footstool of our God’ (1 Chr 28:2), the place where God rests His feet when He is in consultation with His subjects.

4.3. ‘Don’t equate our Temple with their tower!’

Therefore, by noting the mythological understanding inherent in our story about the tower reaching towards the heavens, I find a stern warning issued by the Yahwist Levites:

'Don't equate our Temple with their tower – for you cannot compare our God with their no-gods!'

'You Babylonians think your temples are *bab-el*, gates to God, when in fact they are *balal* - confused, as is your Babylonian religion and culture' (Sherwin 1995:106)

4.4. The Temple is not a 'good luck charm'!

This stern warning was certainly timely, as the Israelites had fallen into the same misplaced theology as that encountered in Babylonian mythology (Gottwald 1985:336):

Zion is the holy mountain of God where Yahweh sits enthroned to rule the whole world. If God is in the temple, how can it ever be destroyed? No, even if nations attack ... Jerusalem with Mount Zion and the temple will always be safe. Jerusalem will be safe, because God is in her midst (Wittenberg 1993:66-67).

This so-called 'Zion theology' is clearly encapsulated in several Psalms, as the hymns to YHWH and His right to choose the place to make His name known became hymns to the Temple built for His presence to occupy as He saw fit (Day 1993:128).

For example, a hymn to the grace and glory of YHWH culminates as a declaration of Zion's unassailability:

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth give way
and the mountains fall
into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah.
There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of our God,
the holy place*

*where the Most High dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day (Ps 46:1-5).*

The city had become inviolable because it contained the Temple, the Temple which assured the continuing presence of GOD. This theology is most clearly seen in Jeremiah's quoting of a ditty apparently sung by the worshippers in, or on their way to, the Temple:

*Do not trust in deceptive words, and say,
'This is the Temple of the Lord,
the Temple of the Lord,
the Temple of the Lord' (Jer 7:4)!*

The people of YHWH had indeed fallen into the same (mis)understanding of the purpose of the Temple as that which they encountered amongst their Babylonian captors.

4.5. The Temple does not guarantee the kingship.

Israel had not only adopted the mythological understanding of the temple-towers of Babylonia, but had also begun to see this Temple as guaranteeing the Davidic dynasty, and their royal dynasty, in turn, guaranteeing the presence and favour of YHWH:

*Then He rejected the tents of Joseph,
He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
But He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which He loved.
He built His sanctuary like the heights,
Like the earth that He established for ever.
He chose David His servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep He brought him
to be the shepherd of His people Jacob,
of Israel His inheritance. (Ps 78:67-69).*

Thus, Israel mistakenly assumed that because the people had their holy city, centred around the functioning of an impressive Temple, all ensured by the reign of the divinely-appointed king, YHWH was now reduced to a 'static presence', and so had to 'operate in accordance with that which his people expected of Him' (Strydom 1987:44).

The people considered themselves secure in their divine election, as YHWH had promised them a city, a temple, and a royal dynasty (Wittenberg 1993:66). According to their incorrect understanding, each of these guaranteed the efficacy of the other. However, the Yahwist Levites did not agree.

4.6. Only YHWH can '...make a name...'

For the Yahwist Levites, therefore, the Temple served a specific function (as discussed above), which certainly did not involve guaranteeing the royal Davidic dynasty. The king ruled by the grace of God, and only YHWH could ensure the ongoing existence of the kingship.

In His covenant-call of Abraham, God had promised to make his name great

*'I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you'* (Gen 12:2-3)..

This promise was restated to David in Jerusalem:

This is what YHWH says: 'I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth' (2 Sam 7:8-9).

In this instance, however, the 'making of a name' is now linked to the promise of dynastic succession:

'YHWH Himself declares to you that YHWH Himself will establish a house for you: when your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever' (2 Sam 7:11b-13).

However, dynastic succession is not determined or guaranteed by the presence of the Temple on Mount Zion, but by the grace and covenant-love of YHWH alone – a covenant-love that is experienced as the people of YHWH live out their covenant-relationship with their God.

4.7. YHWH has 'scattered' you into Exile.

The prophetic voice was unequivocally clear in describing the reason for the Exile:

Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say,

*'This is the temple of the LORD,
the temple of the LORD,
the Temple of the Lord!'*

If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave to your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless (Jer 7:3-8).

The people had begun to trust in the Temple on Zion, and the Davidic dynasty, seeing them as guarantees of YHWH's grace and favour – and had ceased to live the covenant-life (Clements 1988:44). The Yahwist Levites echo these thoughts in the Babel story, stressing the fundamental issue that the people of Shinar had seen their security in three

institutions:

- the city they had built, a gift from their god;
- the tower-temple that guaranteed the presence of their god; and
- an eternal dynasty, assured by their temple-contact with their god.

Similarly, the people of Judah had done exactly the same – finding their security, not in their relationship with YHWH, but in his gift of:

- the city of God, built on Mount Zion;
- the Temple of Solomon; and
- the Davidic dynasty.

As a consequence for ‘building a tower’ of superstitious faith in their temple and kingship, and seeing these as guaranteeing their safety and security, YHWH had ‘come down’, judged them, and ‘scattered them across the face of the earth’ – scattering them to Babylonia and Egypt!

5. THE SECONDARY MESSAGE OF JL

While the full import of JL’s message in the tower story can only be fully understood when the story is identified as myth, and read within its mythological framework, the ancient theologians conveyed a number of secondary meanings through the story of the tower of Babel.

5.1. An aetiological story.

Many scholars, while acknowledging the use of the Babel-story as a ‘building block’ in the Pre-History, view the Babel story as primarily aetiological, written to answer basic questions about life:

‘What was the reason that the unity of the created mankind has been destroyed so early after the creation? Why do peoples live at different

places with different political, social, and socio-religious systems? Why do they speak so many different languages that they cannot any more communicate with each other?' (Findeis 1989:257)

These aetiological 'answers' were no doubt behind the 'original myth' (Von Rad 1972:150), which our author modified and extended (as already discussed).

5.1.1. The origin of multiple languages.

Even a cursory reading of the story leaves one with the impression that the author is attempting to explain the origin of all the languages spoken in the world (Plautt 1981:79).

I have already noted that ancient scholars identified the 'original language' as Hebrew, a belief that extended well into the nineteenth century (Davis 1975:144). This belief was based on the strong biblical declaration of the superiority of Hebrew over the other languages of the world (Katramadou 1997:106). Thus YHWH commands the prophet Ezekiel:

'Son of man, go now to the house of Israel and speak my words to them. You are not being sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel - not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand' (Ez 3:4-6a).

While most modern linguistic scholars reject the notion that all languages originated from a 'single prototype' (Gowan 1988:116), there are still some who argue for a common ANE source for all languages spoken today (eg Aalders 1981:254).

Croatto argues that the Babel story is not attempting to explain the aetiology of the various languages: '...the story of Gen 11:1-9 has nothing to say with respect to the origins of human language' (Croatto 1998:220), as the story talks about 'confusing' the language spoken by the people, not 'diversifying' this language into several others.

Despite Croatto's lone declaration, I support the view that the story of the city and tower of Babel is clearly aetiological, explaining to a Hebrew-speaking reader how the various

nations came to speak different languages, when once they all spoke the sacred tongue in which the world was originally created.

5.1.2. The origin of the city.

The second question answered by the Babel story is ‘We were created to be nomads and pastoralists, where did the idea of the city come from?’ The writer addresses the issue of the origin of the city, offering a simple answer. While some scholars do question whether our story was meant to describe the origin of the city (Gowan 1988:117), it is apparent that the original myth did have this aetiological purpose in mind (Von Rad 1972:150).

5.1.3. The aetiology of Babylon.

However, Babylon was not just any city... the Exiles were undoubtedly amazed and astounded at the ‘polyglot metropolis’ (Klein 1981:63) that was Babylon.

Babylon, in ancient times, especially in the second millennium B.C., was the heart of the ancient world and its centre of power, and the rays of its culture went out far into neighbouring lands. Thus even in Palestine there was legendary knowledge of its gigantic cultural achievements... (Von Rad 1972:150).

It is plausible to imagine the astounded Exiles wondering: ‘Where did this enormous city, a city-of-all-cities, come from?’ It is to this aetiological question that our story also offers an answer (Boice 1982:339).

However, the JL author has ensured that the answer to this question is decidedly polemic (Brueggemann 1982:97), declaring that the origin of this great city was to be found in arrogant disobedience and Babylonian sin (as already discussed).

Several scholars have made much of the philological error in the naming of the city. The city is named בבל, contracted from בבל (from the root בלל, ‘to confuse’) (Keil & Delitzsch 1949:176), whereas the generally accepted meaning of the name Babylon is

either from the Akkadian *Bâb-ilim* ('Gate of God') or the plural *Bâb-ilâm* ('Gate of Gods') (Gelb 1994:266)¹¹. However, I am wary of becoming too technical in comparing the full meaning of these two names, for was the author of the Babel story not simply indulging in a play on words - a typical Hebrew construction (Aalders 1981:250), and one particularly appropriate in a story about the confusion of languages?

While the aetiology of Babylon may be a later addition to the story by the author (Westermann 1987:82), in its final form this story clearly gives a didactic history behind the founding of the great city of Babylon.

5.1.4. The origin of the ziggurat.

The final aetiological question addressed by the Babel story is that of the mighty ziggurats of Babylonia (Davidson 1973:105). Astounded by the size of these structures, the Israelite Exiles would have asked 'Who built these mighty structures, and why?'

The story of the construction of a mythological tower offers an answer to this question too.

5.1.5. Not (just) aetiological.¹²

Van Dyk (1990) argues that so-called 'aetiological elements' which are not central to the 'plot' of the narrative are, in fact, 'rhetorical'; i.e. they are included in the story to interest the listener, and enhance the credibility of the story. For example, the reason for the inclusion of the aetiological tale of the rainbow in the Noah story is: the listener would have been more interested in the story because of the familiarity of the rainbow, and because the part about the rainbow is obviously true so must the rest of the story be true!

Six 'conditions' are outlined by Van Dyk for 'aetiological elements to be regarded as rhetorical. If a so-called aetiological element within a narrative falls within most, or all, of these conditions, it is probably included as a rhetorical device rather than an aetiological

explanation:

- if the element is used to affirm and entertain the listener;
- if the element falls outside the plot;
- if the narrative contains important cultural symbols (i.e. 'a stereotyped belief within that community' Van Dyk 1990:25);
- if more than one aetiological element is found within a single story;
- if the phenomena 'explained' in the story are in a remote (but specific) place (or time); and
- if the aetiological element can be excluded without damaging the plot of the story (Van Dyk 1990:26-27).

I propose that the narrative structure of the Babel story is:

- introduction: *in the far distant past, when everybody lived in unity,*
- complication: *people angered YHWH by building a city and a tower, and*
- conclusion: *YHWH punished them by confusing their language and scattered them throughout the earth.*

Then these 'conditions' would apply to our story as follows:

- the aetiology of Babylon may have been used to affirm and entertain the Exilic listener, as Babylon was an integral part of the world-view of those living in the Levant (as outlined by Von Rad in the quote used above);
- whilst the naming of Babel may be superfluous to the original plot of the story (although I will argue differently below), as is the aetiology of languages; the origin of the city and the ziggurat is central to the story;
- the story is told to convey what the author hoped was a 'stereotyped belief', that to trust in one's own strength, and not in YHWH, was folly; and
- more than one aetiological element is found in the story.

Van Dyk's thesis therefore suggests that our story is not aetiological at all, but that the 'origin elements' were included to 'seduce' the listener into believing the narrative and its symbolism (Van Dyk 1990:29).

It is my view that Van Dyk is both right and wrong. Most of the aetiological elements are not included as 'the response to a question of a child concerning a prominent attribute or social custom' (Van Dyk 1990:19); but are an integral part of the function of the myth as the author seeks to make sense of a changing world (discussed in the previous chapter). Their inclusion, then, is a result of the 'growth and transmission of folklore and oral traditions' (Rogerson 1974:175).

They [i.e. the aetiological elements] are the stock and trade of the learned historian (Van Seters 1986:54).

However, whilst the apparently aetiological elements about the city, the tower, and the name Babel are central to the story, the origin of multiple languages is not, and quite possibly was added to give greater credibility to the story: the listener knows that various languages are spoken throughout the world, so because that part of the story is obviously true, so too must the rest be trustworthy. Similarly, the 'integral aetiologies' also serve as 'hooks' for the listener; as each aetiological element is unveiled by the story-teller so the tale gains greater credibility in the mind of the listener/reader.

Of course, the 'rhetorical aetiology' of languages does not change the significance of the Babel passage in the *Yahwist* narrative, as the aetiological elements are not the only, or the primary, concern of these verses within the great JL history (Otzen 1980b:51).

5.2. YHWH alone is God.

The message of the *Yahwist*, though elaborately illustrated, is straightforward: if there is a cause behind the great diversity of the human race, that cause must be the Lord God of Israel, and no other. He alone holds power over every nation in every time and place. There is, asserts the *Yahwist*, no other God to match Yahweh (Kelly 1992:40).

However, JL is seeking not only to stress the importance of trusting YHWH alone in all areas of life (Harland 1998:526), but to offset and compare the sin of the tower-builders with the faith of Abram, 'the great model of faith' (Guinan 1990:32).

There are therefore several vital contrasts to be made between the Babel-builders and Abram:

- The builders choose their own actions: *'Come, let us...'*
while
- Abram acts in obedience (12:4) to the command of YHWH (12:1)
- Babel is an attempt to *'... make a name for ourselves...'*
but
- Abram obeyed YHWH, trusting that YHWH would *'...make your name great'* (12:2)
- The builders choose to *'...not be scattered over the earth...'*
instead
- Abram moves as YHWH leads... to Canaan, Egypt, the Negev, Trans-Jordan, back to the Negev
- The city-dwellers see their security in bricks and mortar
while
- Abram had only movable property and a tent (12:5, 8)
- Therefore YHWH punished the arrogance of those who trusted in themselves¹³
but
- YHWH blessed the obedience and faith of Abram

Thus JL is not only warning the reader about the folly of trusting in one's own ingenuity and ability, but offers a clear alternative in the faithfulness and obedience of Abram (Halligan 1975:169).

5.3. Keep yourselves separate and holy.

I have already noted above that the addition of verse 9 may have been done primarily for 'rhetorical' reasons, the aetiological element certainly adding weight to the

trustworthiness of the whole story. However, there may have been another, more polemical, purpose in adding the final verse to our story.

In all cultures, but especially in those of the Ancient Near East, language is one of the strongest 'social adhesives' within a people. While culture may vary from tribe-to-tribe within a clan, gods may be added or ejected from the pantheon, and people may move from traditional home to new grazing areas, the loss of language almost always resulted in a loss of social-cohesion, and an assimilation into the nation whose language was adopted (Block 1984:322).

Could JL have been issuing yet another warning to the Hebrews in Babylonian captivity: 'Do not reject YHWH and turn after other gods, nor adopt the manners or speech of the oppressor, for then you, like the people gathered in ancient Shinar, will cease to exist as a nation!'

5.4. Trust YHWH and submit to his will.

Perhaps our author intended one more message for his readers from these nine verses. The story of Babel is not totally unique in the *Tôrah*, for there are several stories of YHWH bringing arrogant nations to nought, just as He did with the Babel-builders. Our story may have served as a further warning to its readers:

Great nations cannot defy God and long survive. The ... nation of Israel need only survey the many nations around her to perceive that God disperses and curses the rebellious, bringing utter confusion and antagonism among them (Ross 1981:133).

Rather than continue to ignore YHWH's *Tôrah*-covenant, the Exiles should acknowledge their sin, submit to the discipline of their God, and obey His word. Then He will once again bless them (as discussed above), and use them to be the source of His blessing to the world.

As the Exiles read the great JL story they could not but marvel that YHWH had used His faithful people whenever they were in a foreign country (eg Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses). As their ancestors had remained faithful in exile, so should they (Levin 2001:52-54).¹⁴

6. BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON

Thus the Babel story, recast by JL in the great Prehistory, 'constitutes a counterhegemonic affirmation' (Croatto 1998:217) to the 'theological error' encapsulated in the *'Enuma Elish*. It is only as the Babel story is understood within its genre of myth, and contextualized within its mythological framework, that it can speak its full message.

As a counter-myth, whose purpose it is to undo the ideological effects of the great Mesopotamian myth of the creation of Babylon (the *'Enuma Elish*), the passage ridicules the great god Marduk and establishes the absolute pre-eminence of Yahweh. As such, the biblical myth conveys a message of hope ... to its original intended audience... (Croatto 1998:222).

This hope was to be realised as the Exiles returned to their homeland, and our story was used to speak a new message into this new context.

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- 1 Parts of this section are taken from my unpublished Master's dissertation *The 'Sons of God' episode in Genesis 6:1-4 and South Africa Today*. Pretoria, UNISA, 1998.
 - 2 For an excellent summary and critique on the history of Pentateuchal criticism see Deist 1978. Unfortunately it lacks the various arguments offered in the last twenty years, but an adequate discussion of the latest points under debate can be found in Blenkinsopp 1992:1-30.
 - 3 An excellent summary of this theory is in Freedman 1962.
 - 4 I am indebted to my colleague Bernie Steyn for translating Levin's important work into English.
 - 5 I am well-aware of the various debates and theories as regards both the formation of Israel, and the conquest of Canaan. A discussion of the various theories is beyond the scope of this thesis.
 - 6 These dates from Anderson 1988:603.

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7. However, creation played an important part in the prophetic and poetic theology of ancient Israel long before it was seen as significant by JL (a brief, but excellent, discussion of this inclusion in the theology of the nation can be found in Van Dyk 1987).
 8. Why this story is out of sequence in the canonized text, and who moved it, will be discussed in our next Chapter.
 9. The great pre-history of the Yahwist Levites can be found in Appendix X (although the story of the Tower of Babel is out of context).
 10. I am indebted to my friend Karl-Heinz Weber for translating relevant sections of this work by Levin.
 11. Gelb (1994:268-269) has identified several instances of the name *tir Babilla* and *tir Babil* ('the forest of Babil') in pre-Akkadian Sumerian - perhaps a precursor to our *Babylon*?
 12. Parts of this section are taken from my unpublished Master's dissertation *The 'sons of God' episode in Genesis 6:1-4 and South Africa Today*, Pretoria: UNISA, 1998.
 13. Halligan (1975:170) suggests that these same comparisons can be made about King David's desire to build a Temple for YHWH, and Solomon's grandiose building projects. However, he is basing his thesis on the dating of the old Documentary Hypothesis - this would place the writing of J towards the end of Solomon's reign (cf Rendsburg 2001).
 14. Levin (2001:52) sees the Yahwist as a 'history of foreignness' ('Geschichte der Fremdlingschaft').

PIETER BREUGEL THE ELDER

c 1560



CHAPTER FIVE

A MYTH MOVED: THE TOWER OF BABEL SPEAKS A NEW MESSAGE.

*'Comfort, comfort my people,'
says your God.
'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.'*

*A voice of one calling:
'In the desert prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all humanity together will see it.'*
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isa 40:1-5).

The great prophetic expectation of YHWH restoring His people to their own land again, with a Davidic ruler on the throne, was realised amidst the sixth century BCE political upheavals of the Ancient Near East.

1. RESTORATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

When Cyrus the Great, the Achaemenid ruler of Persia, conquered Babylon in 539 BCE, the Persians succeeded the Babylonians as the major imperial power of the Near East. In contrast to their Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors, the Achaemenid Persians presented themselves to their subject states as a benevolent power concerned not just with garnering taxes but also with maintaining peace and order throughout the empire. The territories formerly administered by the Assyrians and Babylonians were reorganized into a system of satrapies and provinces; local governments were strengthened; roads and systems of communication were developed; and - most importantly for the Jews - displaced and exiled peoples were encouraged to return to the ancestral homelands and to re-establish local religious and political institutions in order to play supportive roles in this 'new concept of empire' (Purvis & Meyers 1999:216).

1.1. Restoration and Reconstruction.

A weakened and unstable Babylon welcomed Cyrus. A wily politician, he proclaimed himself as the chosen king of Marduk, called to reveal the true nature of the god through benevolence and justice (Pritchard 1969:316). A year later (538BCE) he issued a decree, declaring himself as the chosen one of YHWH, called by God to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. He authorised the Exiles to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the Temple, and called for practical support from those who chose to stay in Babylonia (Ezra 1:2-4).

Taking the temple-treasures with them, a small group of exiles returned to rebuild the Persian province of *Yehud*. They were led by Shesbazzar, the son of King Jehoiachin (Ezra 1:5-11). However, very little is known of their attempts to rebuild the Temple or society (Bright 1981:363).

A second, much larger, wave of exiles returned to Jerusalem in c. 520BCE, early in the reign of Darius (Ezra 2:1-70). They were led by Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, and Joshua, the high priest. They immediately rebuilt the altar, and restarted the cultus (Ezra 3:1-6). The foundations of the new Temple, built on the old, were laid in December 520 BCE, with much emotion and cultic celebration (Ezra 3:7-13). Prophetic encouragement for the rebuilding was given by both Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2), both prophets using messianic-pictures to describe Zerubbabel (e.g. Hag 2:23, Zech 3:8), although the later prophet acknowledged that the king would rule with the High Priest (Zech 4:14).

The people of Samaria offered to assist with the project, but were rebuffed. They turned to Darius for help, only to have their Persian overlord reiterate the decree of Cyrus, and give orders to instate the Temple-officials to the royal pay-roll (Ezra 4:1 - 6:13). The Temple was completed, and dedicated in appropriate fashion, four years later (516BCE). This temple was to serve 'as the centre and bulwark of Israel's life in the post-exilic period' (Anderson 1988a:483). Zerubbabel simply disappears from the history books at this point, probably removed by Darius due to the threat posed by the messianic dreamings of the prophets.

Little is known of the life and growth of the Persian province of Yehud, although archaeological evidence shows that it was 'relatively impoverished and moderately settled' in the early post-exilic period (520 - 450BCE, Purvis & Meyers 1999:221).

Under Artaxerxes I, Ezra was sent to Jerusalem (458BCE), to upgrade the temple, and implement a working judicial system for the province (Ezra 7:1-28). The scribe brought with him a 'book of the Law'. Ezra was soon joined by Nehemiah (445BCE¹). The city walls were built, and the nation called to cultic purity (Ezra 9:1 - 10:44). Finally, the nation adopted 'the Book of the Law of Moses' as their constitution (Neh 7:73 - 10:39).

Israel once more gained nation status, worshipping her God in her own land, with her society shaped and guided by their sacred Book.

1.2. New challenges demand a new response.

The returning exiles faced two fundamental philosophical and theological challenges as they sought to rebuild their country, society, and cultus:

- Aware of the theological response of the Yahwist Levites to the Exile ('God is punishing us for not living His covenant lifestyle'), the returnees had to face a singular question, 'What form should our society take, on what basic premises do we rebuild our nation?'
- As the exiles returned to their devastated homeland, no 'prophetic highway' opened up through the desert, their beloved city lay in ruins, and their fields were a mess of brambles and briars. 'Why had YHWH not kept His prophetic promise? What must we do to make sure He restores us to our rightful place in, or on top of, the world?'

The Priestly Writers were at hand to articulate an apt response to the complex challenges facing the returning exiles.

2. A TIMEOUS RESPONSE - THE PRIESTLY WRITERS

In the development of the Documentary Hypothesis, De Wette identified two *Elohists* strands, both using the term אֱלֹהִים to refer to God prior to the revelation of the divine name in Exodus 3. Noting that the later Elohists strand was primarily concerned with cultic worship, Wellhausen named the authors 'the Priestly Writers', referring to the strand as 'P' (Blenkinsopp 1994:310). In the modern critique of the Documentary Hypothesis (discussed briefly in the previous Chapter) P has stood up best to scrutiny (Blenkinsopp 1992:26).

While several scholars have seen P as a complex narrative made up of two distinct elements, a narrative and a cultic strand, woven together at some stage by a Priestly Compiler (Soggin 1980:140), I regard P as a single body of work, not merely a 'thin narrative thread' (Eissfeldt 1966:207) used to hold together great collections of cultic regulation. As in JE, this material was collected, collated, and edited (by priestly

theologians) from generation to generation. Further shaped by the ministry of the exilic Ezekiel (Levin 2001:75), P eventually reached the form it had during the Exile (Kaiser 1975:106).

Finally, as the exiles began the difficult task of rebuilding their country and society, the Priestly writers re-edited their great work, adding to it the recently written JE, and D, to form the *Tôrâh*, although this great collection would still undergo minor redaction over the next four centuries² (Levin 2001:76).

The intense editorial activity of this period no doubt reflects the extraordinary trauma that the people of Judah and Jerusalem experienced. Deprived of freedom and nationhood and bereft of Temple and Land, the only visible recourse was to the text. It was an idea of their own creation that a book of remembrance should serve in place of all that had been lost. It would provide for a distinctive manner of life to keep them separate from their Gentile neighbours. It would also give hope for the future (Freedman 1983:174).

2.1. The Priestly call - live the YHWH-life.

At some stage, in response to their new situation, and because the Temple was lost, exiled priests had carefully ordered the sacred traditions they had received from their predecessors, producing a sacred story that stressed the four primary marks of non-sacrificial YHWH-worship. These elements of the YHWH-life were shown to be extremely ancient, having been given by God even prior to the great theophany on Sinai:

- the Sabbath - inherent in God's creation of the world, and so applicable to all people, for all are created in His image (Gen 1:1 - 2:4a);
- basic food laws - a part of the covenant made with all people through Noah (Gen 9:1-17);
- circumcision - the outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant made with Israel (Gen 17:1-27); and
- the Passover - celebrating the salvation of YHWH in their history, and in their own lives (Ex 12:14-20).

These four marks of YHWH-covenant were an eternal reminder to all YHWH-followers that their God was with them at all times, even in exile, for He was a God of covenant-love. To continually remind themselves of this reality, the exiles were to keep these ancient ordinances - a reminder to themselves of the continuing presence of their God (Blenkinsopp 1994:316).

2.2. Living ordinances rooted in (divine) history.

However, it must be noted that the Priestly writers, in stressing the origin, and therefore, the importance, of these ordinances, emphasized that they are rooted in the earliest history of the earth and its inhabitants.

P does this by linking his creation account (1:1 – 2:4a) with the story of Noah (7:6-23, 8:1-17, 9:1-17) through the inclusion of the genealogy of the latter (5:1-32), and links Noah with Abraham through another great genealogical list (9:28, 11:10-26, 11:31-32).

1:1-2:4a	5:1-32	7, 8, 9	9 & 11	12 ff
Creation	historical link	Noah	historical link	Abraham

Thus P has rooted the mythological history of the world, and its people, in history, providing a continuous history between the creation of the first human and the calling of the first Hebrew (Clines 1994:305).

2.3. Ancient stories speak a new message.

Furthermore, by ensuring that the ancient ordinances were seen to be firmly rooted in history, P enables the two ancient parts of his primal history to refer directly to the call of Abraham.

Thus, for the Priestly Writer, God issues a decree to the first humans:

And God blessed them and said to them: 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen 1:28a).

This command is then repeated to Noah and his family immediately after the Flood:

'As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it' (Gen 9:7).

It is also incorporated into the covenant that God entered into with Abraham:

*'I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you
I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you' (Gen 12:2-3).*

Thus, through the calculated and creative use of genealogies, the Priestly writer has carefully placed his cosmogonic- and origin-stories within the historical-line of the people, allowing these ancient stories to speak a message that is '...strikingly appropriate to a people of exile who are homeless and rootless, alienated from land and traditions' (Brueggemann 1972:401).

This 'strikingly appropriate' message of covenant mercy (Krašovec 1994:31) was stressed further through P's construction of the Flood story, in which the central theme of the story is placed in 8:1 (Anderson 1994:433):

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and He sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.

Just as God remembered Noah and his family afloat on a sea of water, intervening so as to fulfil His covenant command to early humanity, so He would surely remember the exiles, awash in a sea of paganism and idolatry; ensuring that they too, would fulfil the covenant promise made to them through their first ancestors... through Noah... and through Abraham – but in His time.

2.4. New developments demand a new response.

As the return from exile became a possibility, and (soon) a reality, so these Priestly collators added the newly-written JL and the older D to their schematic outline of their nation's origin and early history. To this narrative they added a vast collection of cultic material (Lev 17-26), often called the 'Holiness Code' (or H) from its stress on the holiness of YHWH and His call for His people to respond with holiness (Lev 19:2).

When embroidering together the mythological history of JL, and his own earliest history, the Priestly redactor gave the early history a specific construct (modified from Sasson 1994:456):

From Adam to Noah
(10 generations)

From the Flood to Abraham
(10 generations)

- | | |
|---|---|
| i. Creation(s) (1:1 – 2:14) | a. The Flood and aftermath (6:9 – 9:2) |
| ii. Warning and Covenant with humanity
(2:15-24) | b. Warning and covenant with Noah
(9:3-17) |
| iii. The Fall (3:1-24) | c. no equivalent |
| iv. Cain and Abel (4:1-16) | d. Canaan is cursed (9:18-27) |
| v. Human ancestries (4:17 – 5:32) | e. Nations of the earth (10:1-32) |
| vi. The Nephilim (6:1-8) | f. Tower of Babel (11:1-9) |

Thus P has woven the mythological history of JL with his own earliest stories to give an 'historiographically oriented narrative' (Di Vito 1992:55), linking this earliest history with the call of Abraham through the repeat of the exact family-tree of the revered ancestor: from Noah to Abram (11:10-32).

However, it is important for the Babel story to note that P has moved it out of the order used by JL, so as to enable his history to follow a carefully constructed theme. In so doing, stressing that the dispersion of the nations was not merely as a result of natural growth (Chapter 10), but the direct result of the actions of God (Babel) as He worked out the salvation history of the world through His chosen people (Levin 1993:127).

P, therefore, skillfully wove his collected traditions with those written down by JL and D, and in so doing allowed this new collection to be experienced afresh as 'the Book of the Law of Moses'.

2.5. Rebuilding society by rebuilding the cultus.

This new collection of the 'law' was to be the basis for rebuilding the new covenant-community of YHWH (Ackroyd 1968:90). If the statutes and guidelines it contained were adhered to He would bless them in their land, but if they disobeyed these commands He would punish them (Lev 26:1-46). Thus, not only did P reinstate the cultus through this great collection of tradition, but provided for the newly-developing nation a divinely-approved constitution.³

However, for the cultus to function correctly it was imperative that the Temple be rebuilt.

2.6. The Temple is rebuilt.

While foundations for the rebuilding of the Temple had been laid under Sheshbazzar sometime soon after the restoration in 539BCE (cf Ezra 5:13-16), the Temple remained unfinished until the work was resumed by Zerubbabel in 520 BCE;

We do not know what work was done on the temple during this time, why it was not finished by Sheshbazzar, or why work was suddenly resumed under Zerubbabel (Purvis & Myers 1999:218).

While we do not know why the Temple was not completed by Sheshbazzar, it is my firm belief that work on rebuilding the Temple was restarted because P published his great

Tôrah of YHWH, not only calling on the returnees to rebuild society according to the guidelines laid down by YHWH centuries before, but calling on them to rebuild the Temple, and to rebuild it according to YHWH's divine plans.

3. DIVINE PLANS FOR THE TEMPLE

However, what form, shape, and size would this Temple for YHWH take? No doubt some foundations of the First Temple remained, but very few of the returnees would remember it well. It is very likely they would have thought of constructing their Temple in much the same way they had seen temples in Babylonia being built (discussed in Chapter Four).

3.1. The Tabernacle and Temple.

When the returning exiles began work on rebuilding the Temple, it is logical to surmise that they would build it in the style of the great temple-towers of Babylon, the only temples many of them had ever seen. For P this was intolerable, as the heinous stage-tower denied the very Person and worship of YHWH. P, therefore, made sure that the new Temple was built according to his context and theological framework (Brueggeman 1994:884), and did this by referring back to the travelling worship-tent of antiquity.

3.1.1. The Origin of the Tabernacle.

Go and tell David my servant, 'This is what the LORD says: 'You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house, from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt, to this day. I have moved from one tent to another, and from one tabernacle to another'' (2 Chron 17:4-5).

The מִשְׁכָּן (from the verb שָׁכַן 'to settle down, abide, dwell'), was probably a series of tents, each replacing its simpler predecessor:

- early in the flight from Egypt, Moses erected a tent as a portable shrine, normally housed at the centre of the Israelite camp, but occasionally set up outside the camp (Exod 33:7-11). This appears to be a simple tent, probably containing only a crude Ark of the Covenant.
- the wandering Hebrews may well have designed and built a more elaborate **משכן** later in their wanderings, although not as large and elaborate as that described by the Priestly writer in Exodus. This tent may well have consisted of three chambers, based on the mobile sanctuaries, and their construction methods, used in Egypt when the divine pharaoh needed to travel (Kitchen 2000:20). The entire camp set up around the Tabernacle in much the same way (Numbers 2:1-34) as the pharaoh set up camp when on a military campaign (Homan 2000:28-29).
- having settled in their Promised Land, Joshua set up the Tent of Meeting at Shiloh (Josh 18:1). While the language used often presupposes a solid building (eg 1 Samuel 3:15), tradition holds that it was a tent (cf Psalm 78:60). However, whether this was simply the tent of Moses (either the first or second model), or a completely new one (the desert one being somewhat travel-weary by then, Davies 1962:505-506), is uncertain. Taking note of the language used, it may well have been a more elaborate, more solid, and less mobile **משכן**.
- David eventually brought the Ark to his capital city, and pitched a tent for it (2 Sam 6:17). This was a more elaborate tent than was previously used, quite possibly containing the various chambers and furnishings as described by P in Exodus (cf 1 Kings 2:28-30).

3.1.2. Solomon builds a Temple.

As soon as he ascended the throne, King Solomon began building a Temple for YHWH, completing it after seven years (1 Kings 6:1-38). He then spent the next five years completing the palace and royal gardens, thus completing his temple complex (1 Kings 7:1-12). His Temple was modelled on the **משכן** (cf Wisdom of Solomon 9:8), probably that of David.

It was this Temple that was repaired centuries later by Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-7), and later destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:8-17).

3.2. Rebuild the Temple YHWH's way!

When faced with the (still!) un-rebuilt Temple, the Priestly Writer ensures that the returned Exiles get down to this important task by stressing the centrality of the Desert Tabernacle for their wandering ancestors, and by ensuring that the exact plans and construction are known. Childs (1974:530) questions why P set out YHWH's instructions, and then repeated them verbatim as the Tabernacle was constructed; I propose the following straight-forward answer:

- to make sure the readers were aware of the exact details, and so would rebuild the Temple 'properly';
- to show how faithful their forefathers were, encouraging the builders to be just as faithful;
- to draw attention to the Tabernacle, and the rebuilding of the Temple, through repetition; and
- to allow for a specific literary construct to be used (discussed below).

3.2.1. Divine plans - the Cosmos.

The Priestly Writer radically revises the ancient traditions, structuring his great redaction around a two-fold creation:

- the creation of the world (Gen 1:1 - 2:4a); and
- the creation of the Tabernacle (Ex 25:1 - 31:18 and 35:4 - 40:38)⁴.

Thus the creation of the Cosmos, rather than being simply another ANE cosmological myth, is prescribed as the very foundation of the relationship between YHWH God and His world, and the blueprint for the means of YHWH's Presence being experienced by His People.

3.2.2. Divine plans - the Tabernacle.

Therefore, having clearly described the creation of the natural world, P uses it as a model for the creation/construction of the Tabernacle. P stresses this relationship by

dividing the construction section (Ex 25-31) into 7 speeches given by Moses, echoing the seven days of the P creation-account (Kearney 1977:375).

Thus the Tabernacle is to consist of three clearly-defined areas, each mirroring a section of the created Cosmos:

- the Courtyard = the disc of the earth
- the Holy Place = the canopy of the skies
- the Holy of Holies = the heavenly realms⁵

Van Dyk (2001:74-85) argues that the Tabernacle and its furnishings mirrored the created Cosmos in fine detail; although he sees the Tabernacle as the ‘template to describe the way in which God created the cosmos’ (2001:74), whereas I prefer to see the creation as the ‘template’ for the Tabernacle. Thus, for Van Dyk, the Tabernacle mirrors the Priestly creation account⁶:

- Creation day 1 God creates light (i.e. the eastern portal on the horizon, from where the sun appeared each morning) the eastern gate into the Tabernacle
- Creation day 2 God created the sky the roof of the Tabernacle, the inner blue and purple covering enhancing the symbolism
- Creation Day 3 land and sea appear the boundaries of the Tabernacle symbolise the boundaries of the dry land, while the laver represents the seas

	plants and trees begin to grow	timber and representations of fruit used in the construction
• Creation day 4	the 'lights' are created	various lamps are used for light in the dark tent
• Creation day 5	flying and sea creatures	no representation
• Creation day 6	animals are created	various animals are used for sacrificial worship
	Humanity is created	the Priests serve God on behalf of all His People, and His created world

Van Dyk (2001:84) does warn that the similarity between creation and construction is in the three-tiered structure of each, and not necessarily in all the finer details, as some of the detailed creative acts are not found in the Tabernacle.

In addition, the prominence given to the final day of creation is mirrored in the instructions to construct the Tabernacle:

• Creation day 7	Sabbath rest for God	Moses commanded to observe the Sabbath (Ex 31:12-18)
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P further highlights the 'close association between world building and sanctuary building' (Blenkinsopp 1994:316) by describing the completion of these two tasks in similar terms (Blenkinsopp 1976:280):

<u>Creation of the world</u>	<u>Construction of the Tabernacle</u>
<i>And God saw all that He had made, and it was very good (Gen 1:31)</i>	<i>Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as YHWH had commanded (Ex 39:43)</i>

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed (Gen 2:1)

So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed (Ex 39:32)

By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing (Gen 2:2)

And so Moses finished the work (Ex 40:33b)

And God blessed the seventh day (Gen 2:3)

And Moses blessed them (Ex 39:43b)

3.2.3. The Second Temple completed.

The Priestly Writer's warning and encouragement paid off, as the Second Temple was dedicated in 516 BCE (Stinespring 1962:547). This Temple was to be the centre of YHWH-worship for almost five centuries.

3.3. Ensuring the continuing presence of YHWH.

As already stated, P's concern was not just architectural, as he was determined that (like his beloved Temple) all of society be rebuilt God's way.

What P seems to have done is emphasize the building of the sanctuary rather than accession to kingship as the climax of creation. As a result Israel was provided with its own highly unique and appropriate version of creation as a foundation or charter myth for the rebuilt sanctuary and the cult which was to be carried out in it (Blenkinsopp 1976:286).

Blessing by YHWH God would not be determined by the dynastic continuance of a royal house, but by the correct cultic living of all God's people – from the King to the beggar (Lev 26:1-45).

4. A MYTH MOVED

There is one further point that must be examined: the story of the Tower of Babel is irreconcilable with the text that precedes it (Skinner 1910:224):

This ... leaves the question why the final editor did not consider 11:1-9 to be an appropriate introduction to ch. 10, especially since Shem's genealogy in 10:21-31 would then have been followed very naturally by Abraham's family tree in 11:10-32. The choice to put the Babel story just here must have been deliberate (Gowan 1988:115).

I have already argued that the Priestly redactor, when combining his great tradition with that written down by JL and D, moved the story of the Tower of Babel out of the sequence used by JL so as to complete a clear structure in his pre-history (Milgrom 1995:19).

However, perhaps there was a second reason for moving these few verses of text out of their logical position within the early history of our world.

4.1. A myth moved.

We have noted that for the Yahwist Levites the city, the tower, and the concept of divine dynasty were at the centre of the story. However, P needed to draw the attention of the Temple-rebuilders to the tower, as a warning not to build their new Temple as a ziggurat. He did this simply by moving the story out of sequence. The 'deliberate dischronolization' (Smith 1996:172) would jar the oral sensibilities of the reader/hearer, thus drawing attention to the tower, and the results of not obeying YHWH (i.e. not building YHWH's new *משכן* according to P's theological description).

4.2. Dating P with Babel.

Taking into account this deliberate dislocation of the Babel story, the great Priestly compilation and redaction of the *Tôrâh* can be dated remarkably accurately. The only

time that the deliberate rearranging of the Primal History would have spoken a unique message to its hearers was when they were planning to rebuild, or had actually started the rebuilding of, the Second Temple.

Therefore, the final Priestly redaction can be dated to between the few years preceding the return of Zerrubabel, and the laying of the foundation of the Second Temple. JL E P D was therefore completed c. 525 - 520 BCE.

5. THE TOWER OF BABEL SPEAKS A NEW MESSAGE

Thus the Priestly Writers, by 'historicizing' their cosmological stories, and by moving the story of the Tower of Babel out of its narrative sequence, enabled the ancient myth to speak a new word of encouragement and warning to the returned exiles.

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1. Unfortunately the 'dates' given in the two books are conflicting, raising much debate as to whether Ezra preceded Nehemiah, or followed after him. A detailed discussion is in Bright 1981:391-402.
 2. The full text of JL and P for Genesis 1 – 12 can be found in Appendix IX.
 3. Levin dates P much later than I do, seeing it as directed at those within the Diaspora, stressing that the ancient cultic laws (centred in the Temple in Jerusalem), were to be the centre of their life as Jews too (Levin 2001:75-76).
 4. Blenkinsopp (1976:278), seeing P as having compiled a Hexateuch, sees a third 'creation' being used in the P-structure: the conquest and settling of the Land under Joshua.
 5. For a brief, but comprehensive, discussion of the ancient's concept of the Cosmos, see Van Dyk 1987.
 6. In discussion with Prof Van Dyk it was agreed that this is a 'chicken or egg?' type of argument.

HENDRICK VAN CLEVE

1563



CHAPTER SIX

BABEL, BABBLE, AND SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

As the narrative is part of the mythical, primeval era and about mankind in general, it does not have a fixed origin or reference to an actual place ... its motif is worldwide (Harland 1998:523).

In this thesis thus far I have examined the various interpretations offered for the text of Genesis 11:1-9, noting that they certainly echo the 'babble' of the tower-builders. Having offered a readable translation, examined its origins, and clearly identified its genre; I then placed it into the 6th century BCE context of the Babylonian Exile and, by doing this, allowed the mythological message of the ancient *Yahwist* Levites (JL) to resound clearly. I then examined how the Priestly theologians (P) enabled the text to speak a new message into a changed context by arranging the story within a (new) wider literary context. In so doing I have regarded the text of Scripture as the object to be studied by me (the subject). However, this is not the purpose of the text in its canonical form:

The main question is no longer 'How did this text emerge and develop?' but 'What is the message of the text in its final [or rather, 'present'] form?' (Rendtorff 1998:44).

However, as I have 'digested the text', so it has begun to address me (Pieterse 2001:20). It is therefore imperative that I now 'consciously stand back' (Wink 1973:25) from the text, and acknowledge myself as the object, to be addressed by the text (now the subject); in order that He Who is the Subject of all may address me through His holy Word.

This kind of literature was told not just to recall the past but to help one understand one's own encounter with the same realities....[This story] contains a meeting between humans and God, and it becomes revelation for us when the story enables us also to encounter that same God (Gowan 1988:8-9).

But how can a centuries-old myth, of vague origin, speak into our rational scientific-world at the beginning of the 21st century? I believe that it can speak into our world exactly *because* it is a centuries-old myth, as the truth it originally conveyed is just as relevant in my world as it was in that of the original author.

'I regard myth as the indispensable matrix of faith' (Manley 1994:30).

While the *Yahwist* Levites were writing to convey a God-message to their readers/hearers, I believe that same *Yahwist* message is as relevant to all South Africans today, as is the 'new message' spoken by our story when put to a new purpose by the Priestly theologians:

This kind of literature was told not just to recall the past but to help one understand one's own encounter with the same realities. [This story] could function as self-affirmation in many different times and places' (Gowan 1988:8).

So what does this obscure, centuries old, text say into my life as a Christian, and specifically as a South African Christian, at the beginning of the 21st century?

1. THE MESSAGE OF THE YAHWIST LEVITES FOR TODAY

As the ancient text involves כָּל־הָאָרֶץ (used five times in our text - vs 1, 4, 8, 9 x2), the message intended by the *Yahwist* Levites (as discussed in Chapter Four) speaks clearly to all בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם (vs 5) today (Swiggers 1999:187), and so has a definite message for me and for my South African context.

1.1. There is only one name that counts.

The story of Babel is about a whole community, therefore it addresses us as a community (Atkinson 1990:175). This is particularly true of my country South Africa, as we seek to rebuild a society torn apart by the 'tower' of *apartheid*. The 'tower' of *apartheid* sought to drive people apart, ensuring that they 'spoke' different languages.¹

As a South African I am justifiably proud of our Constitution, and the Bill of Rights at its centre² (discussed further below). However, as we seek to build a 'new', non-enslaving country, we need to beware lest we too build a 'tower'.

We have seen that the sin of the tower-builders was that their building was an attempt to 'make a name for themselves', ensuring that their dynasty (and therefore society) lasted for ever, rather than trusting in God 'for a name'. This has been the political goal of the Western world since Bacon and Descartes (Kass 1989:59), seeking to build society based on the desires, needs, and ideals of people, rather than the guidelines and grace of God (Marcin 1984:113). It is a short step from a society that seeks to be the sole source of its own sense and security (Atkinson 1990:177) to a 'tower' that declares that God is no longer.

It is only in an urban civilization that man has the metaphysical possibility of saying 'I killed God' (Ellul 1970:16).

Sadly, it is the nature of many of our loftiest ideals and projects that that which is intended to provide security, identity, and life eventually ends up enslaving (Krašovec 1994:26):

What the story tells us in this symbolic way is true of all man's vaunted civilizations through the ages: every civilization which in its arrogance claims a permanent glory for itself eventually collapses, and the greater its claim to glory, the greater its collapse (Bax 1983a:54).

The Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa³ reads:

We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;

- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

As we, together as a country, seek to rebuild our blood-stained society, we must heed the warning of the ancient *Yahwist* Levites, ensuring that our common purpose and goal never become 'an end in itself' (Marks 1983:27). May our 'common language' (Sallis 1992:27) of rights, responsibilities, and justice for all never become a babble of tower-building noise. May we, as South Africans, never forget that the Preamble to our Constitution ends:

May God protect our people.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.

God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa.

Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.

However, the secondary message of the *Yahwist* Levites speaks two additional warnings into my context today too.

1.2. Beware building a private tower.

For many of us today, the story of Babel is not a myth from long-ago, but is a present reality in our private lives, as we are unable to comprehend that our diversity and differences from each other are a divine gift (Gonzalez & Gonzalez 1993:24). When meeting others for the first time we naturally erect a 'tower' around who we really are, in the hope of '*making a name for ourselves*' in their eyes! However, rather than drawing us into closer fellowship and intimacy with one another, these 'towers' usually serve only to separate us from those we meet. We end up '*speaking different languages*', unable to understand one another, and so are '*scattered*' in our solitude and alone-ness.

We can only live without our 'towers' as we accept who we really are in God (Laurin 1978:143), and offer ourselves to others in honesty and trusting vulnerability:

The real evil [of the tower-builders] is not that the people of this town are defying the power of God, but that they are refusing to be vulnerable before others, building instead an edifice meant to impress them. Alienation results because human beings speak the same language only when they appear before each other as they really are, vulnerable, without impressively constructed towers (Rolheiser 1979:88).

This alienation is further entrenched when, focussing rather on my 'impressively constructed tower', I fail to listen to the other (Brueggemann 1982:103), seeing him/her only as someone to be converted into another 'tower-admirer'. It is only as we abandon our 'tower', and begin really to listen to the other that we give them the space to be vulnerable, to be themselves, and allow ourselves that same dignity and space.

Sin and pride seek to destroy this space and drive us away from each other, leaving us to babble in our own language as we scatter to our respective corners of the earth (Rolheiser 1979:89).

1.3. Beware seeing people only as bricks.

In the rabbinic midrash in the *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer*, we read that as the tower got higher, so it became increasingly more difficult to get bricks to the top. Eventually, if a worker dropped a brick, the others lamented the fact that another one would now need to be carried all the way up. However, when a worker lost his balance, and fell to his death, no mourning happened, for workers were plentiful, and easy to replace (Sherwin 1995:109)!

According to Scripture, fundamental to our contented existence as humans is an awareness that, as we live in a world with natural boundaries, so we live in a world with divinely instituted boundaries (Westermann 1987:83). While the majority of our greatest discoveries and inventions have come from dissatisfaction with our perceived natural boundaries; reacting negatively to, or in total disregard of, our divine boundaries often results in the construction of technological 'towers' as we seek to find our own purpose and security (Bax 1983a:53).

While Scripture certainly does not frown upon human inventiveness and progress (Gowan 1988:119), it is all-too-easy for this progress to result in 'technological pride' (Atkinson 1990:178). As we focus more on the acquisition of things, so our standards begin to change, until we become not only creators of things, but 'makers of values' (Kass 1989:53). It is then an easy step for our values to become focussed on our technological creations and machinations, with people being reduced to the 'things' in our society.

History is littered with the ugly scars caused by utilitarianism, as people were reduced to 'things', seen as nothing more than 'bricks' to be used, and discarded when their use is no longer beneficial, as political 'towers' were constructed. For example

- the Crusades;
- slavery;
- the Industrial Revolution;
- communism;
- the Holocaust; and
- in my own country, *Apartheid*, as those who did not fit within a certain race-classification were denied many basic rights, and specifically educated always to be simply tools in the service of their racial-overlords.

As I reflect on the significance of the tower-story for our society today, the world's leaders are becoming increasingly embroiled in the debate on the use of human stem-cells for scientific and medical advancement. The debate divides fairly easily: the pro-research community seeing stem-cells as the route to curing many of the world's diseases, while the anti-research lobby sees it as turning viable human embryos into 'things' (Cloud 2001:32). While many within the scientific field emphasise that research is only conducted on blastocysts discarded by fertility clinics, certain institutes have acknowledged creating embryos for the express purpose of this research (Goldstein 2001:32).

What next? Today a blastocyst is created for harvesting. Tomorrow, researchers may find that a five-month-old fetus with a discernable human appearance, suspended in an artificial placenta, may be the source of even more promising body parts (Krauthammer 2001:37).

As our world advances scientifically we must ensure that people remain people, afforded the dignity and grace due to someone created in the very image of YHWH (Genesis 1:27), and not reduced to a mere commodity:

The message here is clear. 'The technocratic mentality always runs the spiritual danger of valuing commodities over people, and of valuing people as a commodity.' According to the rabbis, this was the sin of the tower people. Once a society begins to consider people as things, and things more valuable than people, such a society cannot in the long run endure. Such a society has lost its moral and spiritual sense of priorities, its sense of purpose. And, such a society is not only that of the tower people; such a society is our own today (Sherwin 1995:109).

We must be aware, and heed the wisdom of the ancient rabbinic interpreters, lest we too see people as being nothing more valuable than 'bricks'.

2. THE PRIESTLY THEOLOGIANS SPEAK AGAIN

Through the careful exegetical process I have followed, I have not only clarified the message of the post-exilic Priestly writers (Chapter Five), but have enabled their message to speak into my world today too, and particularly my South African context.

2.1. Beware how you build your Temple.

I noted, in my previous Chapter, that the primary intention of the Priestly writer in moving the Babel story as it was placed within a wider literary context was to ensure that the returned Exiles saw the hand of God in all of history, and so rebuilt the Temple God's way, and not simply to the designs of the Babylonians. Therein lies a message there for my country too.

The various political 'players' in our country are each attempting to build the new South Africa according to their pre-conceived picture as to what a 'perfect society' should look

like, thus the *South African Communist Party* is working towards a quite different ‘temple’ from that of the *Democratic Alliance*, or the *African National Congress* government. It is to these various preconceived ‘plans’ for a new society that the ancient Priestly writer speaks a clear message again: ‘Beware how you build your ‘temple’ – make sure you build it God’s way, and not according to any hallowed concepts that do not reflect His grace and might!’

As we, the people of South Africa, attempt to rebuild our pain-wracked country, we have ensured that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa has, at its heart, the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2 of the Constitution). The Bill of Rights ensures various basic rights for all the people of our country, entrenching:

- Equality;
- Human Dignity;
- the Right to Life;
- Freedom and Security of the Person;
- Privacy;
- Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Opinion;
- Freedom of Expression;
- the right to Assembly, Demonstration, Picket, and Petition;
- Freedom of Association;
- various Political Rights;
- Citizenship;
- Freedom of Movement and Residence;
- Freedom of Trade, Occupation, and Profession;
- free and lawful Labour Relations;
- care for the Environment;
- the right to own Property;
- the right to Housing;
- accessibility to Health Care, Food, Water, and Social Security;
- accessibility to Education;
- the right to maintain one’s own Language and Culture;
- the existence of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities;
- Access to Information;

- Just Administrative Action; and
- Access to Courts.

In addition, the Bill of Rights ensures that nobody suffers from:

- Slavery, Servitude, and Forced Labour;

and entrenches various rights specific to:

- Children; and
- Arrested, Detained, and Accused Persons.

As a South African I am justifiably proud of our Constitution, and the Bill of Rights at its heart. I believe the Bill of Rights is a valid attempt to ensure that the ‘builders’ of our new nation build society in a way that takes cognisance of each of its members. However, we must be vigilant lest the ‘new nation’ we seek to build becomes a ‘temple’ in itself – we must continually make sure that we do not become so lost in the glorious plans of a model society that we lose sight of the Plans of God, and end up ‘building’ instead a bastardized ‘ziggurat’ to our own human fancies and greed.

Sadly, we have already seen this happen as our new ‘temple’ allocates more rights to convicted criminals than to those wronged by the criminals, leading to an enormous crime-problem, an apparent inability to respond from the South African Police Services and the Judiciary, and a feeling of massive alienation by the average law-abiding citizen. ‘Beware how you build your temple!’ warns the ancient Priestly writer.

2.2. Never think your Temple is God.

My work on the first draft of this section was interrupted by two US airliners crashing into the World Trade Centre in New York City, while a third was nose-dived into the Pentagon in Washington. This unfathomable act of terrorism on September 11th 2001 left 6 333 people dead, the majority dying as the twin towers of the World Trade Centre collapsed in on themselves (TIME, 1 October 2001, pg 21). The entire world has been altered forever by these attacks. Two months later, as I am busy rewriting the chapter, the airwaves are once again carrying news of disaster and bloodshed, as bombs and missiles from the USA and UK crash into ‘specific targets’ in Afghanistan, having convinced themselves that the attacks were planned, financed, and carried out by members of Osama bin Laden’s *Al-Qaeda* organization.

This terror attack allows the ancient Priestly writer to speak his ancient message into our world again: '*Never think your Temple is God!*' Of course, this warning is just as applicable to my life too.

Writing during a time when Israel had to share her land with many other inhabitants of differing traditions and religions (Levin 2001:81), P had given a stern warning that the People of God were not to build their Temple as their Babylonian captors had erected their sacred towers. That message needs to be heard loud and clear in our world today, as so many people turn their means of communion with God into a god, the essence of all religious fundamentalism (Armstrong 2001:56). Of course, this fundamentalist fervour, which is the ultimate form of idolatry, is not restricted to Islamic militants. This same idolatrous fervour threatens to trap Christians who beat up Moslems (James 2001:50), or countries who indiscriminately bomb innocent people in revenge attacks.

In fact, the Priestly writers would direct their stern admonition directly at the Western nations who so arrogantly condemn the fundamentalism of Bin Laden, challenging us to re-examine the foundations of our own societies. Have we 'built' our society on the grace, love, and diversity of God's plans, or on the heretical plans of greed and selfishness which often masquerade as capitalism? Perhaps our idealistic concept of a world-wide economy is nothing short of a 'ziggurat' to the god Mammon (Russell 1999:15). Perhaps the twin towers of the World Trade Centre were the 'Tower of Babel' of today, arrogant symbols of the worship of capitalistic narcissism!

3. IS THERE HOPE AFTER BABEL?

As the ancient message of the *Yahwist* Levites and the Priestly theologians is relevant and topical in our world today, so too is the message of hope spoken by our story in its wider textual context.

As in the story of Babel, so much of our societal-, interpersonal-, and intrapersonal-life seems left with only disintegration, scattering, separation, and confusion (Atkinson 1990:184). Are we always to live this 'life after Babel' (Cloete & Smit 1994:84)? To this fundamental question Scripture gives an emphatic 'No!'

We have already noted that many scholars see the unity of Pentecost as the saving act of God on a world-after-Babel, the various languages now being a uniting factor, rather than a source of division and conflict. While I have already noted my uncertainty about the linking together of these two stories, the post-Pentecost community does give us a clear glimpse of the will of God for a world struggling daily with life-after-Babel:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

'Unity is the very purpose of God for all of creation' (Gonzalez & Gonzalez 1993:23):

And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph 1:8b-10).

According to Scripture, therefore, the unity and development of society is not to be found in a rejection or denial of God (Findeis 1989:258), nor in cocooning ourselves into safe cells of comfort and self-security (Farmer 1995:28). Our ultimate security and growth as people, a community, and as a society rests not in a 'tower' declaring our own arrogance and possibilities, nor in a 'tower' ensuring that we are protected from others; but in embracing our full humanity in Christ, and seeking to live that grace and love out daily.

The picture of the Tower of Babel still confronts us with its prophecy (Bowie 1952:564).

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1. Interestingly, this separation was attempted by forcing a single language (*Afrikaans*) on all people.
 2. For the full text of the Constitution, see www.polity.org.za.
 3. As adopted on 8 May 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of South Africa

ABEL GRIMMER

1604



CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: BABEL, BABBLE, AND BABYLON.

While the story of the Tower of Babel has become an integral part of our Western world-view, many, if not most, of the attempts to understand it are nothing short of babble themselves. This is because they do not take cognisance of the genre of the text (i.e. myth), nor do they interpret it within its wider mythological framework.

I began this thesis by noting the ‘Babel’ of interpretations down through the centuries (Chapter One); arguing that the reason most exegesis of the tower story was nothing short of babble was because the exegete/s did not take cognisance of the genre of the text and, therefore, were unable to satisfactorily explain:

- the purpose of the tower;
- what it means ‘to make a name’; and
- why being ‘scattered’ was so catastrophic.

This means that they were/are unable to determine what the ‘this’ was that YHWH reacted so strongly to. I then suggested that the only way to understand fully this ancient story was to approach it critically and with integrity to the ancient text, its author/s, and its context/s – understanding it as a myth, set within a larger mythological framework.

In Chapter Two I then clarified the text of Genesis 11:1-9, noting the various literary constructs used to enhance, and convey, the message of the text.

Having clarified the text, and ascertained its provenance, I then identified its genre as ‘myth’ (Chapter Three), noting similar Ancient Near Eastern myths, and discussing the mythological understanding conveyed to the early listeners / readers of the Babel story. I argued that the ‘tower’ should be understood within the mythological understanding of the function of a Temple within the world-view of the ANE. This theological understanding, deeply rooted in their understanding of the origin of the universe, sees the temple as:

- a means of constant communication between the god/s and their representative on earth, the king;
- this relationship ensured the continuance of the royal dynasty, as the god/s ‘made a name’ for the king and his subjects; and

- as long as the dynasty survived, and kept civil society running, the people would remain together (i.e. would not 'be scattered across the face of the whole earth').

In Chapter Four I suggested that the mythical story was first included in Israel's sacred history by the *Yahwist* Levites. By stressing its meaning within its wider mythological framework, the tower story was used to convey a stern warning to those in Babylonian Exile:

- they must not even begin to think like their captors, fancying that a building can guarantee contact with YHWH, for only an obedient life will achieve that;
- only YHWH can ensure security and dynastic continuance;
- in fact it was the Hebrews' 'Zion theology', trusting in their temple and king rather than the One Who touched earth in the Temple, that caused them to be sent into exile.

However, interpreted within its wider narrative framework, the story conveyed hope and encouragement to those 'scattered' in exile: YHWH was a covenant-God, and would work out His life-blessing if His people would live a life of covenant-obedience.

In Chapter Five I argued that the story was deliberately rearranged out of sequence by the post-exilic Priestly writer. This enabled the story to serve as a warning to a people seeking to experience the Presence of God in their decimated country as they rebuilt society with a new temple at its centre. Rearranged within its wider narrative context, the story also offered assurance and encouragement to the depressed and questioning returnees. I further suggested that the 'deliberate dischronolization' (Smith 1996:172) of the story enables the dating the great Priestly corpus of the *Tôrâh* with reasonable accuracy.

Throughout these chapters it became apparent that the text conveyed a meaning beyond the obvious story (Derrida 1991:33 argues for the need to discover the 'interlinear translation' of the text). By treating the text with integrity, as a myth, understood within certain historical, textual, and mythological contexts, I have enabled the text to speak its true message into those contexts, and into our world today. As its 'meaning and scope are universal' (Anderson 1978:70), I suggested in Chapter Six that our story has a stern message for South Africa today: we cannot make ourselves like God (JL), but can only make ourselves ready for God to inhabit with His Presence (P), thus allowing Him to recreate a world marred by all my/our Babels (Moye 1990:598).

The value of a mythical account lies in its explanatory power, in its suggestive capacity, and in its artistic achievement. In this respect, the story of the tower of Babel, for all its conciseness, is one of the most forceful mythical accounts in the Old Testament (Swiggers 1999:190).

APPENDIX I

JUBILEES 10:18-27

And in the three-and-thirtieth jubilee, in the first year in the second week, Peleg took to himself a wife, whose name was Lômna the daughter of Sînâ'ar, and she bare him a son in the fourth year of this week, and he called his name Reu; for he said: 'Behold, the children of men have become evil through the wicked purpose of building for themselves a city and a tower in the land of Shinar.' For they departed from the land of Ararat eastward to Shinar; for in his days they built the city and the tower, saying, 'Go to, let us ascend thereby into heaven.' And they began to build, and in the fourth week they made brick with fire, and the bricks served them for stone, and the clay with which they cemented them together was asphalt which comes out of the sea, and out of the fountains of water in the land of Shinar. And they built it: forty and three years were they building it; its breadth was 203 bricks, and the height (of a brick) was the third of one; its height amounted to 5433 cubits and 2 palms, and the extent (of one wall was) thirteen stades (and of the other thirty stades). And the Lord our God said unto us: 'Behold, they are one people, and (this) they begin to do, and now nothing will be withholden from them. Go to, let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech, and they may be dispersed into cities and nations, and one purpose will no longer abide with them until the day of judgement.' And the Lord descended, and we descended with Him to see the city and the tower which the children of men had built. And He confounded their language, and they no longer understood one another's speech, and they ceased then to build the city and the tower. For this reason the whole land of Shinar is called Babel, because the Lord did there confound all the language of the children of men, and from thence they were dispersed into their cities, each according to his language and his nation. And the Lord sent a mighty wind against the tower and overthrew it upon the earth, and behold it was between Asshur and

Babylon in the land of Shinar, and they called its name 'Overthrow'. In the fourth week in the first year in the beginning thereof in the four and thirtieth jubilee, were they dispersed from the land of Shinar.

(Charles 1913a:28-29)

GUSTAV DORÉ

1866



APPENDIX II

PHILO'S ON THE CONFUSION OF LANGUAGES

I. Enough has been said on these matters. The next question which demands our careful consideration is the confusion of tongues and the lessons of wisdom taught by Moses thereon. For he says as follows:

'And all the earth was one lip and there was one voice to all. And it came to pass as they moved from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and dwelt there. And a man said to his neighbour, Come, let us make bricks and bake them with fire. And the brick became as stone to them and the clay was asphalt to them. And they said. 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower, whose head shall be unto heaven, and let us make our name before we are scattered abroad, on the face of all the earth.' And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men built. And the Lord said, 'Behold, they have all one race and one lip, and they have begun to do this, and now nothing shall fail from them of all that they attempt to do. Come and let us go down and confuse their tongue there, that they may not understand each the voice of his neighbour.' And the Lord scattered them abroad thence on the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city and the tower. Therefore the name of the city was called 'Confusion,' because the Lord confounded there the lips of the whole earth, and the Lord scattered them thence over the face of the whole earth' (Gen xi. 1-9).

II. Persons who cherish a dislike of the institutions of our fathers and make it their constant study to denounce and decry the Laws find in these and similar passages openings as it were for their godlessness. 'Can you still', say these impious scoffers, 'speak gravely of the ordinances as containing the canons of absolute truth? For see, your so-called holy books contain also myths, which you regularly deride when you hear them related by others. And indeed,' they continue, 'it is needless to collect the numerous examples scattered about the Law-book, as we might had we leisure to spend in exposing its failings. We have but to remind you of the instances which lie at our very feet and ready to our hand.'

One of these we have here, which resembles the fable told of the Aloeidae, who according to Homer, the greatest and most reputed of poets, planned to pile the three loftiest mountains on each other in one heap, hoping that when these were raised to the height of the upper sky they would furnish an easy road to heaven for those who wished to ascend thither; Homer's lines on this subject run thus:

They on Olympus Ossa fain would pile,
On Ossa Pelion with its quivering leaves,
In hope thereby to climb the heights of heaven (*Odyssey*, xi. 315-318).

Olympus, Ossa and Pelion are names of mountains.

For these the lawgiver substitutes a tower which he represents as being built by the men of that day who wished in their folly and insolent pride to touch the heaven. Folly indeed; surely dreadful madness! For if one should lay a small foundation and build up upon it the different parts of the whole earth, rising in the form of a single pillar, it would still be divided by vast distances from the sphere of ether, particularly if we accept the view of the philosophers who inquire into such problems, all of whom are agreed that the earth is the centre of the universe.

III. Another similar story is to be found in the writings of the mythologists, telling of the days when all animals had a common language. The tale is that in old days all animals, whether on land or in water or winged, had the same language, and just as among men to-day Greeks talk with Greeks and barbarians with barbarians if they have the same tongue, so too every creature conversed with every other, about all that happened to be done to them or by them, and in this way they mourned together at misfortunes, and rejoiced together when anything of advantage came their way. For since community of language led them to impart to each other their pleasures and discomforts, both emotions were shared by them in common. As a result they gained a similarity of temperament and feeling until surfeited with the abundance of their present blessings they desired the unattainable, as so often happens, and wrecked their happiness thereon. They sent an embassy to demand immortality, asking that they might be exempted from old age and allowed to enjoy the vigour of youth for ever. They pleaded that one of their fellow-creatures, that mere reptile the serpent, had already obtained this boon, since he shed his old age and renewed his youth afresh, and it was absurd that the superior beings should fare worse than the inferior, or all than the one. However, for this audacity they were punished as they deserved. For their speech at once became

different, so that from that day forward they could no longer understand each other, because of the difference of the languages into which the single language which they all shared had been divided.

IV. Now Moses, say the objectors, brings his story nearer to reality and makes a distinction between reasoning and unreasoning creatures, so that the unity of language for which he vouches applies to men only. Still even this, they say, is mythical. They point out that the division of speech into a multitude of different kinds of language, which Moses calls 'Confusion of tongues,' is in the story brought about as a remedy for sin, to the end that men should no longer through mutual understanding be partners in iniquity, but be deaf in a sense to each other and thus cease to act together to effect the same purposes. But no good result appears to have been attained by it. For all the same after they had been separated into different nations and no longer spoke the same tongue, land and sea were constantly full of innumerable evil deeds. For it is not the utterances of men but the presence of the same cravings for sin in the soul which causes combination in wrongdoing. Indeed, men who have lost their tongue by mutilation do by means of nods and glances and the other attitudes and movements of the body indicate their wishes as well as the uttered word can do it. Besides a single nation in which not only language but laws and modes of life are identical often reaches such a pitch of wickedness that its misdeeds can balance the sins of the whole of mankind. Again multitudes through ignorance of other languages have failed to foresee the impending danger, and thus been caught unawares by the attacking force, while on the contrary such a knowledge has enabled them to repel the alarms and dangers which menaced them. The conclusion is that the possession of a common language does more good than harm - a conclusion confirmed by all past experience which shows that in every country, particularly where the population is indigenous, nothing has kept the inhabitants so free from disaster as uniformity of language. Further, the acquisition of languages other than his own at once gives a man a high standing with those who know and speak them. They now consider him a friendly person, who brings no small evidence of fellow-feeling in his familiarity with their vocabulary, since that familiarity seems to render them secure against the change of meeting any disastrous injury at his hands. Why then, they ask, did God wish to deprive mankind of its universal language as though it were a source of evil, when He should rather have established it firmly as a source of the utmost profit?

V. Those who take the letter of the law in its outward sense and provide for each question as it arises the explanation which lies on the surface, will no doubt refute on their own principles the authors of these insidious criticisms. But we shall take the line of allegorical interpretation not in any contentious spirit, nor seeking some means of meeting sophistry with sophistry. Rather we shall follow the chain of logical sequence, which does not admit of stumbling but easily removes any obstructions and thus allows the argument to march to its conclusion with unfaltering steps. We suggest then that by the words 'the earth was all one lip and one voice' is meant a consonance of evil deeds great and innumerable, and these include the injuries which cities and nations and countries inflict and retaliate, as well as the impious deeds which men commit, not only against each other, but against the Deity. These indeed are the wrongdoings of multitudes. But we consider also the vast multitude of ills which are found in the individual man, especially when the unison of voices within him is a disharmony, tuneless and unmusical.

VI. Who does not know the calamities of fortune when poverty and disrepute combine with disease or disablement in the body, and these again are mixed with the infirmities of a soul rendered distracted by melancholy or senility, or any other grievous misfortune? For indeed a single item of this list is enough to upset and overthrow even the very stoutest, if it brings its force to bear upon him. But when the ills of body and soul and the external world unite and in serried mass, as though obedient to a single commanding voice, bear down at the same moment upon their lone victim, what misery is not insignificant beside them? When the guards fall, that which they guard must fall too. Now the guards of the body are wealth and reputation and honour, who keep it erect and lift it on high and give it a sense of pride, just as their opposites, dishonour, disrepute and poverty are like foes who bring it crashing to the ground. Again the guards of the soul are the powers of hearing and sight and smell and taste, and the whole company of the senses, and besides them, health and strength of body and limb and muscle. For these serve as fortresses well-walled and stayed on firm foundations, houses within which the mind can range and dwell rejoicing, with none to hinder it from following the urges of its personality, but with free passage everywhere as on easy and open high roads. But against these guards also are posted hostile forces, disablement of the sense-organs and disease, as I have said, which often bid fair to carry the understanding over the precipice in their arms.

While these calamities of fortune which work independently of us are full of pain and misery, they are far outweighed in comparison with those which spring from our deliberate volition.

VII. Let us turn, then, to where the voice of unison is the voice of our self-caused ills and consider it in its turn. Our soul, we are told, is tripartite, having one part assigned to the mind and reason, one to the spirited element and one to the appetites. There is mischief working in them all, in each in relation to itself, in all in relation to each other, when the mind reaps what is sown by its follies and acts of cowardice and intemperance and injustice, and the spirited part brings to the birth its fierce and raging furies and the other evil children of its womb, and the appetite sends forth on every side desires ever winged by childish fancy, desires which light as chance directs on things material and immaterial. For then, as though on a ship crew, passengers and steersmen had conspired through some madness to sink it, the first to perish with the boat are those who planned its destruction. It stands alone as the most grievous of mischiefs, and one almost past all cure - this co-operation of all the parts of the soul in sin, where, as when a nation is plague-stricken, none can have the health to heal the sufferers, but the physicians share the sickness of the common herd who lie crushed by the pestilential scourge, victims of a calamity which none can ignore. We have a symbol of this dire happening in the great deluge described in the words of the lawgiver, when the cataracts of heaven poured forth the torrents of absolute wickedness in impetuous downfall and the 'fountains from the earth', that is from the body (Gen. vii. 11), sprouted forth the streams of each passion, streams many and great, and these, uniting and commingling with the rainpour, in wild commotion eddied and swirled continually through the whole region of the soul which formed their meeting-place. 'For the Lord God', it runs, 'seeing that the wickednesses of men were multiplied on the earth, and that every man carefully purposed in his heart evil things every day', determined to punish man, that is the mind, for his deadly misdeeds, together with the creeping and flying creatures around him and the other unreasoning multitude of untamed beasts (Gen. vi. 5-6). This punishment was the deluge. For the deluge was a letting loose of sins, a rushing torrent of iniquity where there was naught to hinder, but all things burst forth without restraint to supply abundant opportunities to those who were all readiness to take pleasure therein. And surely this punishment was suitable. For not one part only of the soul had been corrupted, so that it might be saved through the soundness of others, but nothing in it was left free from

disease and corruption. For 'seeing', as the scripture says, that 'everyone', that is every thought and not one only, 'purposed', the upright judge awarded the penalty which the fault deserved.

VIII. There are they who made a confederacy at the salt ravine. For the place of vices and passions is hollow and rough and ravine-like; salt indeed, and bitter are the pangs which it brings. The covenant of alliance which they swore was destroyed by wise Abraham, for he knew that it had not the sanctity of oaths or covenant-rites. Thus we read 'all these joined their voices to come to the salt-ravine; this is the salt sea' (Gen. xiv. 3).

Observe further those who were barren of wisdom and blind in the understanding which should naturally be sharp of sight, their qualities veiled under their name of Sodomite - how the whole people from the young men to the eldest ran round and round the house of the soul to bring dishonour and ruin on those sacred and holy Thoughts which were its guests, its guardians and sentinels; how not a single one is minded to oppose the unjust or shrink from doing injustice himself. For we read that not merely some 'young and old' (Gen. xix.4), conspiring against the divine and holy Thoughts, who are often called angels.

IX. But Moses the prophet of God shall meet and stem the strong current of their boldness, though, setting before them as their king their boldest and most cunning eloquence, they come rushing with united onset, though they mass their wealth of water and their tide is as the tide of a river. 'Behold', he says, 'the King of Egypt comes to the water, but thou shalt stand meeting him at the edge of the river' (Ex. vii. 15). The fool, then, will go forth to the rushing flood of the iniquities and passions, which Moses likens to a river. But the wise man in the first place gains a privilege vouchsafed to him from God, who ever stands fast, a privilege which is the congener of His power, which never swerves and never wavers. For it was said to him 'Stand thou here with me' (Deut. v. 31), to the end that he should put off doubt and hesitation, the qualities of the unstable mind, and put on that surest and most stable quality, faith. This is his first privilege - to stand; but secondly - strange paradox - he 'meets'. For 'thou shalt stand meeting' says the text, though 'meet' involves the idea of motion and 'stand' calls up the thought of rest. Yet the two things here spoken of are not really in conflict, but in most natural sequence to each other. For he whose constitution of mind and judgment is tranquil and firmly

established will be found to oppose all those who rejoice in surge and tumult and manufacture the storm to disturb his natural capacity for calmness.

X. It is well indeed that the opponents should meet on the lip or edge of the river. The lips are the boundaries of the mouth and a kind of hedge to the tongue and through them the stream of speech passes, when it begins its downward flow. Now speech is an ally employed by those who hate virtue and love the passions to inculcate their untenable tenets, and also by men of worth for the destruction of such doctrines, and to set up beyond resistance the sovereignty of those that are better, those in whose goodness there is no deceit. When, indeed, after they have let out every reef of contentious sophistry, the opposing onset of the sage's speech has overturned their bark and sent them to perdition, he will, as is just and fit, set in order his holy choir to sing the anthem of victory, and sweet is the melody of that song. For Israel, it says, saw the Egyptians dead on the edge of the sea (Ex. xiv. 30) - not elsewhere. And when he says 'dead' he does not mean the death which is the separation of soul and body, but the destruction of unholy doctrines and of the words which their mouth and tongue and the other vocal organs gave them to use. Now the death of words is silence, which well-behaved people cultivate, regarding it as a sign of modesty, for that silence is actually a power, sister to the power of speech, husbanding the fitting words till the moment for utterance comes. No, it is the undesired silence to which those whom the strength of their opponent has reduced to exhaustion and prostration must submit, when they find no longer any argument ready to their hand. For what they handle dissolves in their hands, and what they stand on gives way beneath them, so that they must needs fall before they stand. You might compare the treadmill which is used for drawing water. In the middle are some steps and on these the labourer, when he wants to water the fields, sets his feet but cannot help slipping off, and to save himself from continually falling he grasps with his hands some firm object nearby and holding tight to it uses it as a suspender for his whole body. And so his feet serve him for hands and his hands for feet, for he keeps himself standing with the hands which we use for word, and works with his feet, on which he would naturally stand.

XI. Now there are many though they have not the capacity to demolish by sheer force the plausible inventions of the sophists, because their occupation has lain continuously in active life and thus they are not trained in any high degree to deal with words, find refuge

in the support of the solely Wise Being and beseech Him to become their helper. Such a one is the disciple of Moses who prays thus in the Psalms: 'Let their cunning lips become speechless' (Ps. xxx. [xxxii.] 19). And how should such lips be silent, unless they were bridled by Him who alone holds speech itself as His vassal? Let us flee, then, without a backward glance from the unions which are unions for sin, but hold fast to our alliance with the comrades of good sense and knowledge. And, therefore, when I hear those who say 'We are all sons of one man, we are peaceful' (Gen. xlii. 11), I am filled with admiration for the harmonious concert which their words reveal. 'Ah! my friends', I would say, 'how should you not hate war and love peace - you who have enrolled yourselves as children of one and the same Father, who is not mortal but immortal - God's Man, who being the Word of the Eternal must needs himself be imperishable?' Those whose system includes many origins for the family of the soul, who affiliate themselves to that evil thing called polytheism, who take in hand to render homage some to this deity, some to that, are the authors of tumult and strife at home and abroad, and fill the whole of life from birth to death with internecine wars. But those who rejoice in the oneness of their blood, and honour one father, right reason, reverence that concert of virtues, which is full of harmony and melody, and live a life of calmness and fair weather. And yet that life is not, as some suppose, an idle and ignoble life, but one of high courage, and the edge of its spirit is exceeding sharp to fight against those who attempt to break treaties and ever practise the violation of the vows they have sworn. For it is the nature of men of peace that they prove to be men of war, when they take the field and resist those who would subvert the stability of the soul.

XII. The truth of my words is attested first by the consciousness of every virtue-lover, which feels what I have described, and secondly by a chorister of the prophetic company, who possessed by divine inspiration spoke thus: 'O my mother, how great didst thou bear me, a man of combat and a man of displeasure in all the earth! I did not owe, nor did they owe to me, nor did my strength fail from their curses' (Jer xv. 10). Yes, is not every wise man the mortal foe of every fool, a foe who is equipped not with triremes or engines, or body-armour or soldiers for his defence, but with reasonings only?

For who, when he sees that war, which amid the fullest peace is waged among all men continuously, phase ever succeeding phase, in private and public life, a war in which the combatants are not just nations and countries, or cities and villages, but also house against house and each particular man against himself, who, I say, does not

exhort, reproach, admonish, correct by day and night alike, since his soul cannot rest, because its nature is to hate evil? For all the deeds of war are done in peace. Men plunder, rob, kidnap, spoil, sack, outrage, maltreat, violate, dishonour and commit murder sometimes by treachery, or if they be stronger without disguise. Every man sets before him money or reputation as his aim, and at this he directs all the actions of his life like arrows against a target. He takes no heed of equity, but pursues the inequitable. He eschews thoughts of fellowship, and his eager desire is that the wealth of all should be gathered in his single purse. He hates others, whether his hate be returned or not. His benevolence is hypocrisy. He is hand and glove with canting flattery, at open war with genuine friendship; an enemy to truth, a defender of falsehood, slow to help, quick to harm, ever forward to slander, backward to champion the accused, skilful to cozen, false to his oath, faithless to his promise, a slave to anger, a thrall to pleasure, protector of the bad, corrupter of the good.

XIII. These and the like are the much-coveted treasures of the peace which men admire and praise so loudly - treasures enshrined in the mind of every fool with wonder and veneration. But to every wise man they are, as they should be, a source of pain, and often will he say to his mother and nurse, wisdom, 'O mother, how great didst thou bear me!' Great, not in power of body, but in strength to hate evil, a man of displeasure and combat, by nature a man of peace, but for this very cause also a man of war against those who dishonour the much-prized loveliness of peace. 'I did not owe nor did they owe to me,' for neither did they use the good I had to give, nor I their evil, but, as Moses wrote, 'I received from none of them what they desired' (Num. xvi. 15). For all that comes under the head of their desire they kept as treasure to themselves, believing that to be the greatest blessing was the supreme mischief. 'Nor did my strength fail from the curses which they laid upon me', but with all my might and main I clung to the divine truths; I did not bend under their ill-treatment, but used my strength to reproach those who refused to effect their own purification. For 'God has set us up for a contradiction to our neighbours,' as is said in a verse of the Psalms (Ps. lxxix. [lxxx.] 7); us, that is all who desire right judgment. Yes, surely they are by nature men of contradiction, all who have ever been zealous for knowledge and virtue, who contend jealously with the 'neighbours' of the soul; who test the pleasures which share our home, the desires which live at our side, our fears and faintings of heart, and put to shame the tribe of passions and vices. Further, they test also every sense, the eyes on what they see, the ears on

what they hear, the sense of smell on its perfumes, the taste on its flavours, the touch on the characteristics which mark the qualities of substances as they come in contact with it. And lastly they test the utterance on the statements which it has been led to make. For what our senses perceive, or our speech expresses, or our emotion causes us to feel, and how or why each result is attained, are matters which we should scrutinize carefully, and expose every error that we find. He who contradicts none of these, but assents to all as they come before him, is unconsciously deceiving himself and raising up a stronghold of dangerous neighbours to menace the soul, neighbours who should be dealt with as subjects, not as rulers. For if they have the mastery, since folly is their king, the mischief they work will be great and manifold; but as subjects they will render due service and obey the rein, and chafe no more against the yoke.

And, when these have thus learnt the lesson of obedience, and those have assumed the command which not only knowledge but power has given them, all the thoughts that attend and guard the soul will be one in purpose and approaching Him that ranks highest among them will speak thus:

‘Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war who were with us, and there is no discordant voice’ (Num. xxxi. 49). ‘We,’ they will continue, ‘like instruments of music where all the notes are in perfect tune, echo with our voices all the lessons we have received. We speak no word and do not heed what is harsh or grating, and thus we have made a laughing-stock of all that other dead and voiceless choir, the choir of those who know not the muse, the choir which hymns Midian, the nurse of things bodily, and her offspring, the heavy leathern weight whose name is Baal-Peor. For we are the ‘race of the Chosen ones of that Israel’ who sees God, ‘and there is none amongst us of discordant voice’ (Ex. xxiv. 11), that so the whole world, which is the instrument of the All, may be filled with the sweet melody of its undiscording harmonies. And therefore too Moses tells us how peace was assigned as the prize of that most warlike reason, called Phinehas (Num. xxv. 12), because, inspired with zeal for virtue and waging war against vice, he ripped open all created beings; how in turn that prize is given to those who, after diligent and careful scrutiny, following the more certain testimony of sight, rather than hearing, have the will to accept the faith that mortality is full of unfaith and clings only to the seeming. Wonderful then indeed is the symphony of voices here described, but most wonderful of all, exceeding every harmony, is that united universal symphony in which we find the whole people declaring with one heart, ‘All that God hath said we will do and hear’ (Ex. xix. 8). Here the precentor whom they follow is no longer the Word, but God

the Sovereign of all, for whose sake they become quicker to meet the call to action than the call of words. For other men act after they have heard, but these under the divine inspiration say - strange inversion - that they will act first and hear afterwards, that so they may be seen to go forward to deeds of excellence, not led by teaching or instruction, but through the self-acting, self-dictated instinct of their own hearts. And when they have done, then, as they say, they will hear, that so they may judge their actions, whether they chime with the divine words and the sacred admonitions.

XIV. Now those who conspired for iniquities, 'moved', we are told, 'from the 'east' (or 'rising') and found a plain in the land of Shinar and dwelt there' (Gen. xi. 2). How true to nature! For there are two kinds of 'rising' in the soul, the better and the worse. The better is when the beam of the virtues rises like the rays of the sun; the worse when virtues pass into the shadow and vices rise above the horizon. We have an example of the former in these words: 'And God planted a pleasance in Eden towards the sun-rise' (Gen.ii. 8). That garden was not a garden of the plants of the soil, but of heavenly virtues, which out of His own incorporeal light the Planter brought to their rising, never to be extinguished. I have heard also an oracle from the lips of one of the disciples of Moses, which runs thus: 'Behold a man whose name is the rising' (Zech. vi. 12), strongest of titles, surely, if you suppose that a being composed of soul and body is here described. But if you suppose that it is that Incorporeal one, who differs not a whit from the divine image, you will agree that the name of 'rising' assigned to him truly describes him. For that man is the eldest son, whom the Father of all raised up, and elsewhere calls him His first-born, and indeed the Son thus begotten followed the ways of his Father, and shaped the different kinds, looking to the archetypal patterns which that Father supplied.

XV. Of the worse kind of rising we have an example in the description of him who wished to curse one who was praised by God. For he too is represented as dwelling at the 'rising', and this rising though it bears the same name as the other is in direct conflict with it. 'Balak', we read, 'sent for me from Mesopotamia from the mountains from the rising saying, 'Come hither, curse for me him whom God does not curse'' (Num. xxiii. 7, 8). Now Balak is by interpretation 'foolish', and the interpretation is most true. For surely it were the pitch of folly to hope that the Existent should be deceived, and that His surest purpose should be upset by the devices of men? And this is the reason why Balaam

also dwells in 'Mid-river-land', for his understanding is submerged in the midmost depths of a river, unable to swim its way upward and lift its head above the surface. This condition is the rising of folly and the setting of reasonableness.

Now these makers of a music whose harmony is disharmony, moved, we are told, 'from the rising'. Is it the rising of virtue that is meant, or the rising of vice? If the former, the movement suggested is one of complete severance. But if it is the latter, it is what we may call an united movement, as when we move our hands, not apart or in isolation, but in connexion and accordance with the whole body. For the place where vice is located serves as the initial starting-point to the fool for those activities which defy nature. Now all who have wandered away from virtue and accepted the starting-points of folly, find and dwell in a most suitable place, a place which in the Hebrew tongue is called Shinar and in our own 'shaking out'. For all the life of the fools is torn and hustled and shaken, ever in chaos and disturbance, and keeping no trace of genuine good treasured within it. For just as things which are shaken off all fall out, if not held fast through being part of a unified body, so too I think, when a man has conspired for wrongdoing, his soul is subject to a 'shaking out', for it casts away every form of good so that no shadow or semblance of it can be seen at all.

XVI. We have example in the Egyptians, the representatives of those who love the body, who are shown to us a flying not from the water, but 'under the water', that is under the stream of the passions, and when they are submerged therein they are shaken and wildly disordered; they cast away the stability and peacefulness of virtue and take upon them the confusion of vice. For we are told, 'that he shook off the Egyptians in the midst of the sea, fleeing under the water' (Ex. xiv. 27).

These are they who know not even Joseph, the many-sided pride of worldly life, and give way to their sins without veil or disguise, husbanding no vestige or shadow or semblance of honourable living. For there rose up, we are told, another King over Egypt, who 'knew not' even 'Joseph' (Ex. i. 8) - the good that is, which is given by the senses, the last and latest in the scale of goods. It is this same king who would destroy not only all perfection but all progress; not only the clear vision such as comes of sight, but the instruction also that comes of hearing. He says, 'Come hither, curse me Jacob, and come hither, send thy curses upon Israel' (Num. xxiii. 7), and that is equivalent to 'Put an end to them both, the soul's sight and the soul's hearing, that it may neither see nor hear any true and genuine excellence.' For Israel is the type of seeing, and Jacob of hearing.

The mind of such as these is in a sense shaken and casts forth the whole nature of good, while the mind of the virtuous in contrast claims as its own the Idea of the good, an Idea pure and unalloyed, and shakes and casts off what is worthless. Thus mark how the Man of Practice speaks: 'Take away the alien gods who are with you from the midst of you, and purify yourselves and change your raiment and let us rise up and go up to Bethel' (Gen. xxxv. 2,3), so that, even though Laban demand a search, no idols may be found in all the house (Gen. xxxi. 35) but veritable substantial realities graven, as though on stone, on the heart of the wise, realities which are the heritage of the self-taught nature, Isaac. For Isaac alone receives from his father the 'real substance' (Gen. xxv. 5).

XVII. Again observe that he does not say that they came to the plain in which they stayed, but that only after full search and exploration they found the spot which was the fittest for folly. For indeed every fool does not just take to him what another gives, but he seeks for evil and discovers it. He is not content with the evils only to which depravity proceeds in its natural course, but adds the perfected efforts of the artist in wickedness. And would that he might only stay for a while among them and then change his habitation, but as it is he determines to abide there. For they 'found', we are told, 'the plain and dwelt there', as though it were their fatherland. They did not sojourn there as on a foreign soil. For it were a less grievous thing if when they fell in with sins, they should count them strangers and outlanders as it were, instead of holding them to be of their own household and kin. For were it a passing visit they would have departed in course of time; their dwelling there was a sure evidence of a permanent stay. This is why all whom Moses calls wise are represented as sojourners. Their souls are never colonists leaving heaven for a new home. Their way is to visit earthly nature as men who travel abroad to see and learn. So when they have stayed awhile in their bodies, and beheld through them all that sense and mortality has to shew, they make their way back to the place from which they set out at the first. To them the heavenly region, where their citizenship lies, is their native land; the earthly region in which they became sojourners is a foreign country. For surely, when men found a colony, the land which receives them becomes their native land instead of the mother city, but to the traveller abroad the land which sent him forth is still the mother to whom also he yearns to return. We shall not be surprised, then, to find Abraham, when he rose from the life of death and vanity, saying to the guardians of the dead and stewards of mortality, 'I am a stranger and sojourner with you' (Gen. xxiii. 4). 'You', he means, 'are children of the soil

who honour the dust and clay before the soul and have adjudged the precedence of the man named Ephron, which being interpreted as 'clay'. And just as natural are the words of the Practiser Jacob, when he laments his sojourn in the body. 'The days of the years of my life, the days which I sojourn, have been few and evil, they have not reached to the days of my fathers which they sojourned' (Gen. xlvii. 9). Isaac, too, the self-taught had an oracle vouchsafed to him thus, 'Go not down into Egypt,' that is passion, 'but dwell in the land which I say to thee' (that is in the wisdom which has no material body, and none can shew it to another), 'so sojourn in this land' (Gen. xxvi. 2, 3), that is in that form of existence which may be shewn and is perceived by the senses. The purpose of this is to show him that the wise man does but sojourn in this body which our senses know, as in a strange land, but dwells in and has for his fatherland the virtues known through the mind, which God 'speaks' and which thus are identical with divine words. But Moses says, 'I am an outlander in the alien land' (Ex. ii. 22). Thus he uses stronger terms. His tenancy of the body is not to him merely that of the foreigner as immigrant settlers count it. To alienate himself from it, never to count it as his own, is, he holds, to give it its due.

XVIII. Now the wicked man wished to display his unity of voice and speech through fellowship in unjust deeds rather than in actual words, and therefore begins to build a city and a tower which will serve for the hold of vice, as a citadel for a despot. He exhorts all those from his company to take their share in the work, but first to prepare the suitable material. 'Come', he says, 'let us make bricks and bake them with fire' (Gen. xi. 3). The meaning of this is as follows. At present we have all the contents of the soul in inextricable confusion, so that no clear form of any particular kind is discernable. Our right course is to take the passion and vice, which at present is a substance devoid of form and quality, and divide it by continuous analysis into the proper categories and the subdivisions in regular descending order till we reach the ultimate; thus we shall obtain both a clearer apprehension of them and that experienced use and enjoyment which is calculated to multiply our pleasure and delight.

Forward then, come as senators to the council-hall of the soul, all you reasonings which are ranged together for the destruction of righteousness and every virtue, and let us carefully consider how our attack may succeed. The firmest foundations for such success will be to give form to the formless by assigning them definite shapes and figures and to distinguish them in each case by separate limitations, not with the uncertain equilibrium of the halting, but firmly planted, assimilated to the nature of the

square - that most stable of figures - and thus rooted brick-like in unwavering equilibrium they will form a secure support for the superstructure.

XIX. Every mind that sets itself up against God, the mind which we call 'King of Egypt', that is of the body, proves to be a maker of such structures. For Moses describes Pharaoh as rejoicing in buildings constructed of brick. This is natural, for when the workman has taken the two substances of earth and water, one solid and the other liquid, but both in the process of dissolution or destruction, and by mixing them has produced a third on the boundary line between the two, called clay, he divides it up into portions and without interruption gives each of the sections its proper shape. He wishes thus to make them firmer and more manageable since this, he knows, is the easiest way to secure the completion of building. This process is copied by the naturally depraved, when they first mix the unreasoning and exuberant impulses of passion with the gravest vices, and then divide the mixture into its kinds, hence into sight and hearing, and again into taste and smell and touch; passion into pleasure and lust, and fear and grief; vices in general into folly, profligacy, cowardice, injustice, and the other members of that fraternity and family - the materials which moulded and shaped, to the misery and sorrow of their builders, will form the fort which towers aloft to menace the soul.

XX. Ere now, too, there have been those who went to a further extreme, and not only worked up their own souls to do thus, but have violently forced their betters, the children of the race that has vision, to make bricks under duress and build strong cities (Ex. I. 11) for the mind which thinks itself their sovereign. They wished in this way to show that good is the slave of evil and passion stronger than the higher emotions, that prudence and every virtue are subject to folly and all vice, and thus must render obedience to every command of the despotic power. 'Behold,' says the enemy, 'the eye of the soul so translucent, so pure, so keen of vision, the eye which alone is permitted to look on God, the eye whose name is Israel, is imprisoned after all in the gross material nets of Egypt and submits to do the bidding of an iron tyranny, to work at brick and every earthy substance with labour painful and unremitting.' It is but natural that Israel should sorrow and groan because of them; for the one solitary thing which he still treasures as a jewel amid his sufferings is that he can weep sore for his present state. There is sound wisdom in the words, 'The children of Israel groaned because of their tasks' (Ex. ii. 23). Which of the wisely-minded, when he sees the tasks which many men endure and the

extravagance of the zeal which they commonly put forth to win money or glory or the enjoyment which pleasure gives, would not in the exceeding bitterness of his heart cry aloud to God the only Saviour to lighten their tasks and provide a price of the soul's salvation to redeem it into liberty? What then is the liberty which is really sure and stable? Aye, what? It is the service of the only wise Being, as the oracles testify, in which it is said, 'Send forth the people that they may serve me' (Ex. viii. 1).

But it is the special mark of those who serve the Existent, that theirs are not the tasks of cupbearers or bakers or cooks, or any other tasks of the earth earthy, nor do they mould or fashion material forms like the brickmakers, but in their thoughts ascend to the heavenly height, setting before them Moses, the nature-beloved of God, to lead them on the way. For then they shall behold the place which in fact is the Word, where stands God the never changing, never swerving, and also what lies under his feet like 'the work of a brick of sapphire, like the form of the firmament of the heaven' (Ex. xxiv.10), even the world of our senses, which he indicates in this mystery. For it well befits those who have entered into comradeship with knowledge to desire to see the Existent if they may, but, if they cannot, to see at any rate his image, the most holy Word, and after the Word its most perfect work of all that our senses know, even this world. For by philosophy nothing else has ever been meant, than the earnest desire to see these things exactly as they are.

XXI. But when he speaks of the world of our senses as God's footstool, it is for these reasons. First to shew that not in creation is to be found the cause which made it; secondly to make it plain that even the whole world does not move at its own free unshackled will, but is the standing-ground of God who steers and pilots in safety all that is. And yet to say that He uses hands or feet or any created part at all is not the true account. For God is not as man (Num. xxiii. 19). It is but the form employed merely for our instruction because we cannot get outside ourselves, but frame our conceptions of the Uncreated from our experience. It is a fine saying when by way of illustration he speaks of the world as an appearance of brick. It does seem to stand fast and firm like a brick as we judge it when our outward sight comes in contact with it, but its actual movement is exceeding swift, outstripping all particular movement. To our bodily eyes the sun by day and the moon by night present the appearance of standing still. Yet we all know that the rapidity of the course on which they are carried is unapproached, since they traverse the whole heaven in a single day. So too also the whole heaven itself

appears to stand still but actually revolves, and this motion is apprehended by the eye which is itself invisible and closer akin to the divine - the eye of the understanding.

XXII. When they are described as using fire with their bricks, it is a symbolical way of saying that they hardened and strengthened their passions and vices by the heat and high pressure of argument, to prevent their ever being demolished by the guards of wisdom, who are ever forging engines to subvert them. And therefore we have the addition, 'their brick become stone to them' (Gen. xi. 3). For the looseness and incoherence of the talk which streams along unsupported by reason turns into a solid and resisting substance, when it gains density and compactness through powerful reasonings and convincing demonstrations. The power of apprehending conclusions grows, so to speak, to manhood, whereas in its childhood it is fluid through the humility of the soul, which is unable as yet to harden and thus retain the impressions which are stamped upon it.

'And the asphalt was clay to them' (*ibid.*). Not the reverse, their clay was asphalt.

The wicked may seem to make the weak cause strong against the better, and to harden the loose stuff which exudes from the weak, to obtain a firm footing from which to shoot their bolts against virtue. But the Father of excellence in His loving-kindness will not suffer the platform to reach the condition of cement which defies dissolution, but makes the unsubstantial result of their fluid industry to be but as sloppy clay. For if the clay had become asphalt, what is now a piece of earth in constant flux and perceived only by the outward sense might have won its way in complete triumph to power, fast-cemented and irremovable. But since the reverse has come to pass and the asphalt has changed to clay, we must not lose heart, for there is hope, any hope, that the stout supports of vice may fall beneath the axe of God's might. So it was with just Noah. In the great ceaseless deluge of life, while he is as yet unable to behold existences as they really are through the soul alone apart from sense, he will 'coat the ark,' I mean the body, 'with asphalt within and without' (Gen. vi. 14), thus strengthening the impressions and activities of which the body is the medium. But when the trouble has abated and the rush of the waters stayed, he will come forth and employ his understanding, free from the body, for the apprehension of truth. On the other hand the mind called Moses, that goodly plant, given the name of goodly at his very birth (Ex. ii. 2), who is virtue of his larger citizenship took the world for his township and country, weeps bitterly (Ex. ii. 6) in the days when he is imprisoned in the ark of the body bedaubed as with 'asphalt-pitch'

(Ex. ii. 3), which thinks to receive and contain, as with cement, impressions of all that is presented through sense. He weeps for his captivity, pressed sore by his yearning for a nature that knows no body. He weeps also for the mind of the multitude, so erring, so vanity-ridden, so miserable - the mind which clings to false opinion, and thinks that itself, or any created being at all, possesses aught that is firm, fast-cemented and immutably established, whereas all that is fixed and permanent in circumstances and condition is graven as on stone in the keeping of God alone.

XXIII. The words, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose head shall be unto heaven', suggest such thoughts as these. The lawgiver thinks that besides those cities which are built by men's hands upon the earth, of which the materials are stones and timber, there are others, even those which men carry about established in their souls. Naturally these last are models or archetypes, for the workmanship bestowed upon them is of a more divine kind, while the former are copies composed of perishing material. Of the soul-city there are two kinds, one better, the other worse. The better adopts as its constitution democracy, which honours equality and has law and justice for its rulers - such a one is as a melody which sings God's praises. The worse, which corrupts and adulterates the better, as the false counterfeit coin corrupts the currency, is mob-rule, which takes inequality for its ideal, and in it injustice and lawlessness are paramount. The good have their names entered on the burgess-roll of the former type of state, but the multitude of the wicked are embraced under the second and baser type, for they love disorder rather than order, confusion rather than fixedness and stability.

The fool, not content with using himself alone, thinks fit to use fellow-workers in sin. He calls upon the sight and the hearing and invokes every sense to range itself beside him without delay, each bringing all the instruments that are needed for the service. And further he spurs and incites that other company, the company of the passions, to put their untutored nature under training and practice and thus render themselves resistless. These allies, then, the mind summons, saying, 'Let us build ourselves a city', which means, 'Let us fortify our resources and fence them in with strength, that we may not fall easy victims to the onset of the foe. Let us mete out and distribute the several powers of the soul as by wards and tithings, allotting some to the reasoning and some to the unreasoning portion. Let us choose for our magistrates such as are able to provide wealth, reputation, honours, pleasures, from every source

available to them. Let us enact laws which shall eject from our community the justice whose product is poverty and disrepute - laws which shall assure the emoluments of the stronger to the succession of those whose powers of acquisitions are greater than others. And let a tower be built as a citadel, as a royal and impregnable castle for the despot vice. Let its feet walk upon the earth and its head reach to heaven, carried by our vaulting ambition to that vast height'. For in fact that tower not only has human misdeeds for its base, but it seeks to rise to the region of celestial things, with the arguments of impiety and godlessness in its van. Such are its pronouncements, either that the Deity does not exist, or that it exists but does not exert providence, or that the world had no beginning in which it was created, or that though created its course is under the sway of varying and random causation, sometimes leading it amiss, though sometimes no fault can be found. For this last an analogy is often seen in ships and chariots. For the course of the one on the water and of the other on land often goes straight without helmsman or charioteer. But providence demands, they say, more than a rare and occasional success. Human providence frequently achieves its purpose, the divine should do so always and without exception, since error is admitted to be inconsistent with divine power.

Further, when these victims of delusion build up under the symbol of a tower their argument of vice, what is their object but to leave a record of their ill-savoured name?

XXIV. For they say, 'let us make our name'. What monstrous and extravagant shamelessness! What is this you say? You ought to be hiding your misdeeds in night and profound darkness, and to have taken, if not true shame, at least the simulation of it to veil them, whether to keep the goodwill of the more decent sort, or to escape the punishments which wait on open sins. Instead, to such a pitch of impudent hardihood have you come, that you not only let the full sunlight shine upon you and fear neither the threats of better men, nor the inexorable judgments of God, which confront the authors of such unholy deeds, but you also deliberately send to every part rumours to report the misdeeds of which you yourselves are guilty, that none may fail to learn and hear the story of your shameless crimes. O wretched, utter miscreants!

What sort of name, then, do you desire? Is it the name that the best befits your deeds? Is it one name only? One general name perhaps, but a thousand specific ones, which you will hear from the lips of others even if your own are silent. Recklessness with shamelessness, insolence with violence, violence with murder, seductions with

adulteries, unbridled lust with unmeasured pleasures, desperation with foolhardiness, injustice with knavery, thefts with robbery, perjuries with falsehoods, impieties with lawbreakings; these and the like are the names for such deeds as yours. It is indeed a fine cause for pride and boasting, when you pursue so eagerly the repute which these names give, names at which you should in all reason hide your heads for shame.

With some indeed their pride in these names comes from the belief that they have gained invincible strength by the fact that all men think them such, and these God's minister Justice will punish for their great audacity. Though perhaps they have not merely a presentiment, but a clear foresight of their own destruction. For they say, 'before we are dispersed' (Gen. xi. 4) let us take thought for our name and glory. Do you then know, I would say to them, that you will be scattered? Why then do you sin? But surely it bespeaks the mind of fools that they do not shrink from iniquity, though the gravest penalties often menace them, openly and not obscurely. The punishments of God's visitation may be thought to be hidden from our sight, but they are really well known. For all, however wicked, receive some general notions to the effect that their iniquity will not pass unseen by God, and that they cannot altogether evade the necessity of being brought to judgement. Otherwise how do they know that they will be scattered? They certainly do say, 'before we are dispersed'. But it is the conscience within which convicts them and pricks them in spite of the exceeding godlessness of their lives, thus drawing them on reluctantly to assent to the truth that all human doings are surveyed by a Superior Being and that there awaits them an incorruptible avenger, even justice, who hates the unjust deeds of the impious and the arguments which advocate those deeds.

XXV. But all these are descended from the depravity which is ever dying and never dead, whose name is Cain. Is not Cain, when he had begotten a son whom he called Enoch, described as founding a city to bear his son's name (Gen. iv. 17), and thus in a sense raising a building of created and mortal things to subvert those to which has fallen the honour to be the work of a diviner architect? For Enoch is by interpretation 'thy gift', and each of the unholy thinks that his understanding gives him his apprehension and reflections, that his eyes give him sight, his ears hearing, his nostrils smell, and the other senses the functions that belong to themselves severally, and again that the vocal organs give him speech, but God, he thinks, is either not the cause in any sense or not the first cause. And therefore Cain retained in his own keeping the firstlings of the fruits of his husbandry and offered, as we are told, merely the fruits at a later time, although he

had beside him a wholesome example. For his brother brought to the altar the first-born younglings of the flock, not the after-born, thus confessing that even the causes which come higher in the chain of causation owe their existence to the Cause which is highest and first of all. The impious man thinks the opposite, that the mind has sovereign power over what it plans, and sense over what it perceives. He holds that the latter judges material things and the former all things, and that both are free from fault or error. And yet what could be more blameworthy or more clearly convicted of falsehood by the truth than these beliefs? Is not the mind constantly convicted of delusion on numberless points, and all the senses judged guilty of false witness, not before unreasoning judges who may easily be deceived, but at the bar of nature herself whom it is fundamentally impossible to corrupt? And surely, if the means of judgement within us, supplied by mind and sense, are capable of error, we must admit the logical consequence, that it is God who showers conceptions on the mind and perceptions on sense, and that what comes into being is not a gift of any part of ourselves, but all are bestowed by Him, through whom we too have been made.

XXVI. Having received from their father self-love as their portion, his children desire to add to it and raise it heaven high, until Justice who loves virtue and hates evil comes to their aid. She razes to the ground the cities which they fortified to menace the unhappy soul, and the tower whose name is explained in the book of Judges. That name is in the Hebrew tongue Penuel, but in our own 'turning from God.' For the stronghold which was built through persuasiveness of argument was built solely for the purpose of diverting and deflecting the mind from honouring God. And what greater sin against justice could there be than this? But there stands ready armed for the destruction of this stronghold the robber who despoils injustice and ever breathes slaughter against her, whom the Hebrews call Gideon, which is interpreted the 'Robbers' Hold'. Gideon swore, we read, to the men of Penuel saying, 'When I return with peace I will demolish this tower' (Jud. viii. 9). A grand boast, most fitting to the evil-hating soul whose edge has been made sharp against the impious, that it receives the strength to pull down every argument which would persuade the mind to turn away from holiness. And the words are true to nature, for when the mind 'returns', all in it that was starting aside or turning away is brought to nothing. And the fit time for destruction of this, though clean contrary to expectation, is, as Gideon says, not war but peace. For it is through that stability and tranquillity of understanding, which it is the nature of piety to engender, that every

argument is overturned which impiety has wrought. Many too have exalted their senses, as though they were a tower, so that they touch the boundaries of heaven, that is symbolically our mind, wherein range and dwell those divine forms of being which excel all others. They who do not shrink from this give the preference to sense rather than understanding. They would use perceptible things to subdue and capture the world of things intelligible, thus forcing the two to change places, the one to pass from mastery to slavery, the other from its natural servitude to dominance.

XXVII. The words, 'the Lord came down to see the city and the tower' (Gen. xi.5), must certainly be understood in a figurative sense. For to suppose that the Deity approaches or departs, goes down or goes up, or in general remains stationary or puts Himself in motion, as particular living creatures do, is an impiety which may be said to transcend the bounds of ocean or of the universe itself. No, as I have often said elsewhere, the lawgiver is applying human terms to the superhuman God, to help us, his pupils, to learn our lesson. For we all know that when a person comes down he must leave one place and occupy another. But God fills all things; He contains but is not contained. To be everywhere and nowhere is His property and His alone. He is nowhere, because He Himself created space and place coincidentally with material things, and it is against all right principle to say that the Maker is contained in anything that He has made. He is everywhere, because He has made His powers extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe without His presence, and uniting all with all has bound them fast with invisible bonds, that they should never be loosed.... That aspect of Him which transcends His Potencies cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure being, but that Potency of His by which He made and ordered all things, while it is called God in accordance with the derivation of that name, holds the whole in its embrace and has interfaced itself through the parts of the universe. But this divine nature which presents itself to us, as visible and comprehensible and everywhere, is in reality invisible, incomprehensible and nowhere And so we have the words 'Here I stand before thou wast' (Ex. xvii. 6). 'I seem', He says, 'the object of demonstration and comprehension, yet I transcend created things, preceding all demonstration or presentation to the mind.' None of the terms, then, which express movement from place to place, whether up or down, to right or to left, forward or backward, are applicable to God in His aspect of pure being. For no such term is compatible with our conception of Him, so that He must also be incapable of displacement or change of locality. All the

same Moses applies the phrase 'come down and saw' to Him, who in His prescience had comprehended all things, not only after but before they come to pass, and he did so to admonish and instruct us, that the absent, who are at a long distance from the facts, should never form conclusions hastily or rely on precarious conjectures, but should come to close quarters with things, inspect them one by one and carefully envisage them. For the certitude of sight must be held as better evidence than the deceitfulness of hearing. And therefore among those who live under the best institutions a law has been enacted against giving as evidence what has been merely heard, because hearing's tribunal has a natural bias towards corrupt judgement. In fact Moses says in his prohibitions, 'Thou shalt not accept vain hearing' (Ex. xxiii. 1), by which he does not merely mean that we must not accept a false or foolish story on hearsay, but also that as a means of giving a sure apprehension of the truth, hearing is proved to lag far behind sight and is brimful of vanity.

XXVIII. This is the reason we assign for the words 'God came down to see the city and the tower', but the phrase which follows, 'which the sons of men built' (Gen. xi. 5), is no idle addition, though perhaps some profane person might say with a sneer, 'A novel piece of information this which the lawgiver here imparts to us, namely that it is the sons of men and not some other beings who build cities and towers'. 'Who', he would continue, 'even among those who are far gone in insanity, does not know facts so obvious and conspicuous?'

But you must suppose that it is not this obvious and hackneyed fact which is recorded for us in our most holy oracles, but the hidden truth which can be traced under the surface meaning of the words.

What then is this truth? Those who ascribe to existing things a multitude of fathers as it were and by introducing their miscellany of deities have flooded everything with ignorance and confusion, or have assigned to pleasure the function of being the aim and end of the soul, have become in very truth builders of the city of our text and of its acropolis. They pile up as in an edifice all that serves to produce that aim or end and thus differ not a whit to my mind from the harlot's offspring, whom the law has banished from God's congregation with the words 'he that is born of a harlot shall not enter the congregation of the Lord' (Deut. xxiii. 2). For like bowmen, whose shots roam from mark to mark and who never take a skilful aim at any single point, they assume a multitude of what they falsely call sources and causes to account for the origin of the existing world

and have no knowledge of the one Maker and Father of all. But they who live in the knowledge of the One are rightly called 'Sons of God', as Moses also acknowledges when he says, 'Ye are sons of the Lord God' (Deut. xiv. 1), and 'God who begat thee' (*ibid.* xxxii. 18), and 'Is not He Himself thy father?' (*Ibid.* 6). Indeed with those whose soul is thus disposed it follows that they hold moral beauty to be the only good, and this serves as a counterwork engineered by veteran warriors to fight the cause which makes Pleasure the end and to subvert and overthrow it. But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God's First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called, 'the Beginning', and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image, and 'he that sees', that is Israel. And therefore I was moved a few pages above to praise the virtues of those who say that 'We are all sons of one man' (Gen. xlii. 11). For if we have not yet become fit to be thought sons of God yet we may be sons of His invisible image, the most holy Word. For the Word is the eldest-born image of God. And often indeed in the law-book we find another phrase, 'sons of Israel', hearers, that is, sons of Him that Sees, since hearing stands second in estimation and below sight, and the recipient of teaching is always second to him with whom realities present their forms clear to his vision and not through the medium of instruction. I bow, too, in admiration before the mysteries revealed in the books of Kings, where it does not offend us to find described as sons of God's psalmist David those who lived and flourished many generations afterwards (1 Kings xv. 11; 2 Kings xviii. 3), though in David's lifetime probably not even their great-grandparents had been born. For the paternity we find ascribed to the standard-bearers of noble living, whom we think of as the fathers who begat us, is the paternity of souls raised to immortality by virtues, not of corruptible bodies.

XXIX. But of those who glory in their iniquities, the Lord said 'Behold there is one race and one lip of them all' (Gen. xi. 5), that is, behold they are one connexion of family and fellowship of race, and again all have the same harmony and fellowship of voice; there is none whose mind is a stranger to the other nor his voice discordant. It is so also with men who have no gift of music. Sometimes their vocal organ, though every note is entirely tuneless and highly unmelodious, is supremely harmonized to produce disharmony, with a consonance which it turns to mere dissonance. And the same studied regularity may be noticed in fever. For the recurrences which are called in the

medical schools quotidian, or tertian, or quartan, make their visitation about the same hour of the day or night and maintain their relative order.

The words 'And they have begun to do this' (Gen xi. 6), express strong scorn and indignation. They mean that the miscreants, not content with making havoc of the justice due to their fellows, went further. They dared to attack the rights of heaven, and having sown injustice, they reaped impiety. Yet the wretches had no profit of it. For while in wronging each other they achieved much of what they wished and their deeds confirmed what their senseless scheming had devised, it was not so with their impiety. For the things that are God's cannot be harmed or injured, and when these reprobates turn their transgressions against them, they attain but to the beginning and never arrive at the end. Therefore we have these words, 'They have *begun* to do.' For when, insatiate in wrongdoing, they had taken their fill of sins against all that is of earth and sea and air whose allotted nature is to perish, they bethought them to turn their forces against the divine nature in heaven. But on them nothing that exists can usually have any effect save evil speech, though indeed even the foul tongue does not work harm to those who are its objects (for they still possess their nature unchanged), but only brings disasters beyond cure on the revilers. Yet that they only began and were unable to reach the end of their impiety is no reason why they should not be denounced as they would had they carried out all their intentions. Therefore he speaks of their having completed the tower, though they had not done so. 'The Lord,' he says, 'came down to see the city and tower which they had built' already, not which they intended to build (Gen xi. 5).

XXX. What proof have we that the structure was not already completed? First, self-evident facts. No part of the earth can possibly touch the heaven for the reason already mentioned, namely that it is just as impossible as it is for the centre to touch the circumference. Secondly, because the aether, that holy fire, is an unquenchable flame, as its very name shews, derived as it is from $\alpha\iota\theta\epsilon\iota\nu$, which is a special term for 'burn'. This is attested by a single part of the heavenly expanse of fire, namely the Sun, which, in spite of its great distance, sends its rays to the corners of the earth, and both earth and the naturally cold extent of air, which divides it from the sphere of heaven, is warmed or consumed by it as the case may be. For to all that is at a long distance from its course or lies at an angle to it, it merely gives warmth, but all that is near it or directly under it it actually destroys with the force of its flames. If this is so, the men who ventured on the ascent could not fail to be blasted and consumed by the fire, leaving

their vaulting ambition unfulfilled. That it was unfulfilled seems to be suggested by Moses in the words which follow. 'They ceased,' he says, 'building the city and the tower' (Gen xi. 8), obviously not because they had finished it, but because they were prevented from completing it by the confusion that fell upon them.

Yet as the enterprise was not only planned but undertaken, they have not escaped the guilt which would attend its accomplishment.

XXXI. We have a parallel in Balaam, that dealer in auguries and prodigies and in the vanity of unfounded conjectures, for the name Balaam is by interpretation 'vain'. The law-book declares that he cursed the Man of Vision, though in words he uttered prayers of blessing, for it considers not what he actually said, words restamped under God's providence, like a true coin substituted for the false, but his heart, in which he cherished thoughts of injury rather than of benefit. There is a natural hostility between conjecture and truth, between vanity and knowledge, and between the divination which has no true inspiration and sound sober wisdom.

And indeed if a man makes a treacherous attempt against another's life, but is unable to kill him, he is none the less liable to the penalty of the homicide, as is shown by the law enacted for such cases. 'If,' it runs, 'a man attacks his neighbour to kill him by guile and flees to refuge, thou shalt take him from the altar to put him to death' (Ex xxi. 14.). And yet he merely 'attacks' him and has not killed him, but the law regards the purpose of murder as a crime equal to murder itself, and so, even though he takes sanctuary, it does not grant him the privileges of sanctuary, but bids him be taken even from the holy place, because the purpose he has harboured is unholy. Its unholiness does not merely consist in this, that it plans death to be dealt by the arm of wickedness against the soul which might live for ever by the acquisition and practice of virtue, but in that it lays its abominable audacity to the charge of God. For the words 'flee to refuge' lead us to the reflexion that there are many who, wishing to shirk all charges to which they are liable and claiming to escape the penalties of their misdeeds, ascribe the guilty responsibility, which really belongs to themselves, to God who is the cause of nothing evil, but of all that is good. And therefore it was held no sacrilege to drag such as these from the very altar.

The punishment which he decrees against those who 'build' up and weld together arguments for godlessness is indeed extreme, though perhaps some foolish people will imagine it to be beneficial rather than injurious. 'Nothing shall fail from them of all that

they attempt to do,' it says (Gen xi.6). What a misery, transcending limitation and measurement, that everything which the mind in its utter infatuation attempts should be its obedient vassal not backward in any service whether great or small, but hastening as it were to anticipate its every need.

XXXII. This is a sign of a soul lacking good sense, which finds no obstacle in all that lies between it and its sin. For he who is not far gone in mortal error would pray that all the promptings of his mind's purposes should fail him, so that when he attempts to commit theft or adultery, or murder or sacrilege, or any similar deed, he should not find an easy path, but rather a host of obstacles to hinder its execution. For if he is prevented, he is rid of that supreme malady, injustice, but if he carries out his purpose in security that malady will be upon him. Why then do you continue to envy and admire the fortunes of tyrants, which enable them to achieve with ease all that the madness and brutal savagery of their minds conceive, and hold them blessed, when rather our hearts should bewail them, since poverty and bodily weakness are a positive benefit to the bad, just as abundance of means and strength are most useful to the good?

One of the foolish who saw to what a pitch of misery free licence leads said boldly, 'That I should be let free is a greater indictment' (Gen. iv. 13). For it is a terrible thing that the soul, so wild as it is by nature, should be suffered to go unbridled, when even under the rein and with the whip in full play it can hardly be controlled and made docile. And therefore the merciful God has delivered an oracle full of loving-kindness which has a message of good hope to the lovers of discipline. It is to this purport. 'I will not let thee go nor will I abandon thee' (Josh. i.5). For when the bonds of the soul which held it fast are loosened, there follows the greatest of disasters, even to be abandoned by God who has encircled all things with the adamantine chains of His potencies and willed that thus bound tight and fast they should never be unloosed. Further in another place he says 'All that are bound with a bond are clean' (Num. xix.15), for unbinding is the cause of destruction which is unclean. Never then, when you see any of the wicked accomplishing with ease whatsoever he attempts, admire him for his success, but contrariwise pity him for his ill-luck, for his is a life of continual barrenness in virtue and fruitfulness in vice.

XXXIII. We should give careful consideration to the question of what is implied by the words which are put into the mouth of God. 'Come and let us go down and confuse their

tongue there' (Gen. xi.7). For it is clear that He is conversing with some persons whom He treats as His fellow-workers, and we find the same in an earlier passage of the formation of man. Here we have 'The Lord God said, 'Let us make man in our own image and likeness'' (Gen. i. 26) where the words 'let us make' imply plurality. And once more, 'God said, 'Behold Adam has become as one of us by knowing good and evil'' (Gen. iii.22); here the 'us' in 'as one of us' is said not of one, but of more than one. Now we must first lay down that no existing thing is of equal honour to God and that there is only one sovereign and ruler and king, who alone may direct and dispose of all things. For the lines :

It is not well that many lords should rule;

Be there but one, one king (*Iliad*, ii, 204-205)

could be said with more justice of the world and of God than of cities and men. For being one it must needs have one Maker and Father and Master.

XXXIV. Having reached agreement on this preliminary question our next step will be to gather the relevant considerations into a coherent argument. Let us consider what these are. God is one, but He has around Him numberless Potencies, which all assist and protect created being, and among them are included the powers of chastisement. Now chastisement is not a thing of harm or mischief, but a preventive and correction of sin. Through these Potencies the incorporeal and intelligible world was framed, the archetype of this phenomenal world, that being a system of invisible ideal forms, as this is of visible material bodies. Now the nature of these two worlds has so struck with awe the minds of some, that they have deified not merely each of them as a whole, but also their fairest parts, the sun, the moon and the whole sky, and have felt no shame in calling them gods. It was the delusion of such persons that Moses saw, when he says 'Lord, Lord, King of the Gods' (Deut. x. 17), to shew the differences between the ruler and the subjects.

There is too, in the air a sacred company of unbodied souls, commonly called angels in the inspired pages, who wait upon these heavenly powers. So the whole army, composed of the several contingents, each marshalled in their proper ranks, have as their business to serve and minister to the word of the Captain who thus marshalled them, and to follow His leadership as right and the law of service demand. For it must not be that God's soldiers should ever be guilty of desertion from the ranks. Now the King may fitly hold converse with His powers and employ them to serve in matters which should not be consummated by God alone. It is true indeed that the Father of All had not

need of aught, so that He should require the co-operation of others, if He wills some creative work, yet seeing what was fitting to Himself and the world which was coming into being, He allowed His subject powers to have the fashioning of some things, though He did not give them sovereign and independent knowledge for completion of the task, lest aught of what was coming into being should be miscreated.

XXXV. This outline was needed as premises. Now for the inferences. Living nature was primarily divided into two opposite parts, the unreasoning and reasoning, this last again into the mortal and immortal species, the mortal being that of men, the immortal that of unbodied souls which range through the air and sky. These are immune from wickedness because their lot from the first has been one of unmixed happiness, and they have not been imprisoned in that dwelling-place of endless calamities - the body. And this immunity is shared by unreasoning natures, because, as they have no gift of understanding, they are also not guilty of wrongdoing willed freely as a result of deliberate reflection. Man is practically the only being who, having knowledge of good and evil, often chooses the worst, and shuns what should be the object of his efforts, and thus he stands apart as convinced of sin deliberate and aforethought.

Thus it was meet and right that when man was formed, God should assign a share of the work to His lieutenants, as He does with the words 'let *us* make men,' that so man's right actions might be attributable to God, but his sins to others. For it seemed to be unfitting to God the All-ruler that the road to wickedness within the reasonable soul should be of His making, and therefore He delegated the forming of this part to His inferiors. For the work of forming the voluntary element to balance the involuntary had to be accomplished to render the whole complete.

XXXVI. So much for this point, but it is well to have considered this truth also, that God is the cause of good things only and of nothing at all that is bad, since He Himself was the most ancient of beings and good in its most perfect form. And it best becomes Him that the work of His hands should be akin to His nature, surpassing in excellence even as He surpasses, but that the chastisement of the wicked should be assured through His underlings. My thoughts are attested also by the words of him who was made perfect through practice, 'the God who nourisheth me from my youth; the angel who saveth me from all evils' (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16). For he, too, hereby confesses that the truly good gifts, which nourish virtue-loving souls, are referred to God alone as their cause, but on the

other hand the province of things evil has been committed to angels (though neither have they full and absolute power of punishment), that nothing which tends to destruction should have its origin in Him whose nature is to save. Therefore He says, 'Come let us go down and confound them.' The impious indeed deserve to have it as their punishment, that God's beneficent and merciful and bountiful powers should be brought into association with works of vengeance. Yet, though knowing that punishment was salutary for the human race, He decreed that it should be exacted by others. It was meet that while mankind was judged to deserve correction, the fountains of God's ever-flowing gifts of grace should be kept free not only from all that is, but from all that is deemed to be, evil.

XXXVII. We must now enquire what is meant by 'confusion'. What should be our method? The following in my opinion. We often obtain a knowledge of persons whom we have not known before from their kinsfolk or those who bear some resemblance to them. And so in the same way things which in themselves are not easy to apprehend may reveal their nature through their likeness to their congeners. What things then resemble confusion? 'Mechanical mixture' to use the old philosophical term and 'chemical mixture'. The first presents itself for examination in dry substances, the latter in liquid. Mechanical mixture of different bodies occurs when they are juxtaposed in no regular order, as when we collect barley and wheat and pulse or any other kind of grain and pile them together. Chemical mixture is not juxtaposition, but the mutual coextension and complete interpenetration of dissimilar parts, though their various qualities can still be distinguished by artificial means, as is said to be the case with water and wine. These substances if united do produce, we are told, a chemical mixture, but all the same that mixture can be resolved into the different qualities out of which it was composed. A sponge dipped in oil will probably absorb the water and leave the wine. Probably the explanation is that since the sponge is produced out of water, it tends to absorb out of the mixture the substance which is akin to it, the water, and leave the foreign substance, the wine.

But confusion is the annihilation of the original varieties or qualities, which become co-extensive through all the parts and thus produce a single and quite different quality. An example of this is the quadruple drug used in medicine. This is produced, I believe, by the combination of wax, tallow, pitch and resin, but, when the compound has been formed, it is impossible to analyse or separate the properties which went to form it. Each

of them has been annihilated, and from this loss of identity in each has sprung another single something with properties peculiar to itself. But when God threatens impious thoughts with confusion He does not order merely the annihilation of the specific nature and properties of each separate vice. The order applies also to the aggregate to which they have contributed. He means that neither their separate parts, not yet their united body and voice, shall be invested with strength to destroy the better element. And therefore He says, 'Let us confound their tongue there, that each of them may not understand the voice of his neighbour' (Gen xi,7), and this is equivalent to 'let us make each part of vice mute that it may not by its separate utterance nor yet in unison with others be the cause of mischief.'

XXXVIII. This is our explanation, but those who merely follow the outward and obvious think that we have at this point a reference to the origin of the Greek and barbarian languages. I would not censure such persons, for perhaps the truth is with them also. Still I would exhort them not to halt there, but to press on to allegorical interpretations and to recognize that the letter is to the oracle but as the shadow to the substance and that the higher values therein revealed are what really and truly exist. Indeed the lawgiver himself gives openings for this kind of treatment to those whose understanding is not blinded, as he certainly does in the case now under discussion, when he calls what was then taking place a 'confusion'.

Surely if he had merely meant that different languages originated, he would have applied a more correct term and called it 'separation' rather than 'confusion'. For when things are divided they are not 'confused', but quite the contrary, 'separated'. And the contradiction is not merely one of name but of fact. Confusion - the process of fusing together - is, as I have said, the annihilation of the individual properties, and the production thereby of a single whole with its own properties, whereas separation is the division of one into several, as in the case of genus and the species, which form the genus. And therefore if the Sage's command was to divide speech, the single whole, by section into several languages, he would have used more apposite and exact terms such as dissection or distribution or separation, and not their opposite, confusion. But his purpose and desire is to break up the company of vice, to make her agreements of none effect, to do away with her fellowship, to annihilate and destroy her powers, to overthrow the might of her queenship which by her abominable transgressions she had made so strong.

Observe that he who fashioned the living being, brought none of its parts into fellowship with any other. The eyes cannot hear, nor the ears see; the palatal juices cannot smell, nor the nostrils taste; nor again can speech have any of the sensations which the senses produce, just as on the other hand the senses have no power of utterance. For the great Contriver knew that it was well for them that none should hear the voice of his neighbour. He willed rather in the interests of animal life, that each part of the living organism should have the use of its own particular powers without confusion with others, and that fellowship of part with part should be withdrawn from them, while on the other hand the parts of vice should be brought into confusion and complete annihilation, so that neither in unison nor separately by themselves should they become a source of injury to their betters.

That is why he adds - 'The Lord dispersed them thence' (Gen. xi 8), that is He caused them to be scattered, to be fugitives, to vanish from sight. For while sowing is the cause of good, dispersing or sowing broadcast is the cause of ill. The purpose of the first is to improve, to increase, to create something else; the purpose of the second is to ruin and destroy. But God the Master-planter wills to sow noble living throughout the All, and to disperse and banish from the Commonwealth of the world the impiety which He holds accursed. Thus the evil ways which hate virtue may at least cease to build the city of vice and the tower of godlessness. For when these are scattered, those who have been living in exile for many a day under the ban of folly's tyranny, shall receive their recall under a single proclamation, even the proclamation enacted and ratified by God, as the oracles show, in which it is declared that 'if thy dispersion be from one end of heaven to the other He shall grant thee from thence' (Deut. xxx.4.). Thus it is a work well-befitting to God to bring into full harmony the consonance of the virtues, but to dissipate and destroy the consonance of vices. Yes, confusion is indeed a most proper name for vice, and a standing evidence of this is every fool, whose words and purposes and deeds alike are worthless and unstable (Colson & Whitaker 1968:9-119).

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APPENDIX III

JOSEPHUS' *JEWISH ANTIQUITIES* 1.4.1-3

1. Now the sons of Noah were three, - Shem, Japhet, and Ham, born one hundred years before the Deluge. These first of all descended from the mountains into the plains, and fixed their habitation there; and persuaded others who were greatly afraid of the lower grounds on account of the flood, and so were very loath to come down from the higher places, to venture to follow their examples. Now the plain in which they first dwelt was called Shinar. God also commanded them to send colonies abroad, for the thorough peopling of the earth, - that they might not raise seditions among themselves, but might cultivate a great part of the earth, and enjoy its fruits after a plentiful manner: but they were so ill instructed, that they did not obey God; for which reason they fell into calamities, and were made sensible, by experience, of what sin they had been guilty; for when they flourished with a numerous youth, God admonished them again to send out colonies; but they, imagining the prosperity they enjoyed was not derived from the favour of God, but supposing that their own power was the proper cause of the plentiful condition they were in, did not obey him. Nay, they added to this their disobedience to the Divine will, the suspicion that they were therefore ordered to send out separate colonies that, being divided asunder, they might the more easily be oppressed.

2. Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah - a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it was through his means that they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny - seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his power. He also said he would be revenged on God; if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a

tower too high for the waters to be able to reach, and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!

3. Now the multitude were very ready to follow the determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God; and they built a tower, neither sparing any pains, not being in any degree negligent about the work; and, by reason of the multitude of hands employed in it, it grew very high, sooner than any one could expect; but the thickness of it was so great, and it was so strongly built, that thereby its great height seemed, upon the view, to be less than it really was. It was built of burnt brick, cemented together with mortar, made of bitumen, that it might not be liable to admit water. When God saw that they acted so madly, he did not resolve to destroy them utterly, since they were not grown wiser by the destruction of the former sinners; but he caused a tumult among them, by producing in them divers languages; and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another. The place wherein they built the tower is now called *Babylon*; because of the confusion of that language which they readily understood before; for the Hebrews mean by the *Babel*, Confusion. The Sibyl also makes mention of this tower, and of the confusion of the language, when she says thus:- 'When all men were of one language, some of them built a high tower, as if they would thereby ascend up to heaven; but the gods sent storms of wind and overthrew the tower, and gave every one his peculiar language; and for this reason it was that the city was called *Babylon*.' But as to the plain of Shinar, in the country of Babylonia, Hestæus mentions it, when he says thus:- 'Such of the priests as were saved, took the sacred vessels of Jupiter Enyalus, and came to Shinar of Babylonia' (Whiston 1981:30).

MAURITS CORNELIS ESCHER

1928



APPENDIX IV

PSEUDO-PHILO'S BOOK OF BIBLICAL ANTIQUITIES, VI - VII

VI. ¹ Then all they that had been divided and dwelt upon the earth gathered together thereafter, and dwelt together; *and they set forth from the East and found a plain in the land of Babylon: and there they dwelt, and they said every man to his neighbour:* Behold, it will come to pass that we shall be scattered every man from his brother, and in the latter days we shall be fighting one against another. *Now, therefore, come and let us build for ourselves a tower, the head whereof shall reach unto heaven, and we shall make us a name and a renown upon the earth.*

² And they said everyone to his neighbour: Let us take bricks, and let us, each one, write our names upon the bricks and burn them with fire: and that which is thoroughly burned shall be for mortar and brick (perhaps, that which is not thoroughly burned shall be for mortar, and that which is, for brick).

³ And they took every man their bricks, saving 12 men, which would not take them, and these are their names: Abraham, Nachor, Loth, Ruge, Tenute, Zaba, Armodath, Iobab, Esar, Abimahel, Saba, Auphin. ⁴ And the people of the land laid hands on them and brought them before their princes and said: These are the men that have transgressed our counsels and will not walk in our ways. And the princes said unto them: Wherefore would ye not set every man your bricks with the people of the land? And they answered and said: We will not set bricks with you, neither will we be joined with your desire. One Lord know we, and him do we worship. And if ye should cast us into the fire with your bricks, we will not consent to you.

⁵ And the princes were wroth and said: As they have said, so do unto them, and if they consent not to set bricks with you, ye shall burn them with fire together with your bricks. ⁶ Then answered Jectan which was the first prince of the captains: Not so, but there shall be given them a space of 7 days. And it shall be, if they repent of their evil counsels, and will set bricks along with us, they shall live; but if not, let them be burned

according to your word. But he sought how he might save them out of the hands of the people; for he was of their tribe, and he served God.

⁷. And when he had thus said he took them and shut them up in the king's house: and when it was evening the prince commanded 50 mighty men of valour to be called unto him, and said unto them: Go forth and take to-night these men that are shut up in mine house, and put provision for them from my house upon 10 beasts, and the men bring ye to me, and their provision together with the beasts take ye to the mountains and wait for them there: and know this, that if any man shall know what I have said unto you, I will burn you with fire.

⁸. And the men set forth and did all that their prince commanded them, and took the men from his house by night; and took provision and put it upon beasts and took them to the hill country as he commanded them.

⁹. And the prince called unto him those 12 men and said to them: Be of good courage and fear not, for ye shall not die. For God in whom ye trust is mighty, and therefore be ye stablished in him, for he will deliver you and save you. And now lo, I have commanded 50 men to take provision from my house, and go before you into the hill country and wait for you in the valley: and I will give you other 50 men which shall guide you thither: go ye therefore and hide yourselves there in the valley, having water to drink that floweth down from the rocks: hold yourselves there for 30 days, until the anger of the people of the land be appeased and until God send his wrath upon them and break them. For I know that the counsel of iniquity which they have agreed to perform shall not stand, for their thought is vain. And it shall be when 7 days are expired and they shall seek for you, I will say unto them: They have gone forth and have broken the door of the prison wherein they were shut up and have fled by night, and I have sent 100 men to seek them. So will I turn them from their madness that is upon them.

¹⁰. And there answered him 11 of the men saying: Thy servants have found favour in thy sight, in that we are set free out of the hands of these proud men. ¹¹. But Abram only kept silence, and the prince said unto him: Wherefore answerest thou not me, Abram, servant of God? Abram

answered and said: Lo, I flee away today into the hill country, and if I escape the fire, wild beasts will come out of the mountains and devour us. Or our victuals will fail and we shall die of hunger; and we shall be found fleeing from the people of the land and shall fall in our sins. And now, as He liveth in whom I trust, I will not remove from my place wherein they have put me: and if there be any sin of mine so that I be indeed burned, the will of God be done. And the prince said unto him: Thy blood be upon thy head, if thou refuse to go forth with these. But if thou consent, thou shall be delivered. Yet if thou wilt abide, abide as thou art. And Abram said: I will not go forth, but I will abide here.

^{12.} And the prince took those 11 men and sent other 50 with them, and commanded them saying: Wait, ye also, in the hill country for 15 days with those 50 which were sent before you; and after that ye shall return and say: We have not found them, as I said to the former ones. And know that if any man transgress one of all these words that I have spoken unto you, he shall be burned with fire. So the men went forth, and he took Abram by himself and shut him up where he had been shut up aforetime.

^{13.} And after 7 days were passed, the people were gathered together and spake unto their prince saying: Restore us the men which would not consent unto us, that we may burn them with fire. And they sent captains to bring them, and they found them not, save Abram only. And they gathered all of them to their prince saying: The men whom ye shut up are fled and have escaped that which we counselled. ^{14.} And Phenech and Nemroth said unto Jectan: Where are the men whom thou didst shut up? But he said: They have broken prison and fled by night: but I have sent 100 men to seek them, and commanded them if they find them that they should not only burn them with fire but give their bodies to the fowls of the heaven and so destroy them. ^{15.} Then said they: This fellow which is found alone, let us burn him. And they took Abram and brought him before their princes and said to him: Where are they that were with thee? And he said: Verily at night I slept, and when I awaked I found them not.

^{16.} And they took him and built a furnace and kindled it with fire, and put bricks burned with fire into the furnace. Then Jectan the prince being amazed (lit. melted) in his mind took Abram and put him with the bricks

into the furnace of fire. ¹⁷ But God stirred up a great earthquake, and the fire gushed forth of the furnace and brake out into flames and sparks of fire and consumed all them that stood round about in sight of the furnace; and all they that were burned in that day were 83 500. But upon Abram was there not any the least hurt by the burning of the fire.

¹⁸ And Abram arose out of the furnace, and the fiery furnace fell down, and Abram was saved. And he went unto the 11 men that were hid in the hill country and told them all that had befallen him, and they came down with him out of the hill country rejoicing in the name of the Lord, and no man met them to affright them that day. And they called that place by the name Abram, and in the tongue of the Chaldeans Deli, which is being interpreted, God.

VII. ¹ And it came to pass after these things, that the people of the land turned not from their evil thoughts: and they came together again unto their princes and said: The people shall not be overcome for ever: and now let us come together and build us a city and a tower which shall never be removed.

² And when they had begun to build, God saw the city and the tower which the children of men were building, *and he said: Behold, this is one people and their speech is one*, and this which they have begun to build the earth will not sustain, neither will the heaven suffer it, beholding it: and it shall be, if they be not now hindered, that they shall dare all things that they shall take in mind to do. ³ *Therefore, lo, I will divide their speech*, and scatter them over all countries, that they may not know every man his brother, neither every man understand the speech of his neighbour. And I will deliver them to the rocks, and they shall build themselves tabernacles of stubble and straw, and shall dig themselves caves and shall live therein like beasts of the fields, and thus shall they continue before my face for ever, that they may never [again] devise such things. And I will esteem them as a drop of water, and liken them unto spittle: and unto some of them their end shall come by water, and other of them shall be dried up with thirst. ⁴ And before all of them I choose my servant Abram, and I will bring him out from their land, and lead him into the land which my eye hath

looked upon from the beginning when all the dwellers upon earth sinned before my face, and I brought on them the water of the flood: and then I destroyed not that land, but preserved it. Therefore the fountains of my wrath did not break forth therein, neither did the water of my destruction come down upon it. For there will I make my servant Abram to dwell, and I will make my covenant with him, and bless his seed, and will be called his God for ever.

⁵ Howbeit when the people that dwelt in the land had begun to build the tower, God divided their speech, and changed their likeness. And they knew not every man his brother, neither did each understand the speech of his neighbour. So it came to pass that when the builders commanded their helpers to bring bricks they brought water, and if they asked for water, the others brought them straw. And so their counsel was broken and they ceased building the city: *and God scattered them thence over the face of all the earth. Therefore was the name of that place called Confusion, because there God confounded their speech, and scattered them thence over the face of all the earth* (James 1971:89-96, italics by the author).

APPENDIX V

ORIGEN'S *CONTRA CELSUS* 5.30

Let us conceive, then, that all the nations on earth are using one particular language, and as long as they agree with one another they continue using the divine language. And they remain without moving from the east as long as they pay attention to the things of light and of the effulgence of the everlasting light. And when these people move themselves from the east and pay attention to things foreign to the east, they find 'a plain in the land of Shinar' which means 'a shaking of teeth', as a symbol that they have lost that by which they are nourished, and they dwell there. Then they desire to collect material things and to join what cannot be naturally joined to heaven, in order that by means of material things they may conspire against immaterial things, saying: 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them with fire.' Therefore, they strengthen and harden material clay, and desire to make the brick into stone and the clay into asphalt, and by these methods to build a city and a tower, 'the top of which', as they suppose, 'will reach to heaven', like the high things that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God. And each one is handed over to angels who are more or less stern and whose character varies in proportion to the distance they have moved from the east, whether they had travelled far or a little way, and in proportion to the amount of bricks made into stones and of clay into asphalt and to the size of the building made out of them. Under them they remain until they have paid the penalty for their boldness. And each one is led by angels, who put in them their native language, to the parts of the earth which they deserve. Some are led to parched land, for example; others to country which afflicts the inhabitants by being cold; and some to land that is difficult to cultivate; others to land that is less hard; and some to country full of wild beasts, and others to country that has them to a lesser degree (Chadwick 1965:287).

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APPENDIX VI

TARGUM NEOFITI, 11, 1-9

Now, all the inhabitants of the earth had one language and one speech. And they used to converse in the language of the sanctuary by which the world was created in the beginning.

And when they caused their hearts to move away (from the Lord), they found a valley in the land of Babel and settled there. And they said to one another: 'Come, let us make bricks and heat them in a furnace.' And they had bricks for stones and had asphalt for mortar. And they said: 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, with its top reaching toward the heavens; and let us make ourselves an idol on top of it and let us put in its hand a sword to make war against Him before we are scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth.' And the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord was revealed to see the city and the tower which the sons of man had built. And the Lord said: 'Behold, one people and all of them have one language and behold, now they have begun to act, and now, nothing they plan to do will be held back from them. Come, now, and I will be revealed and there we shall confound their tongues so that one will not give heed to the language of the other.' And the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they were held back from building the city. For this reason he called its name Babel, for thus did the Lord confound the tongues of all the inhabitants of the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth (McNamara 1992:84-85).

APPENDIX VII

TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN 11:1-9

The whole earth had one language, one manner of speaking, and one counsel. They spoke in the language of the Sanctuary, (the language) in which the world was created in the beginning.

And when they moved east they found a plain in the land of Babel and settled there. They said to one another: 'Come, let us cast bricks and bake them in the furnace.' And they had bricks for stone, and clay for mortar. And they said: 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching towards the heavens. Let us make ourselves an idol at its top, and let us put a sword in its hand, and let it draw up battle formations against (Him) before we are scattered from upon the face of the earth.' The Lord revealed himself to take revenge on them for the work of the city and the tower which the sons of man had built. And the Lord said: 'Behold they are one people, and they have all one language, and they have planned to do this! And now, nothing they plan to do can be withheld from them.' Then the Lord said to the seventy angels that stand before him: 'Come then, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's language.' The Memra of the Lord was revealed against the city, and with it seventy angels corresponding to seventy nations, each having the language of his people and the characters of its writing in his hand. He scattered them thence upon the face of all the earth into seventy languages, so that one did not know what the other said, and they killed one another. And they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the inhabitants of the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them upon the face of the whole earth (Maher 1992:49-50).

APPENDIX VIII

TARGUM ONKELOS 11:1-9

Now the whole world had one language and one manner of speaking. And when they journeyed in the east, they discovered a valley in the land of Babylonia and settled there.

So one said to the other, 'Come, let us cast bricks and burn them in fire' and brick served them as stone, while bitumen served them as mortar. Then they said, 'Come let us build ourselves a city and a tower, with its top reaching toward heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth.' Now the Lord revealed Himself in connection with the work of the city and the tower which the descendants of man had built. Then the Lord said, 'Here is one people and every one of them has one and the same language, and this is how they have begun to act; and nothing they have schemed to do will be withheld from them. Come, let us be revealed and there confound their language, so that they may not understand one another.' So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of the whole earth, and they desisted from building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confounded the speech of the whole earth, and from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of the whole earth (Grossfeld 1988:61-62).

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2000



APPENDIX IX

THE SOURCES IN GENESIS 1-12^a

JL = the *Yahwist* Levite source

P = the *Priestly* source^b

¹ ¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light 'day,' and the darkness he called 'night.' And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.

⁶ And God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.' ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse 'sky.' And there was evening, and there was morning - the second day.

⁹ And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground 'land,' and the gathered waters he called 'seas.' And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.' And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning - the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.' And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning - the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.' ²¹ So God created the great

creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.' ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning - the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female
he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' ²⁹ Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground - everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning - the sixth day.

2 ¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ² By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³ And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. ⁴ This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens - ⁵ And no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the

ground, ⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground - ⁷ the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground - trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'

¹⁸ The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man.'

²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

3 ¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?'

² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'

⁴ 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'

¹⁰ He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'

¹¹ And he said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?'

¹² The man said, 'The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this,
'Cursed are you above all the livestock
and all the wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.'

¹⁶ To the woman he said,
'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you.'

¹⁷ To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree
about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

'Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are and to dust you will return.'

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all
the living.

²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed
them. ²² And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us,
knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also
from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.' ²³ So the LORD God banished him
from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After
he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim
and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

4 ¹ Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.' ² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.'

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' ¹⁰ The LORD said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'

¹³ Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴ Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'

¹⁵ But the LORD said to him, 'Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. ¹⁶ So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹ Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰ Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the

harp and flute. ²² Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah. ²³ Lamech said to his wives,

‘Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.

²⁴ If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times.’

²⁵ Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, ‘God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’ ²⁶ Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

5 ¹ This is the written account of Adam's line.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. ² He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man.’

³ When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. ⁴ After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. ⁵ Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.

⁶ When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. ⁷ And after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. ⁸ Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.

⁹ When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰ And after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹¹ Altogether, Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.

¹² When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³ And after he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ Altogether, Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.

¹⁵ When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. ¹⁶ And after he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷ Altogether, Mahalalel lived 895 years, and then he died.

¹⁸ When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. ¹⁹ And after he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ Altogether, Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.

²¹ When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²² And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

²⁵ When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. ²⁶ And after he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷ Altogether, Methuselah lived 969 years, and then he died.

²⁸ When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. ²⁹ He named him Noah and said, 'He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.' ³⁰ After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. ³¹ Altogether, Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

³² After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

6 ¹ When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.' ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days - and also afterward - when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

⁵ The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷ So the LORD said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them.' ⁸ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

⁹ This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. ¹⁰ Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵ This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. ¹⁶ Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷ I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸ But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark - you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹ You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰ Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹ You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.'

²² Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

7 ¹ The LORD then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. ² Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, ³ and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴ Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.'

⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. ⁷ And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸ Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, ⁹ male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰ And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month - on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

¹³ On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. ¹⁴ They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. ¹⁵ Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. ¹⁶ The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷ For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. ¹⁹ They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. ²⁰ The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. ²¹ Every living thing that moved on the earth perished - birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. ²² Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. ²³ Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

²⁴ The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

8 ¹ But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. ² Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. ³ The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, ⁴ and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

⁶ After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark ⁷ and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from

the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. ⁹ But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. ¹⁰ He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹ When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. ¹² He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

¹³ By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ 'Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷ Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you - the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground - so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.'

¹⁸ So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹ All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds - everything that moves on the earth - came out of the ark, one kind after another.

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. ²¹ The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²² 'As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night
will never cease.'

⁹ ¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. ² The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. ³

Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

⁴ 'But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. ⁵ And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

⁶ 'Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;

for in the image of God
AS FOR YOU, BE FRUITFUL AND INCREASE IN NUMBER; MULTIPLY ON THE EARTH AND INCREASE UPON IT.'

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you - every living creature on earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

¹² And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³ I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.'

¹⁷ So God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.'

¹⁸ The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) ¹⁹ These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth. ²⁰ Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. ²¹ When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. ²² Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his

father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness.

²⁴ When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said,

'Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers.'

²⁶ He also said,

'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.

²⁷ May God extend the territory of Japheth;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be his slave.'

²⁸ After the flood Noah lived 350 years. ²⁹ Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died.

10 ¹ This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

² The sons of Japheth:

Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.

³ The sons of Gomer:

Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.

⁴ The sons of Javan:

Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim and the Rodanim.

⁵ (From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

⁶ The sons of Ham:

Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan.

⁷ The sons of Cush:

Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah:

Sheba and Dedan.

⁸ Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. ⁹ He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.' ¹⁰ The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. ¹¹ From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah ¹² and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

¹³ Mizraim was the father of the Ludites,

Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites,

¹⁴ Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

¹⁵ Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn,

and of the Hittites, ¹⁶ Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites,

¹⁷ Hivites, Arkites, Sinites,

¹⁸ Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered ¹⁹ and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

²⁰ These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

²¹ Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.

²² The sons of Shem:

Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.

²³ The sons of Aram:

Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech.

²⁴ Arphaxad was the father of Shelah,

and Shelah the father of Eber.

²⁵ Two sons were born to Eber:

one was named Peleg,

because in his time the earth was divided;

his brother was named Joktan.

²⁶ Joktan was the father of Almodad,

Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,

²⁷ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah,

²⁸ Obal, Abimael, Sheba,

²⁹ Ophir, Havilah and Jobab.

All these were sons of Joktan.

³⁰ The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in the eastern hill country.

³¹ These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

³² These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

11 ¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ² As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

³ They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶ The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel - because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

¹⁰ This is the account of Shem.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. ¹¹ And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹² When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. ¹³ And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁴ When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. ¹⁵ And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁶ When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. ¹⁷ And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

¹⁸ When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. ¹⁹ And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁰ When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. ²¹ And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

²² When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. ²³ And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁴ When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. ²⁵ And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

²⁶ After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

²⁷ This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. ²⁸ While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. ²⁹ Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milcah and Iscah. ³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

³¹ Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

³² Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

12 ¹ The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

² 'I will make you into a great nation

and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.’

^a *The Holy Bible, New International Version* ©. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

^b This division of the sources is my own, based on Von Rad’s detailed commentary (Von Rad 1972:46-161)

REBEKAH THEMBI OOSTHUIZEN (age 7½)

2000



The tower of Babel

The people were building a tower
to reach God. God was very angry
and confused them by making their
languages.

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