

# **Challenging the Beast: An Alternative to the Empire**

## **A Literary-Critical, Comparative, and Theological Reading of the Primeval History**

### **Introduction**

In 2008, I attended a missiology conference in Hungary. On hearing that I was an OT scholar, a South African missiologist kindly drew my attention to recent interpretations of the Tower of Babel story that see the builders' sin in horizontal rather than vertical terms. My interest was raised and I felt the enormous challenge to tackle this passage. I quickly realized though that it can correctly be interpreted only by studying both its narrower (chs. 10–11) and wider (chs. 1–12) contexts, that is, by studying the whole of PH. Little did I know at the time, fortunately, that, according to one Tyndale House estimation, on average, two studies a day are completed on PH. It is an over-researched topic, one whose secondary literature is so enormous that no-one can dream of reading all of it. In addition, proposing a new thesis of how to read PH is extremely difficult.

My actual research started at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2010. It was a good start and I spent the three summer months in the excellent library of the seminary whose self-advertising motto, spelled out in seminary banners and its mission statement, was “diversity.”

In 2012, I spent six weeks in the friendly environment and superior library of Wheaton College, then, another three months in Halle, Germany where, with the kind assistance of Prof. Ernst-Joachim Waschke, I studied the German secondary literature. Next year, I worked at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, Prague, then, in a friend's house near Prague surrounded with all sorts of books, the complete works of Marx-Engels and Lenin among them. Whether or not this circumstance contributed to my thesis of seeing PH as an anti-empire document I leave for further research to determine.

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My wife and four children have bravely put up with my long physical and mental absences. Without their assistance and forbearance, I would not have succeeded. I dedicate this study to my family.

## **1 Context and Method**

### ***1.1 Context***

“It is abundantly clear today that, of the two major centres of civilization in the area, it was distant Mesopotamia and not neighbouring Egypt that left the deeper cultural impress upon Israel.” Even though it was over half a century ago that Ephraim Speiser made this statement (1957: 209; cf. Clifford 1985: 520), his view has become scholarly consensus. Of the dependence of Genesis on Mesopotamian myths, Jacobsen (1981: 528–29) claims that P knew and admired Mesopotamian records which inspired him to imitation. This is, seeing the parallels, very probable. The various cultures of ancient Mesopotamia adopted each other's cultural heritage revered and cherished for centuries. Myths were assigned particular significance in world view and politics.

With the first chapters of Genesis, we enter the world of ANE myths. In PH, we can see numerous clear and quite a few oblique references to Mesopotamian mythology – primordial events, mythic heroes and concepts all contributing in their own ways to how society was expected to function.

Those myths had usually originated in ancient times but still played a significant role in Neo-Babylonian society, religion, and politics. This context inevitably impacted upon the Jewish people, who, exiled to Babylonia, were governed by the interests and rules of imperial politics, and witnessed to Babylonian religious festivals and rites.

This study is an attempt to read Genesis 1–11 to see its theology against a Babylonian background. I will first discuss the socio-cultural context of PH, then provide a literature survey before outlining the narrator's literary strategy and my methodology in detail. The major bulk of this study is devoted to exegesis, the thesis being that PH is a counter-narrative to that of Babylon, criticizing Babylon's hierarchical society, imperial politics and culture and advocating an egalitarian world.<sup>1</sup> This world involves the rejection of city, kingship, and sanctuary based religion in favor of a society based on commoners. This aspect has not been fully appreciated.

To prove my thesis, I have studied Mesopotamian texts and concepts in relation to PH. In studying the biblical text, I will not deal with genetic questions of how and when the text was formed. Despite its long textual pre-history, I will read PH as a self-contained literary unit, the introduction to Genesis/Pentateuch. To be sure, there have been studies on PH as the introduction to Genesis (Turner 1990), the Pentateuch (Clines 1976) or the OT (Schüle 2006). However, synchronic studies have paid little attention to the Mesopotamian background. Diachronic studies, on the other hand, tend to study PH as an accumulation of sources. Even though the Mesopotamian background is well-known, I know no synchronic study on PH making use of this background to the extent it seems necessary.

Isaac has shown that the Joseph narrative reflects motifs of the kingship rituals of the *akītu* festival (2006: 239-40). Her conclusion is pertinent to my theme:

Examination of some of the myth, ritual and symbolic elements in the Joseph story makes a persuasive argument that the literature of Mesopotamia was also the literature of Israel and Judah, and may have been used in a variety of ways with the assumption that the audience knew the literature and would recognize the references made to the myths, whether direct or oblique. (246)

Along these lines and with a number of OT scholars, I regard 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylon as the context of the origin of PH (see Smith 2010: 78-82, 124-27).<sup>2</sup> This context is a significant factor for interpretation. Even though Israel had encountered polytheism and ANE mythology in the land of Canaan and Israelite religion had had syncretistic elements, in Babylonia they came across Babylonian religion, culture, and politics in all their manifestations – rites, festivals, architecture, social stratification, politics. It was the world view and the narrative of the world empire.

In Mesopotamia, the most important concepts fundamental for the society were kingship, city, and temple. They were correlated but, for the sake of a transparent argument, I will discuss them separately. The significance of each member of the “triad” for Mesopotamian society has been recognized and studied. However, considering them as a “triad” constitutive for PH seems novel.<sup>3</sup> The perceived insignificance of commoners in Mesopotamia seems noteworthy too.

### 1.1.1 City

In Mesopotamia, the capital city was not only the center of a country but also the nexus between the human and divine worlds (Westenholz 1998: 43). Therefore, creation in Mesopotamia was closely linked with cities. The city was regarded as sacred because the gods chose that particular location,

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Crüsemann states concerning Deuteronomy (1996: 246-47): “The sovereignty of the people underlying the law compels us to speak of something like a democracy.” PH's values, explicit or implicit, compel us to speak of something like democracy too. Thus, I sometimes use the terms “democracy” and “democratic” at the risk of being anachronistic.

<sup>2</sup> Since this study is concerned with PH against the backdrop of Neo-Babylonian Mesopotamia, I will not specify time references when referring to BC/BCE.

<sup>3</sup> McDowell concludes her study on the image of God by stating (2015: 207) “that the nature of the divine-human relationship as it is presented in Gen 1 had three major components which were intimately related to one another: kinship, kingship and cult.” It is tempting to correlate the city-kingship-shrine triad with McDowell's “three major components” and elaborate on this correlation. The latter two concepts definitely qualify but city and kinship hardly.

designed it, and laid its foundations (44). City walls were conceived as keeping out not just military danger. “In the Mesopotamian view, within the walls there is order, outside them is chaos. The countryside is the place where enemies, barbarians, animals, and ghosts live, all to be kept out. The walls provide that security, clearly delineating the two spheres” (Van de Mierop 2003: 265).

Cities were often known by their shrines “thus reflecting the early amalgam of the city and divinity. These cities were conceived as sacred rather than political settlements, built in pure places” (Westenholz 1998: 46). “The glorification of the city and its temples was a major theme in the hymns which were addressed to a city or its temple” (46). The city was the sacred symbol of the society because it was the outward sign by which citizens distinguished themselves from others (44; cf. Clifford 1994: 21-22). “The cities themselves were property of the gods and thereby holy. In many cases not only the temples, but also the holy cities, were regarded not as human-made, but rather built by the gods” (Schaudig 2010: 148) or, at least, sanctioned by them.

From Hammurabi’s time on, Babylon achieved a crucial role so that, by the close of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, Babylon’s kings had managed to promote their city and their tutelary god Marduk into the front ranks of the cosmos by creating a theological and cosmological basis for their elevation. To this end, they used myths, epics, hymns, and historiographic texts. Babylon was often identified with the archetypal primeval cities of Eridu and Nippur (Halla and Simpson 1998: 49).

Sumerian religion crystallized in city states, each with its particular gods and cults. Mutual tolerance was manifested in a generally accepted hierarchical order of the chief gods from the different cities. While Hammurabi welded the same cities into a single Babylonian state, religion continued its city-bound organization, though quite substantial changes gradually took place in the official hierarchy. And in all matters the 1,100 years between Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II witnessed tremendous development. Yet, to the end, despite the political unity based on the city of Babylon, matters of thought still reflected local attachments. (Lambert 1965: 289-90)

The 51 epithets of Babylon in the Topography of Babylon, Tintir, originating probably in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, are summarized by George (1992: 8):

They portray the city as a place of prosperity and happiness, of justice, freedom and beauty, whose foundation is primeval, created by the gods and chosen by them as their home; on this account it is a sacred city, a fount of life and a source of wisdom, the religious and cosmological centre of the universe, given over to the celebration of festivals and exercising control over kingship and the divine decrees which rule mankind.

It seems that Tintir was designed to demonstrate that Babylon had replaced Nippur as the religious center of Babylonia just as, in BCS, Enlil had ceded power to Marduk (George 1992: 6).

The Praise of Babylon, probably composed under Sargon II (Foster 2005: 876), extols Marduk and his sanctuary,

May months and years bless sublime Esagila,  
May its brickwork give blessing to noble Marduk.  
At the month of life, (at?) the New Year’s festival, let a celebration be held,  
Let the four world regions gaze fixedly upon his features,  
May he bestow a satisfying life upon the shepherd who provides for him. (lines 5-9)

BCS takes as much pains to explain Babylon’s origin as it does to proclaim Marduk’s supremacy in the pantheon. Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar II reached the apex of what a city could be.

The city of Babylon contained a myriad of signs to the visitor, but one message seems to have been dominant: it was the place of order in a world of chaos. Simultaneously, while it was clearly delineated by its straight walls, meticulously protected, it was an organizing principle for the entire universe. On a vertical axis it tied all the levels of the universe together as a large post in its center. On a horizontal axis, with its size and its widespread contacts, it extended that order throughout the regions of the world. Physical dimensions were reformulated. Babylon was limited, but at the same time it was limitless: by itself, it was the entire universe. Its own role as a microcosm reflecting the entire cosmos was repeated by the temple at its heart. Marduk’s sanctuary, as clearly delineated as the city itself, was an entire universe on its own, housing all the gods representing universal order. (Van de Mierop 2003: 273)

Westenholz's conclusion (1998: 51) is more general:

Every religious system expresses, codifies, and reaffirms the central values of a society in such a way as to legitimate and maintain the social fabric of that society. Thus, the Mesopotamian theology sanctifies and prescribes the urban character of civilized society by its emphasis on the divine foundation of the city. This underlies the continuing sense of communion between the city and its temple, on the one hand, and the divine realm, on the other, with their interrelationship perceived as the source of the city-state's prosperity. The city's material well-being was seen as entirely dependent on maintaining the correct relationship to the city's deity.

Since "city" was a theologically loaded concept in Mesopotamia, founding a city entailed, more often than not, imperial attitudes, tendencies of supremacy, and proneness to rivalry. From Sargon on, all the

kings shared a common vision: to realize, no matter, how briefly or ephemerally, the perennial ideal of Mesopotamian unity. Whether they succeeded or perished in the attempt, their memory apparently intrigued later generations beyond that of the more typical, but duller, periods of fragmentary petty statism that intervened. (Halla and Simpson 1998: 46)

This view of cities had as a consequence that urban life was seen as superior to the nomadic. Nomads were regarded as uncivilized, a threat to society. "Mesopotamian theology that is reflected in most of the mythology of Babylon and Assyria has an urbanized society as its foundation" (Walton 1995: 165). Cities were governed by kings. So, kingship is another significant concept.

### 1.1.2 Kingship

Kingship and capital cities in SKL and other works are intimately interrelated (Miller 1985: 237-38) so that Oppenheim hits the nail on the head by considering them "The institutionalization of the desire for continuity in Mesopotamia" (1964: 79). Once elective kingship was replaced by hereditary in Mesopotamia, the tendency of kings to claim divine backing was inevitable. "Achievement of this end required a firm alliance of royal and religious interests, including a whole new ideology, or theology, of kingship" (Halla and Simpson 1998: 46).

In Mesopotamia, a kingless society was one in which humans were without guidance, so leading a miserable life (cf. Speiser 1955: 50), also suggested by a reconstructed part of SFS (see Jacobsen 1981: 516). The purported significance of kings is tangible in genealogies. Genealogy was a "royal genre." King lists testified to unity and authority (Halla 2010: 175-76). Not just that. Since the Amorite ethos emphasized genealogy and ancestor worship (Halla 1992: 400), genealogy was employed to political ends. The underlying agenda of SKL is geographical power claims (Wilcke 1989). Akkadian lists show a genealogical interest with genealogies serving similar ends. SKL's reference to kingship's heavenly origin "indicated that the office, and not the office-holder, was of superhuman origin" (237; cf. Wilson 1977: 81). The "basic ideology of the Sumerian King List involves more than a zealous theory; we may be dealing with a current norm of political thought, a widely accepted political idea which cherished the concept of long-continued unification of the land" (Hartman 1972: 27).<sup>4</sup> In Mesopotamia, genealogies were never used to structure narratives or link narrative units (Wilson 1977: 135). Segmented genealogies, seldom stretching beyond three generations, were much less frequent and were hardly preserved and used politically (196).

In Babylon, history began with kings (see Lambert and Millard 1969: 15). In creation accounts, kings are "created separately in order to oversee the human race's service of gods" (Clifford 1994: 143); "in Mesopotamian myth at least, kingship was a necessary part—even the apex of—the creation of humankind" (Batto 2004: 179). Not surprisingly, "the builders and rulers of the great cities were remembered in the tradition as either kings, or gods, or both" (Miller 1985: 240).

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding the early kings in SKL, Jacobsen (1939: 140-41) claims that it was compiled at the inauguration of the Neo-Sumerian period at Uruk. With their independence from the Gutis re-established, Sumer sought to express national feelings and unity by reflecting on its past and the restoration of kingship. Disagreeing with Jacobsen, Kraus (1952: 46-51) dates it at the beginning of the Old-Babylonian dynasty. Be that as it may, the origin of SKL is bound up with the beginning and legitimizing of a new era.

In the late Assyrian epic *Creation of the King* (Foster 2005: 496-97), the creation of a king is narrated in the fashion of the creation of the first humans.

Belet-ili fashioned the king, the counsellor-man,  
They [the gods] gave the king warfare on behalf of the [great] gods.  
Anu gave his crown, Enlil ga[ve his throne],  
Nergal gave his weapon, Ninurta gave [his splendor],  
Belet-ili gave [his] fea[tures],  
Nusku commissioned a (wise) counsellor and he stood in attendance upon him.  
He who shall speak [lies and falsehood] to the king,  
Be [he important, he shall die violently],  
[Be he rich, he will become poor].  
[He who shall harbor evil against the king in his heart],  
[Erra will call him to account in a plague].  
[He who shall think disrespectful thoughts of the king,  
a whirlwind shall crush him,  
his accumulated goods shall be a puff of wind].  
[The gods of heaven and netherworld assembled],  
[They blessed the king, the counsellor-man],  
[They delivered the weapon of combat and battle into his hand],  
[They gave him the people of this land, that he serve as their shepherd]. (lines 36-52)

In the epic “*The Return of Lugalbanda*,” King Enmerkar of Uruk lays siege to Aratta. After a long, futile siege, he complains to his tutelary goddess, Inanna by recounting how he built his capital city Uruk.

Once upon a time my noble sister, Holy Inana,  
From her bright mountain chose me in her holy heart  
And made me enter Kulab [possibly Uruk], the Brickwork.  
Unug [i.e., Uruk] then was a mere marsh, oozing water.  
Where there was dry land Euphrates poplars grew.  
Where there was a reed thicket old and young reeds grew together.  
Enki, king of Eridug,  
Made me tear out the old reeds and made me drain the water.  
Fifty years I was building, fifty years I was working.  
So now, if eventually in all of Sumer and Akkad  
The Martu, who know no grain, should rise up,  
There stands the wall of Unug, extended across the desert like a bird net! (lines 294-305)

Then comes the complaint proper,

But here, in this place, my power seems to be finished!  
My troops are bound to me as a calf to its mother.  
Yet, like a child that hates its mother and leaves the city  
My noble sister, Holy Inana,  
Has run back to Kulab, the Brickwork!  
Could she love her city, yet hate me?  
She should link the city to me!  
Could she hate her city, yet love me?  
She should link the city to me!  
Should the n u – g i g [i.e., Inana]—as happened to the Anzud chick—  
Reject me in person  
And abandon me by keeping to her holy chamber... (lines 306-18)

The king’s question is rhetorical with a firm answer in the negative assumed. City, kingship, and tutelary deity are closely interrelated. City is as much linked to the king, and vice versa, as the love of the patron deity to the city. A claim to a tutelary deity was a power claim as well.

The king performed cultic duties as intermediary between gods and the people, he represented the entire nation. He was a corporate personality and functioned as an intermediary between the divine and the political spheres (see Frankfort 1948: 251-61). “He is the personification of the kingdom, and his kingdom is the image of heavenly dominion; accordingly, the king is seen as the ‘perfect

likeliness [sic] of the god” (Spieckermann 2010: 349-50).<sup>5</sup> Akkadian texts do not demonstrate that the subjects “are the primary concern of royal dominion. That has to be proved in the temples, at court, and in impressive deeds of warfare and building activities” (350-51).

Pondering all these entities essential for royal dominion, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the king’s responsibility for a people or a nation does not hold an influential position neither under the ideological aspect of kingship nor in reality. Subjects are necessary to exercise kingship. However, they are not the primary concern of royal dominion. They testify to the fact that a king has been bestowed with dominion according to divine will. (351)

As a consequence of centralized government, the general public got disenfranchised. Commoners were but cogs in the machine of a society founded on and made functioning by royal figures.

The political development in early historical times seems to lie under the spell of one controlling idea: concentration of political power in as few hands as possible.

Within small areas, in town and township, this principle had been realized—to a very substantial degree during the first centuries of Mesopotamian history. The country formed a mosaic of diminutive, self-sufficient, autonomous city-states, and in each such state one individual, the ruler, united in his hands the chief political powers: legislative, judiciary, and executive. Only he could promulgate and carry into effect new law; he alone was personally responsible by contract with the city-god for upholding justice and righteousness; as supreme commander of all armed forces, he led the state in battle; and, as administrator of the main temple complex, he controlled the most powerful single economic unit within the state.

But the momentum of the autocratic idea was still far from spent with the realization of this idea within small separate areas. It drove Mesopotamia forward relentlessly toward the more distant aim: centralization of power within one large area. Each ruler of a city-state was forever striving to subdue his neighbors, striving to become the one who would unite all of southern Mesopotamia into a single centralized state under a single ruling hand—his own. From before the dawn of history through the soldier-kingdoms of Lugalzagesi and the early Sargonids to the highly organized bureaucratic state of the Third Dynasty of Ur, we watch these efforts toward ultimate centralization steadily grow in power, in intensity, and in efficiency. (Jacobsen 1943: 159-60)

There is no sign of democratic ideas and institutions gaining ground (Jacobsen 1943: 165; cf. Jacobsen 1960: 65-66). No wonder that in the developing monarchies of ANE, kings were increasingly responsible to gods instead of the general public (Jacobsen 1957: 126). Over time, this state of affairs entailed gradually imperialistic politics and religion. “The conclusion seems warranted that ancient Mesopotamia experienced all but one of what has been called the five basic stages of Greek constitutional development: only democracy failed to appear” (Bailkey 1967: 1235).<sup>6</sup>

Since kingship and religion in Sumer were intricately interrelated, for the sake of both (Hallo 2010a), I will turn my attention to cult.

### 1.1.3 Shrine

Nebuchadnezzar, the righteous king, faithful shepherd who leads the peoples, director of the regions belonging to Bel, Šamaš, and Marduk, the contented, seeker after wisdom, regardful of life, exalted one who wearies not, caretaker of Esagila and Ezida, son of Nabopolassar king of Babylon am I.

When Marduk, the great lord, exalted me over the kingdoms of the land and gave me many peoples to shepherd, before Marduk, my divine creator, in fear I bowed; to bear his yoke I bent my neck. His numerous monthly offerings, his pure free will ? offerings, I rendered greater than before. [...]

E-temin-anki, *zikkurat* of Babylon, in joyful gladness I built. As to Babylon, the city of the great lord Marduk, Imgur-Bêl, its great wall, I finished. Upon the thresholds of the great gates mighty bulls of

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<sup>5</sup> Holloway notes that this leads to a blurring of the distinctions between gods and kings (2002: 178-93). He concludes (187) that “we must accept the existence of divinized royal images of living kings in the Neo-Assyrian temple system, and elsewhere.” A related aspect is the heroic king; see Capomacchia 2001: 95.

<sup>6</sup> The five stages being, monarchy, oligarchy, tyranny, democracy, and a return to tyranny (Bailkey 1967: 1211).



bronze and terrible serpents [*mušḫuššu*] standing upright I placed. Its moat I dug and reached the water level; therein I built with mortar and burnt brick. (Langdon 1905: 83, 85)

This part of the inscription, dating between 600-593 (Langdon 1905: 21-22) and representative of Neo-Babylonian inscriptions, contains various references pertaining to my discussion. Here, Nebuchadnezzar II lists his achievements. Foremost among them are those related to religion. In Sumer, temple building was associated with creation. The temple was considered “the concrete expression of the finality of the creation” (Clifford 1994: 26, 61). Therefore, temple construction was seen as a major duty of kings at the head of a state and hence servants of gods.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, no “greater service could be rendered to a god than the building of his house” (Frankfort 1948: 267). Constructing temples was commenced with festive rituals, carefully and usually executed by kings, and there were ceremonial feasts when they were dedicated (see Hurowitz 1992: 39-41).<sup>8</sup> In Babylon, it was not any different.

Under Nabupolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II, the “ancient cradle of the North Semitic races became once more, under the leadership of Babylon, the centre of the Semitic world, and the ancient shrines became the object of even greater veneration than they had been in the days of Assyrian dominion” (Langdon 1905: 1). Owing to the diverse capabilities attributed to him, Marduk had achieved a dominant and decisive status in the Babylonian pantheon by the first millennium with his supremacy reaching its final and highest climax under Nebuchadnezzar II (Sommerfeld 1987-90: 362, 366). By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Marduk was seen as the savior of the universe and creator of humankind (see Black 1981: 40).

Marduk’s son, Nabu also played a prominent role in Neo-Babylonian culture. The god of wisdom and science, he gained a prestigious status under Nabupolassar. Owing to his influence on human destiny in particular, Nabu was venerated in Babylonia and beyond. When mentioned along with Marduk, he always precedes his father (Langdon 1905: 4). This does not seem to have changed under Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The “holy triad” of city-kingship-temple was spectacularly underpinned by Nebuchadnezzar who created a center for his empire in Babylon by reconstructing the Etemenanki and building his palace: one god, one king, one temple, one palace (Schaudig 2010: 159-61).

City, king, and shrine were always the beginning of Mesopotamian city states. Thus, Frankfort’s claim (1948: 270) that in Mesopotamia there was no “reference to a primeval plan, an order established at the time of creation” is only half true. It is certainly correct that, as opposed to Egypt, Mesopotamia did not view the universe as static. Also true, in Mesopotamia “the gods had decreed justice as the order of society. They desired their elected ruler to be a just king and persecuted injustice wherever it occurred” (278). Still, one finds little sign of this divine concern as translated into social practice. Religion and piety were manifestations of the divine world order in which divine intention and action were attributed much more significance than human initiative (see Frankfort 1948: 270). This latter was subordinated to the divine. In more general terms, the vertical aspects of religion were overemphasized at the cost of the horizontal. This is only partly explained by the fact that “the Mesopotamian did not presume that the gods themselves were bound by any order which man could comprehend” (278).<sup>9</sup> Still, Mesopotamia’s dynamic world view was to a considerable degree rendered static by the significance of cities, kings, and temples assigned to them by virtue of their primeval origin.

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<sup>7</sup> With no attempt at comprehensiveness, George (1993) lists more than 1200 temple names in Sumerian and Akkadian literary works.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. King Gudea’s plan to build a temple to his patron deity Ningirsu and Gudea’s consultation with various deities to implement the plan (Black–Cunningham–Robson–Zólyomi 2004: 44). After the divine approval, “In our city there was perfection” (45).

<sup>9</sup> Strikingly, Frankfort’s discussion of “Cosmic Powers and Social Justice” (1948: 277-81) contains very little of what a modern reader would expect.

### 1.1.4 Commoners

Having discussed the concepts of city, kingship, and religion, I will discuss the role of commoners. The word “commoner,” I use in the sense of an individual belonging to the lower classes in Mesopotamian society. The briefness of my discussion is due to the perceived insignificance of commoners in Mesopotamian society.

Palaces and temples were the chief patrons of both arts and letters in Sumer and Akkad—and then as now, he who pays the piper calls the tune. As a result we unfortunately know less than we would like about the common man: his concerns, his aspirations, his reactions to life. These matters figure in literature only or chiefly in proverbs and other types of so-called wisdom texts, numerically a relatively small literary genre. (Hallo 2010b: 223; cf. Hallo 2010a: 664)

Apart from gods and demigods, it was kings, and sometimes sages and priests, who gained relevance in society and culture – they were the organizing and sustaining powers of society. No narrative on commoners has come to light. No significance was attributed to them.

### 1.1.5 Myths and Genealogies

The fabric of Mesopotamian society was sewn up by mythic epics, hymns, and genealogies, providing for the ideological cohesion of society. The exiles would inevitably get acquainted with them in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia. BCS was a narrative authorized by the empire at the New Year festival in Babylon where it was recited and enacted, with royal participation. The Gilgamesh epic had gained a status of holy script by this time. Gilgamesh was known as a king and demigod, or superhuman force of evil, as late in antiquity as 200 CE and beyond (see George 2003: 54-70). The epic Gilgamesh deals with universal questions like friendship, mortality, heroism, achievement in life. In this respect, Genesis, and PH in particular, proves an appropriate counterpart to the epic. Judging on the basis of extant manuscripts, BCS and Gilgamesh were the most popular Mesopotamian epics at the time of the exile (see George 2003: 39). Atrahasis too was well-known.<sup>10</sup>

The narratives of PH are mythical.<sup>11</sup> The mythic genre of PH means that, as opposed to the genre of historical narrative from 11:27 (see Blenkinsopp 2011: 1), not each detail begs questions for explanation. In myths, “any single act can be unmotivated and unreasonable in itself, provided it is effective in setting up the explanation of the ensuing acts” (Liverani 2004: 6). Indeed, we are model readers of Genesis 1–11, to use Umberto Eco’s phrase (1979), if we do not want to know where evil came from in God’s world created good; how the serpent could talk; where on earth could Cain acquire a wife etc. For this very reason, we ask in vain why Cain and Abel sacrificed to God since they had not received any cultic instruction; what known command Cain transgressed by killing his brother, or how God can be revered by our reverence for life (see 9:6) as God himself had asked for nothing of this kind in the narrative (so Miles 1995: 41, 44). In myth, many an odd detail is taken for granted and left unexplained in order to give an account of why the world is like it is.

Whereas myths are implicit building stones of PH, genealogies are explicit in that a quite extensive part, some 3 chapters are of that genre in PH. There were two sorts known in ancient Mesopotamia, vertical (or linear) and segmented genealogies.

Let us start with Wilson’s observation. He notes a change in the use of genealogy during the Old-Babylonian dynasty.

The Amorites may have once used segmented genealogies for political purposes. However, when Amorite kings came to power in the heartland of Mesopotamia, these segmented genealogies ceased to function politically in the new monarchical context. Linear genealogies, through which the kings justified their right to rule, replaced segmented genealogies. (1979: 17)

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<sup>10</sup> For the historical dependence of the Genesis flood story on Atrahasis and Gilgamesh, see Kvanvig 2011: 224-33, with a nice list and discussion of parallels.

<sup>11</sup> I also like „protohistory” coined by Wenham (2015: 85-88).



Mesopotamian genealogies, MKL and SKL included, were mostly linear (Wilson 1977: 57). In contrast, WSL were most often segmented (see Levin 2001: 12), sometimes combined. Malamat gives a helpful account of the role of each.

Vertical, one-dimensional patterns record only “genealogical depth” and sequence of generations, while the two-dimensional pattern forms points of segmentation; that is, it encompasses nodal eponyms from which stem several descendants who in turn may act as founding ancestors of peoples, tribes and clans, such as Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons, in the Bible. This segmentation, with its wide range of primary and secondary lineages, is the foremost concept in the genealogical positioning of the individual and in the ascertaining of kinship, whether on a broad ethnographic plane or within a more restricted tribal circle. (1968: 164; cf. Wilson 1975)

The Pentateuch uses “linear genealogies to define chronologies, and segmented genealogies to define ethnicity and the relationships between Israel and the nations” (Levin 2001: 40). Not just that. Nearly all longer ANE genealogies are concerned with “office holders, usually kings but also priests and scribes” (Hess 1989: 247). In PH, however, all genealogies list common people. Thus, these genealogies are an indicator of how PH, as opposed to Mesopotamia, views culture, kingship, and society.

In Genesis, we have both segmented and linear genealogies, often but not always introduced by the ancestor, that focuses on the descendants of a certain character (see Carr 1998: 163). It may cautiously be stated that segmented genealogies represent family lines, whose members will cease to play any significant role after the genealogy whereas linear genealogies point ahead: their final member will be the protagonist in the next narrative. This is not to say characters of segmented genealogies do not count. They indeed do by representing generations of the earth hence providing a universal outlook (see Carr 1998a: 328). Still, they present “inorganic” material for the plot, and do not explicitly contribute to it. The lines of Cain (4:17-24), Ham, Japhet, and Shem (10:1-32), Ishmael (25:12), and Esau (36:1, 9) are “dead ends.” The exception to the rule, through Shem’s linear genealogy, is Terah, whose line (11:27-32) produces Abram, predecessor of Israel, and Lot, predecessor of Ammon and Moab. In contrast, Seth’s line (ch. 5) produces Noah, savior of humankind. It is true, Lot gets his share as Abram’s sidekick, but he exits the scene after his semi-genealogy in 19:37-38. In 29:31–30:24, Jacob’s genealogy is segmented, implying an emphasis on his family – henceforth the focus is on Israel as a family and, from Exodus on, as a nation (cf. Exod 1:1-5 and Num 3:1; see Carr 1998: 171). In 6:9, Noah, in 25:19, Isaac, and, in 37:2, Joseph receive the focus by their respective *toledot* formulas. Note that Seth’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s “genealogies” are preceded by the dead-end genealogies of Cain, Ishmael, and Esau (see Carr 1998: 166), that happen to be those of the older brothers.

By the application of the *toledot* formula, it is emphasized that Abraham, and through him, the people Israel, are linked to the creation of heaven and earth. The first of these formulas in 2:4, “This is the genealogy of heaven and earth,” reports the creation of Adam whose genealogy leads to Noah, whose genealogy in turn leads to the forefather of Israel. This is a shrewd renunciation of royal genealogies like SKL that claim heavenly origins. In Genesis, humankind in general has heavenly origins albeit in a different sense than in ANE.

The *toledot* formula is a colophon, a heading of a new tablet. While a colophon in the Neo-Babylonian period only occasionally gives the name of the owner of the tablet, it almost always contains its scribe, along with his genealogy (Leichty 1964: 151). In this light, it is remarkable that the colophons of PH, i.e. the *toledot*, refer to neither of these but instead state, “This is the *toledot* of N,” with the genealogy following not that of the scribe but of N.

Last but not least, Richard Hess cautions,

Even the formal study of the biblical genealogies is not completely adequate. It is at once too broad and too narrow. It is too broad in that it ignores the basic components which form the genealogies, the personal names themselves. It is too narrow in that it fails to examine the narrative context of Gen 1-11 and how the genealogies fit therein. (1989: 253)

I will interpret the PH genealogies against their ANE background as well as their canonical context.

### 1.1.6 Rites

The most important occasion reflecting and defining society and religion in Babylon was the New Year or *akītu* festival.<sup>12</sup>

The rituals involving the renewal of the king, the crucial role of the high priest in the ceremonies, and the two days of “determining of the destinies” functioned more to reinforce the ideology and agenda of the monarchy and the priesthood than to instill religious sentiment. Ostensibly dealing with the renewal of charter for kings, the *akītu* also involves aspects of legitimization of the Mesopotamian kings. The celebration of the *akītu* was an integral component in royal politics, both domestic and foreign. The continuity and the widespread dissemination of the festival throughout Mesopotamian history attest to its religious, political, and sociological import. (Bidmead 2002: 2)

It was increasingly politicized in the Neo-Babylonian era (169).

The *akītu* served to maintain class distinction and promote political ideology. The emphasis on the *kidinnu* (the privileged group who, under divine protection, were exempt from royal taxation, corvée, and military duty) in the prayers and the king’s proclamation is but one example of this ideology. [...] The *akītu* provided the perfect opportunity for the king to boast of his wealth and achievements in war—military troops, prisoners of war, tributes, and booty from vassal nations all participated in this parade. During the Neo-Babylonian period the annual military campaign and announcement of war proclamations occurred in the spring, often coinciding with the beginning of the *akītu*. Holding popular appeal, the *akītu* was the festival *par excellence* in Mesopotamian culture. (5)

In the festival, religious, political, and social aspects went hand-in-hand.

The *akītu* also allowed the king to demonstrate publicly his concern for the people of Babylon. It provided public proof of the maintenance of the world order. The king, acting as the divine patron of the citizens, created ritual symbols of inclusion that reaffirmed the entire society, even though in actuality he was only promoting the interests of the few. Even groups who were excluded could feel some connection within the social cohesion created by the *akītu*. [...]

The temple and the monarchy served as a unifying symbol to the Babylonians. Through the myth of the *Enuma eliš* and the *akītu* rituals, the festival provided religious and social legitimation. As social reality was rooted in the cosmogonic myth, the accompanying rituals served to propagate that myth. (170-72)

In BCS, Marduk forms the world from the corpse of Tiamat the chaos monster. The world thus contains traces of primordial chaos, personified by Tiamat, as well as order, imposed on it by Marduk. In light of this aspect of BCS, the *akītu* festival does not simply commemorate a primordial triumph over chaos, for chaos always lurks latently in the world. Rather, the festival sets into motion the ongoing victory over disorder. The disorder inherent in the world created from Tiamat’s corpse did not evenly affect the cosmos: order was particularly present in the Esagila, while the area outside Babylon was conceived ritually as a domain of chaos (Pongratz-Leisten 1994: 77-78, 73-74). Marduk’s journey outside the city walls to the *akītu* house allows chaos to return to the city, while

His return to the city at the end of the festival represents the triumph of order. Thus in the Babylonian Akitu the processions away from and back to the city on the eighth through eleventh of Nisan serve the same function as the events of the fifth: they recalled Marduk’s original and ongoing victory over chaos as narrated in *Enuma Elish*. (Sommer 2000: 89-90)

In the *akītu* itself, only citizens of status were allowed to participate in the procession, with the common citizens looking on (Bidmead 2002: 171).

Another significant rite was the *mīs pî* or mouth washing ritual. The ritual is summarized by Schüle (2005: 12-13; 2006: 161-63; cf. Berlejung 1998: 178-283; Walker and Dick 1999: 68-72; McDowell 2015: 43-85). 1) In the workshop of the city temple, craftsmen shape the wooden image and cover it with gold and precious stones. When finished, its mouth is washed and opened, then the image is set on a base. 2) From the workshop the image is carried through the desert to the river and

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<sup>12</sup> The New Year festival took place in Neo-Babylonian times, 625-539, perhaps dating back to as early as 750 (Lambert 1968: 106). As a reference point in PH, this may also support PH’s Babylonian provenance.

from the river to a garden. 3) Arriving at the garden, the central place of the ritual, a place of plants and animals, a series of mouth washings is performed. It spends the rest of the day, the night, and a good part of the next day in the garden. The gods come there to accept the image. They spend the night in its company so providing perfect purity by which it is rid of any trace of human work. 4) Finally, it has to reach its final destination, the holy of holies in the temple where it will from now on reside. The ritual's significance for the creation of humankind in Genesis 2 will be discussed in due course.

### **1.1.7 Reading the Primeval History against a Babylonian Backdrop**

The dividing of PH into creation, multiplication of humankind, and flood draws on ancient Sumerian-Akkadian traditions that belonged to the world view of Mesopotamians but became obsolete after the collapse of Babylon. Similarly, the significance of genealogies like SKL and, along with it, of numerology finds no echo in a post-Babylonian audience. Accounts and themes like creation or flood and motifs such as the tree of life, the serpent, the rainbow are modeled on Babylonian parallels, most important among them being BCS, Atrahasis, Gilgamesh, and, to a lesser extent, Adapa, with explicit or implicit references to them. The sophistication of the number system along with the significance accorded to numbers and mathematics in Babylonia points in the same direction. Thus, we see themes and motifs that imply a Neo-Babylonian origin.

Kingship and state were in crisis at several points in Mesopotamian history, producing various sorts of literature envisaging a better future. Still, the "hypostatic" significance of the city-kingship-temple triad based on Babylonian ideology is a product of the earlier, Assyrian-Babylonian period only. And it is not just envisaging a better future, it is much more systematic, comprehensive, and coherent. I will demonstrate how PH endorses values by reconstructing an alternative world to that based on the Mesopotamian triad.

Having said this, I do not claim that PH/Genesis/Pentateuch was not re-edited in post-exilic times. Indeed, it went through a process of re-editing in the post-Babylonian era (cf. Carr 2010: 207-22; 2011). Still, these features make an exilic provenance for PH's (near) final shape reasonable.<sup>13</sup>

## **1.2 Literature Survey**

Scholars concerned with the theology of PH have made compelling arguments for PH's exilic provenance (e.g., Batto 1992: 73-101; LaCocque 2006; Smith 2010), so, this view is adopted here. It is also my conviction that, without the comparative material of ANE myths, rituals, and concepts, PH cannot be interpreted. For this reason, both synchronic and comparative studies will be used and discussed. In addition, I consider it heuristic if not indispensable to read the narrative in a way that is sensitive to its political values, overt or covert. A story composed by those vanquished and exiled by a world empire can be expected to express their views on that empire.

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<sup>13</sup> Croatto (2006) argues for Persian provenance of the Pentateuch as a "counter-text." The data he lists, however, concern Babylonian religion and world view, not Persian. After surveying the evidence, Uehlinger (1990: 360-72) comes to the conclusion that the reference to kiln-fired brick and tar (11:3) implies a Neo-Babylonian context, probably the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. But the story attained its final shape and import as a failed attempt at world dominion in the Persian era (572-83). Schüle (2006: 371-72) deems the lack of reference to Persia in ch. 10 as a matter of course as Elam and Media, the neighbor countries are there. This is the more baffling as he concludes that the subtext of the genealogy concerns itself with "the role of empires and Israel's relationship to other people" (372). To be sure, this silence can be attributed to the editors' more amicable attitude to Persian administration (see Carr 2011: 205-07). Persia is neither implicitly nor explicitly referred to in PH nor mentioned in the genealogies. Even (possible) Arabian and Armenian tribes and Elam are referred to but not Persia. Thus, this procedure demonstrates a methodological fallacy. J, for instance, does not know the "image of God" formula thus has a different theological concept. Exodus tradition does not know of creation, therefore it has a different concept. P is unaware of the conquest, therefore it has a different concept. On the other hand, PH's unawareness of Persia does not posit a non-Persian background. This sort of argument seems fallacious.

### 1.2.1 Synchronic Approaches

In what follows, I will survey synchronic studies on the plot and, then, on the structure of PH.

#### 1.2.1.1 *The Theme/Plot of Primeval History*

Until recently, PH was generally seen as a collection or montage of narratives, genealogies, sources, traditions of diverse origin, with no unitary theme or purpose assumed. Summing up the overall approach up to the mid-70's, Gary Smith (1977: 310; his emphasis) seems to be on the mark: "because of the variety of literary *genres* and the broad scope of divergent topics, few have treated the unit as a structural whole." Indeed, the impression one gets by reading commentaries from before that time is that PH is dealt with, even when stated to the contrary, as a patchwork of unrelated traditions or sources. One finds no answer to questions like, Why did the author pick these sources/traditions? In what way did these stories relate to his putative context?<sup>14</sup> What story did he want to tell? What is PH all about? In what way does PH introduce Genesis and the Pentateuch?

Starting in the mid-70's, the approach to PH has changed. Without denying diverse sources or traditions, there has since been an increasing tendency to read PH as a coherent narrative with a theme addressing a particular existential situation. After considering biblical scholarship's proper concern with the origins and background of different units and their ANE parallels, Sasson notices this shift by stating that

it is equally important a task to outline the frameworks of overarching, architectonic structure within Biblical narratives and to seek therein evidence for the theological presuppositions and the hermeneutical perspectives of those redactors who, by gathering the hoary traditions, by sifting from among them those which suited didactic purposes, and by shaping as well as by arranging and welding them in a manner which promoted their ideals, created a compilation of Genesis which approximates our very own. (1980: 213)

This change has come about as a result of emerging synchronic approaches and the search for the theology inherent in the narrative.

A little noticed 1975 paper by **Isaac Kikawada** seems to be the first attempt to make sense of the whole of Genesis 1–11 as one coherent narrative. He sees in the primeval narrative of humankind, threatened by annihilation three times but never fully realized, a pattern from Atrahasis utilized by Genesis. In his 1981 article, he applies the threat-escape pattern to the whole of Genesis and observes recurring themes in the Torah.

In his 1985 book (co-authored with **Arthur Quinn**), Kikawada challenges the documentary hypothesis by providing alternative, literary-theological explanations of discrepancies to sources. It is meant to be a "provocative challenge," as the front page claims. However, without an exhaustive treatment of how PH came about, it falls short of providing a satisfactory alternative to the documentary hypothesis.

Although Kikawada has provided a frame, owing to his synchronic approach, he cannot, for instance, accommodate the genealogies in his scheme. (Also, the historical context remains throughout vague.) As a result, he fails to realize that PH is not just a nicely structured narrative modeled on ANE literature but has theological and political intentions. He also fails to attend to the aspect of how PH introduces Genesis/Pentateuch. Still, this is an excellent early attempt to accommodate the Atrahasis framework into PH and beyond.

In a 1976 article, devoted to Genesis 1–11, which could be considered the introduction to his 1978 book on the theme of the Pentateuch, **David Clines** raises the question (483), "What is the theme of Genesis 1–11 as it stands?" What is "theme"? It is the statement of the content, structure, and development of a work. There are four observations Clines makes. 1) Can literary works have more than one theme? Theme might be sought, identified, and articulated on different levels in a literary work but it has only one theme. 2) How can theme be demonstrated? There is no way of demonstrating it for everyone's satisfaction. "The only formal criterion for establishing a theme is:

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<sup>14</sup> For the sake of convenience, I will consider the author/narrator/editor/redactor as a male individual.

the best statement of the theme of a work is the statement that most adequately accounts for the content, structure and development of the work. To state the theme of a work is to say what it means that the work is as it is" (486). 3) How can one discover the theme? Clines' response is: through trial and error (486).<sup>15</sup> 4) Does the theme need to have been in the author's mind? Not necessarily. Authors do not always conceptualize their work. It is the critic or reader who needs to find the theme.

After this methodological survey and discussing three suggestions (487-502),<sup>16</sup> Clines proposes two themes.

Mankind tends to destroy what God has made good. Even when God forgives human sin and mitigates the punishment sin continues to spread, to the point where the world suffers uncreation. And even when God makes a fresh start, turning his back on uncreation forever, man's tendency to sin immediately becomes manifest. (502)

And,

No matter how drastic man's sin becomes, destroying what God has made good and bringing the world to the brink of uncreation, God's grace never fails to deliver man from the consequences of his sin. Even when man responds to a fresh start with the old pattern of sin, God's commitment to his world stands firm, and sinful man experiences the favor of God as well as his righteous judgment. (502)

Clines then raises two questions. 1) Where does PH end? 2) How does the theme of PH relate to that of the Pentateuch? Responding to the first question, he sees the conclusion of PH as fuzzy, making it possible for the patriarchal narrative to develop from it. As to the second question, his suggestion is rather preliminary and not as well-founded as that in his 1978 book.

Clines' 1978 book *The Theme of the Pentateuch* is a follow-up on his previous work. He claims the Pentateuch's theme is threefold: the partial fulfillment of the promise of land, progeny, and the relationship of God and Israel. By starting his investigation with the patriarchal narratives, however, he first leaves chs. 1–11 "almost entirely out of account" "partly for a logical reason: they concern a world in which the divine promise to the patriarchs has not yet been spoken, and so their theme—whatever it may be—can hardly be subsumed under that of the patriarchal promises and their (partial) fulfillments" (66). His chapter on PH (66-86), apparently discordant with the rest of the Pentateuch, is virtually identical to his 1976 paper. This may be taken as a tacit acknowledgement of a failure to integrate PH in a search for Pentateuch's theme. As a result, the Pentateuch basically has two themes, one in PH and one in the rest. Clines' failure to include PH in his quest of the Pentateuch's theme may be indicative of the limits of the synchronic approach. Owing to his synchronic approach, he does not paint a detailed historical background either.

A doctoral student of David Clines, **Laurence Turner** set out on the path trodden by his supervisor and studied announcements of plot in Genesis (1990), so refining Clines' methodology and some of his theses. He also includes PH in his study, so making amends to Clines' failure. Because of his concern with the final shape, he adopts "an agnostic stance toward such questions as authorship,

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<sup>15</sup> The trial-and-error "method" and phrases like "more subjective considerations" in the quotation above make Clines' inchoate approach apparent, in need of a more refined and rigorous methodology regarding theme. Whether or not independently of Clines, Sailhamer (1984: 75) studied the first creation account as the introduction to the Pentateuch asking what the central concern or theme of "the largest meaningful unit," the Pentateuch is. He comes to a methodological conclusion similar to that of Clines and, at the same time, more practical by delineating an agenda: "The central concern of the large narrative unit is not always immediately apparent but usually becomes clearer with a trial and error effort to relate the parts to the whole." Then, he claims "that the most prominent event and the most far-reaching theme in the Pentateuch, viewed entirely 'on its own [sic], is the covenant between Yahweh and Israel established at Mount Sinai." No doubt, covenant is prominent. But why is it more prominent than, say, land (NB: Sailhamer finds the focus of Genesis 1 on land; 77-78) or progeny; and, second, how does the creation account, given its universal perspective, relate to it? Neither questions are answered by Sailhamer in a satisfying way.

<sup>16</sup> These are, 1) sin–speech–mitigation–punishment theme; 2) spread-of-sin, spread-of-grace theme (for both, see von Rad 1972: 152-53); creation–uncreation–re-creation theme (see Blenkinsopp 1971; Clines 1972-73).



date and composition of the book” and considers source- and traditio-historical questions irrelevant (16-17).

Turner is a perceptive reader keen to notice motifs, apparently insignificant details, and connections, so trying to interpret plot and narrative. Also, he works with no rigid methodological presuppositions (see 17-18). Right in his second sentence, he observes (13), “Narratives in general have several ways of alerting readers to what is likely to transpire in the story as it unfolds, or how to make sense out of what they have just read, and Genesis itself uses several such conventions.” Genesis employs what Turner calls announcements of plot, i.e. “statements which either explicitly state what will happen, or which suggest to the reader what the major elements of the plot are likely to be” (13). The unfolding of plots, however, does not smoothly develop from the announcements. “In fact, if these truly are *plotted* narratives, we must allow for the possibility of surprise, mystery and complication, which are essential elements in any plot worthy of the name” (15; emphasis his).

Turner finds 1:28 as the announcement of plot to PH. It contains three imperatives to humankind: 1) be fruitful and fill the earth; 2) subdue the earth; and 3) have dominion over the animals (22-23). These divine commands, however, do not prove static. The first, “fill the earth,” seems to be less susceptible to change, whereas “two of the imperatives in particular (subjugation of the earth and dominion over the animals) undergo significant modification” (48-49).

In the final section of his Conclusion, he comes closest to address the issue of the plot of Genesis. He claims that “the Announcements are misleading indicators of how the plot of Genesis will develop” (181) and “the plot of the Genesis stories is not predetermined by the Announcements, but neither is it completely open-ended” (182). Therefore, announcements of plot in Genesis are not foolproof indicators of what will happen but rather “may be seen as declarations of Yahweh’s initial intention—what Yahweh would *like* to happen—but no more than that” (182; emphasis original). They are subject to modification. “The book delights in teasing its readers, forcing us to read the text closely to see what is *actually* happening and not, like many commentators, just taking statements, even divine statements, at face value” (182; his italics).

I have two remarks. The first concerns Turner’s thesis. 1:28 may indeed be taken as the announcement of PH’s plot. More precisely, in my view, 1:28 announces a set of plots in PH and Genesis. It does so explicitly. This is, however, not the only plot. While a narrative can have one theme only, it usually has several plots. As I argued above in a preliminary fashion, the lack of reference to city, kingship, and cult, significant Babylonian concepts, is a telltale indicator of plot in PH. Clearly, this plot is not announced in an explicit way similar to that in 1:28. Instead, it is implicitly present in PH. Indeed, one can securely argue that it is not announced at all in the way Turner defines announcement.

The second is a criticism that concerns Turner’s failure to see the first eleven chapters as in some way introductory to the patriarchal narrative in general, and that of Abraham in particular. It could have been easy for him to demonstrate how the announced plot of PH is picked up by what follows but, unfortunately, he fails to read Genesis in this way. He correctly points out, for instance, the importance of land possession and the promise of nationhood for Abraham without linking them to PH’s dominant theme (58-104). Answering the question of whether or not there is a plot in Genesis, he postpones the answer “until the whole book has been canvassed” (15). He does not give a definite answer to this at the end but customarily speaks of the *plots* of Genesis, rarely of its *plot*, and never of theme. Since he studies four stories in Genesis but never the one and whole, he seems to imply a negative response (see especially 181-83).

### 1.2.1.2 The Structure of the Primeval History

Since my concern lies with PH as a self-contained unit, I will survey studies dealing with its structure. On the basis of repeated vocabulary and motifs in Genesis 1–2 and 8–9, apparently being unaware of Kikawada, **Gary Smith** (1977) has observed “striking similarities that the author places in the Adamic and Noahic stories” (310) and divides PH into two main sections. The parallels observed are: 1) humankind cannot live on the earth as it is covered with water, thus

separation/subsiding of water is needed (1:9-10; 8:1-13); 2) the animals are brought forth to swarm on the earth (1:20-21, 24-25; 8:17-19); 3) God establishes days and seasons (1:14-18; 8:22); 4) God blesses the animals to multiply (1:22; 8:17); 5) humankind is brought forth and blessed to multiply (1:28; 9:1, 7); 6) humankind is to rule over the animals (1:28; 9:2); 7) God provides food for humankind (1:29-30; 9:3); 8) image of God in humankind (1:26-27; 9:6).

God's blessing, the theological emphasis in these passages, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," is not just the key to understanding the (Priestly) writer but "the key theological focal point" (311). The genealogies in chs. 5 and 10 are the realization of God's blessing.

There is a secondary theological structure subservient to the theme of God's blessing: God's curse. Following Clark (1971), Smith finds the following relationships between chs. 3 and 4: 1) Yahweh's command/decision (2:17; 4:4-5b); 2) temptation by the serpent/sin (3:4-5; 4:7); 3) act of sin (3:6; 4:8); 4) result of sin (3:7, 4:8); 5) legal investigation (3:10; 4:9); 6) excuses and denials (3:12; 4:9); 7) accusations (3:13; 4:10); 8) pronouncement of judgment (3:14-19; 4:12); 9) recognition of the justice of judgment by the guilty (3:20; 4:13-14); 10) mitigation (3:21; 4:15); 11) execution of judgment (3:23; 4:16).

In these episodes, God's curse affects humankind's relationship to God, to life and death, and to the ground.

Man's relationship to God is described in terms of his walk in the presence of the Lord. Adam initially walked in communion with God. When Adam and Eve were cursed they were driven "from the presence of the LORD" (3:8, 24). Enoch (5:22) and Noah (6:9) "walked with God," but Cain's curse resulted in his "going out from the presence of the LORD" (4:16). The ultimate curse of removal from God's presence is found in the flood incident when all flesh is blotted out. At this point man's relationship to God is identical to his relationship to life and death. Man is warned that death will be one of the results of the curse in Gen 2:17, and Cain realized that the threat of death was part of his curse (4:14-15). The third area influenced is man's relationship to the ground. In Gen 3:17 the ground on which Adam was forced to toil was cursed. Cain was "cursed from the ground" in Gen 4:11-14, and the destruction of society by the removal of man "from the face of the ground" is referred to in Gen 6:7; 7:3, 4, 23. The curse does not bring fruitfulness, multiplication and a filling of the earth, but just the opposite. (314-15)

In 8:21-22, the curse is removed. God elects Noah to overcome the power of curse. The curse on sin is not taken away but overcome by God's blessing righteous Noah (6:22, 7:5). 8:21 is aware of the power of sin, thus, Noah's sin comes as no surprise. Still, God's determination to bless the earth is not affected.

In Gen 11:1-9, there is no formal curse. But humankind is in rebellion against God. God's judgment scatters humans into every part of the earth. By this action, the danger of creating another society (see Gen 6:1-9) is avoided. The inhabitants of Babel are no longer able to do everything they intend to (Gen 11:6). Similarly to Cain, they are ejected from their former home to wander about looking for a new home. Missing in this judgment is the note of grace found after the curse of Adam, Cain, and the flood. It is not, however, that now God has no interest in the nations, for, in ch. 12, he elects another man to take the place of Adam and Noah, and it is through Abraham that God brings his blessings on the families of the earth. All in all, Genesis 1-11 is the theological foundation for the Pentateuch with blessing as a dominant concept determining the rest.

Smith's approach is novel in that it tries to make sense of the whole of PH as the introduction to the Pentateuch. Its overall structure needs, however, more elaboration. This was attempted in a 1980 essay by **Jack Sasson**. He has observed that, from Adam to Noah, there are ten generations just as there are from Noah to Abram. Sasson thus divides PH into two parts.

i	Creation(s), 1:1-2:14	a	The flood and its aftermath, 6:9-9:2
ii	Warning and covenant with man, 2:15-24	b	Warning and covenant with man, 9:3-17
iii	The fall, 3:1-24		No equivalent

iv	Cain and Abel, 4:1-16	c	Curse of Canaan, 9:18-27
v	Mankind's ancestries, 4:17-5:32	d	Nations of the earth, 10:1-32;
vi	The nephilim, 6:1-8	e	Tower of Babel, 11:1-9

Sasson's attempt is to be commended in that it tries to accommodate each section of PH, despite the failure to find a neat structure where each unit has its corresponding part. His structure, however, can be improved as I will try to show.

In a short essay of 1992, **Anthony Tomasino** made some amendments to Sasson's scheme. Pointing out similarities in vocabulary and motifs, he suggested that Noah's drunkenness is the counterpart to the fall story. I will build on this observation too.

In an important article, **David Carr** (1998a) has studied how and to what effect PH narrows its focus. Elaborating on previous studies, he has observed a parallel structure (329):

<b>Pre-Flood Scene Sequence</b>	<b>Flood/Post-Flood Scene Sequence</b>
Programmatic creation narrative, 1:1-2-3	<b>"Descendants of Noah," 6:9-9:29</b>
<b>"Descendants of Heaven and Earth," 2:4-4:26</b>	
Garden of Eden – Creation, 2:5-25	Flood story – First family, 6:9-9:17
Garden of Eden – Parents, 3:1-24	
Cain and Abel – Children, 4:1-16	Noah and sons story – Parent and children, 9:18-
descendants in 4:17-26	29
<b>"Descendants of Adam," 5:1-6:8</b>	<b>"Descendants of Noah's sons," 10:1-11:9</b>
Genealogy, 5:1-32	Genealogy, 10:1-32
Story of human community as a whole, 6:1-8	Story of human community as a whole, 11:1-9

This is a creation-uncreation-new creation story line, partly structured by the *toledot* headings. Both sequences conclude with a section of genealogy (5:1; 10:1),

a section which gives a genealogy of the descendants of the first family in the storyline (Gen 5,1-32; 10,1-32) and a narrative regarding the community descending from them (6,1-4; 11,1-9). At the same time, however, the marked sections of each storyline do not always correspond to each other. The "descendants of Noah" section parallels both the unlabeled creation story in Gen 1,1-2,3 and the "'descendants' of heaven and earth" section in Gen 2,4-4,26. In sum, the storyline structure of the primeval history is built on a similar genealogical principle to that of the genealogical headings of Genesis, and genealogical headings mark some of the major breaks in it. Nevertheless, the whole does not seem to have been designed so that the headings rigidly corresponded to each other in each storyline. (330)

Carr then sets out to account for the parallels of the two sequences of creation and uncreation/re-creation.

Whereas God concluded the six days of creation by "seeing" what God had done and finding it "very good" (Gen 1,31), now God "sees" the earth and finds that it has been "ruined" as a result of "all flesh" (Gen 6,12). This then sets in motion the destruction of the offending life through a partial undoing of the Genesis 1 creation, indeed the undoing of the precise parts of God's creation work that led to life in the first place. God had created the space for life through separating the primeval oceans with a dome (1,6-8), but now destroys life through opening the gates of his dome to let the waters meet again (7,11). The dry ground on which life could exist had emerged through the gathering of waters in the creation story (1,9). Now life dies when this ground again disappears in the midst of the flood (Gen 7,19-20; cf. 8,9). Then, when the ground reappears *on the anniversary of creation* (Gen 8,13-14) and the living beings emerge from the ark (Gen 8,15-19), God repeats the fertility blessing given to both animals and humans at the beginning of creation (Gen 1,22.28; 8,17; 9,1.7). In this way, the flood is a partial uncreation and recreation of the world, and the fertility blessing that undergirds the genealogically structured narrative is kept in motion. (330-31; his italics)

The same holds for

the story describing events following the flood, Gen 9,20–27, [which] links in striking ways with both of the larger stories describing events following creation, both the Garden of Eden story (Gen 2,5–3,24) and the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4,1–16). The story of Noah and his sons and the garden of Eden story are parallel in their common focus on an initial progenitor who is defined by his relation to the אדמה (2,5,7–8,15; 9,20), initiates agriculture (2,7)/viticulture [sic] (9,20), and then experiences problems from the products of his garden (fruit in Gen 2,17; 3,2–6 and wine in 9,20–21). More specifically, both stories feature the seeing of nakedness (3,7; 9,22), and final giving of a divine (3,14–19) or human (9,25–27) pronouncement of judgment. These parallels continue in correlations between Gen 9,20–27 and Gen 4,1–16. Both Gen 4,1–16 and 9,20–26 begin with an explicit description of the sons as the first children of Adam and Noah respectively (4,1–2; 9,18); both have a focus on farming the “ground” (האדמה) shortly afterward (4,3; 9,20); both describe division between brothers and a misdeed by one of them (4,4–8; 9,21–23); both narrate God/Noah’s recognition of what happened (4,9–10; 9,24); and both conclude with a curse on one of the brothers (4,11–12; 9,25–26). Thus, the story of Noah and his sons in Gen 9,20–27 encapsulates in a small compass many of the themes and dynamics of its multiple pre-flood correlates. At the same time, this story reflects a certain divine withdrawal after the covenant of restraint established in Gen 8,20–9,17 of the present text. Now Noah, rather than God, plants the garden, pronounces judgment on a (grand)son, and expels him, this time from his tent. (331–32)

Then, Carr turns his attention to the third section.

Thematic correlations appear again in the third major stage of each storyline: stories regarding the human community descending from the initial human progenitors, Gen 11,1–9 and 6,1–4. Both stories occur after genealogical sections, which, despite their differences, imply that a much larger human community has developed from the first human family (Gen 4,17–5,32; 10,1–32). Both of these stories describe a threat to the boundary between this human community and the divine realm. In the pre-flood story divine beings break this boundary. They take human daughters “for themselves” (6,2), who bear “for them” the “sons of the name” (Gen 6,4). Similar motifs recur in the Tower of Babel story, where the humans attempt to build a tower to heaven in order to make a “name” “for themselves” (11,4). In each story God responds to this threat with a speech proclaiming the unacceptability of the crossing of the divine-human boundary (6,3a; 11,6), and then creates safeguards to protect it, whether temporal (Gen 6,3b) or spatial (11,7–8). Neither story has the elements of judgment that characterized stories earlier in the sequence (cf. Genesis 2–4 and 6–9), yet both describe God as acting to prevent the blurring of the line that separates humanity from God. Finally both stories end with a note linking the story to legendary items familiar to the audience, the “giants”/“men of the name” in 6,4 and the city of Babel in 11,9. (332–33)

Finally, Carr draws attention to the different endings of the respective story lines.

The pre-flood storyline ends with the divine decision to destroy humanity (6,5–7). But by the time we reach the end of the flood/post-flood storyline this option of total destruction has been ruled out. God has established a covenant with Noah and his sons not to destroy the world despite God’s clear recognition of the persistently evil nature of humanity (Gen 8,21; cf. Gen 6,5). God has given the sign of the rainbow, and promised to “remember” this covenant (Gen 9,15–16) much as God “remembered” Noah in the midst of the flood (Gen 8,1). There are many links here with the original creation story, but the introduction of the “covenant” makes a crucial difference. Unlike in the pre-flood storyline, the post-flood world now stands under the protection of the covenant. So, instead of a decision to destroy all of humanity, we see a different sort of narrative narrowing. God leaves the rest of humanity alive, but initiates a special relationship with a certain genealogical line. After the scattering of humanity with the tower of Babel (Gen 11,1–9), the stage is set for the creation of particular people for a relationship with God. (333–34)

The focus on theme and correspondence in PH has become sharper since Gary Smith’s first paper. I will draw and try to improve on them.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In a recent essay, Spoelstra (2022) has suggested an additional chiasmic structure of PH. I cannot give here a thoroughgoing critique of his study but he himself has spotted its weakness saying that “various elements of this detailed paneling contain asymmetrical aspects, that is, details in one panel which are out of sequence with its counterpart in another panel” (46).

One final comment on PH's structure. To the best of my knowledge, it was Rolf Rendtorff (1961: 75-76) who first proposed that PH does not consist of chs. 1–11 but ends with the flood. Humankind's history after Noah is then the introduction (*Vorbau*) to the patriarchal narrative preparing Abraham's election, the story with which salvation history and Israel's story starts. J has adopted the Sumerian way of structuring history (similarly Gese 1958: 134-35, 142-43) but significantly changed the concept. In Sumer, so Rendtorff, the golden era was the period before the flood, later times saw only deterioration (see also Kramer 1943). Abraham's election is not the restoration of golden times, still, salvation history starts with Israel/Abraham.<sup>18</sup>

Next to follow suit was Fretheim in 1969. He argued that in chs. 1–8 blessing is not mentioned and curse is decisive as opposed to chs. 9–11; the basic subject is humankind in chs. 1–8, in chs. 9–11, it is the nations; geographical references are vague in chs. 1–8, while, in chs. 9–11, they are specific; in chs. 1–8, there is no reference to Israel, while in Shem's genealogy, there is; the subject matter is universal in chs. 1–8, while, in chs. 9–11, it is historical in character; material is drawn on ANE myths in chs. 1–8, while chs. 9–11 show no relation to ANE material (1969: 21-22).<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Batto (1992: 69, 73, 87-88), Baumgart (1999: 34-37), and Ska (2006: 22) draw the line between PH and the rest after the flood (9:17, 9:29, and 9:19 respectively), which is not very different from my suggestion below. 11:1-9 is the first story to be set in a real location (Baumgart 1999: 16; cf. Uehlinger 1990: 559), with chs. 10–11 leading up to the Abraham story. Thus, they do not strictly belong to PH. I will still discuss the whole of chs. 1–11 as PH for two reasons. First, the next big section, the patriarchal narrative starts only in 11:27. Second, chs. 10–11 serve as a bridge between PH and the patriarchal narrative and as such provide essential material to round off the preceding material and prepare the succeeding chapters. This bridging function is visible in structural-thematic correspondences like those between chs. 2–3 and 9:20-29 or 6:1-4 and 11:1-9. discussed below.

Synchronic approaches are keen to point out recurring motifs, themes, and key words as well as to read the text in the light of these as a unitary narrative. On the other hand, as a reaction to the preoccupation of the diachronic approach's putative settings, synchronic studies have not really dealt with the date and setting of PH. Comparative approaches make an important contribution to this aspect as well as shed light on possible parallels.

### 1.2.2 Comparative Approaches

“Perhaps the single greatest contribution to the study of Genesis 1 in the twentieth century came from comparative study with ancient Near Eastern creation texts,” Mark Smith (2010: 293-94) remarks and his observation seems to hold true of PH in particular. In his comprehensive 1990 study, **Christoph Uehlinger** investigates Gen 11:1-9 from this perspective. He gathers massive comparative historical and linguistic evidence in support of his argument. In his view, “city and tower” is a well-attested terminology for a city with a citadel (201-53). He traces and critiques the theological interpretation of human hybris in the tower project (254-90). The Akkadian equivalent to the term “one mouth/one speech” (11:1, 6) stands for “being of one mind,” i.e. united under one ruler, either in acknowledgement of the supremacy of the ruler or in opposition to it. As such, it is often related to world dominion. “Making a name” (11:4) is likewise a political term found in the context of founding cities subsequent to military conquests. “One nation” (11:6), as a propaganda term, connotes (Israelite) deportees in construction work of the Assyrian empire. These terms are frequently used in inscriptions directly related to construction work and, indirectly, to world dominion (344-513).

Uehlinger posits to the first layer of the story an anti-Assyrian or anti-Sargonide political motive as a reflection on the failure of the building of Dur-Sharrukin by Sargon II (514-46). The second level is anti-Babylonian, composed in Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar's reign or in the turmoil

<sup>18</sup> Alster (1973 and 1983) and Batto (1991), however, contend that there was a golden era concept in Mesopotamia.

<sup>19</sup> Fretheim makes these observations of chs. 2–8 of J only.



following his death (546-58), subsequently reworked by a pre-P author (558-72) until, in the Persian era, it attained its final shape and import as a failed attempt at world dominion (572-83). God's intervention is not to create a multitude of languages but only to terminate the common language of the people involved in the building project. The sin of the builders is not named, like that of Sargon (consisting of or related to the profanation of Babylonian holy places), thus may not be pointed out *in concreto*, only theologically, *in abstracto* (535-36).

It is hard to ignore and even harder to refute Uehlinger's linguistic and historical arguments. They are judicious as he interacts with both the comparative material and various interpretations. He is to be commended for his propensity for seeing the political dimension of the text. Less convincing are his redaction critical reconstructions. He claims, for example, that 11:4b, 8a, 9b are post-exilic additions to the story. In this way, however, he makes things unnecessarily complicated. The sentences with the verb *pûš* make good sense "syntactically, structurally and as regards contents, because it is part of the contrast between 'being spread' all over the earth and living as 'one people' with 'one speech' on one spot" (Kooij 1996: 34). Uehlinger also suggests that the story was originally a story about an unnamed city that was later identified with Babylon. Kooij correctly critiques (35) Uehlinger's position that "is based on literary-critical arguments which are too subtle or too rigid to be convincing." All in all, whereas Uehlinger's strength is his work with the comparative linguistic and historical evidence, his weakness lies with the interpretation of the canonical story (cf. Kooij 1996: 37).

**Bernard Batto** is one of those scholars who consistently read OT texts with ANE texts, iconography, and concepts as background. Through his interpretation, OT texts are seen as being organically related to the ANE world, while at the same time taking on novel meanings. His studies (1987; 1987a; 1991; 1992; 2000; 2004; 2013) are fruits of this endeavor.

His 1992 study (and particularly some aspects of it) has received insufficient scholarly attention, in my view.<sup>20</sup> In ch. 1, Batto discusses myth. In chs. 2-3, he interprets the Yahwist and Priestly creation stories against a Mesopotamian background. By reading ch. 2 of Genesis against Atrahasis and ch. 1 against BCS, Batto presents a compelling case of how the early chapters of Genesis might have been composed and what their theological intent is. He takes Atrahasis as the literary model to PH and hence draws the boundary of PH after the flood.

Batto makes important observations about the description of creation.

In P's schema the formula *kî tôb* is omitted for two works: the firmament on day 2 and humankind on day 6. If, as suggested above, the author imposed a sixfold *kî tôb* in imitation of the six days of creation, then he was required to omit the formula for two of the eight works. The omission in the case of the firmament may be due to the conception of the author, discussed previously, that the work of day 2 was completed only on day 3 with the definition of the seas. But a comparable suggestion is not forthcoming in the case of humankind. A simpler explanation is at hand. These two works did not merit the judgment that they were perfect. The firmament would later prove defective when it allowed the waters of the Great Abyss (*têhôm rabbâ*) to come cascading through at the time of the flood (7:11). Humankind, too, would prove defective, indeed beginning with the very next episode (Genesis 2-3) and culminating in the violence that brought on the deluge (6:11-12). (90-91)

Humankind's flaw, he goes on (91), "arose from within the humans themselves; it was not a defect to be credited to the Creator." By placing the creation story in ch. 1

as the introduction to the J story, the Priestly Writer radically altered the shape and message of the primeval myth. More accurately, he turned the story inside out. With the juxtaposition of these two passages the primeval myth now, for the first time, became a story of a "Fall"—to use traditional Christian terminology. The Yahwist's story of an originally imperfect humankind gradually being perfected was now inverted and transformed by P into a story of an originally perfect humankind become quite imperfect. (91)

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<sup>20</sup> He is not referred to by Witte 1998; Blenkinsopp 2002; Walton 2011; McDowell 2015. The other side of the coin is that there is no interaction by him with newer approaches to the Pentateuch.

Batto reads motifs, like the nakedness of the first couple, against their ANE background and comes to novel interpretations. Also, he interprets sections with the whole of PH in mind, i.e. without losing sight of the trajectory of the narrative in PH. Because of their groundedness in ANE mythology, I will follow Batto's interpretations at several points. To be sure, the risk of using the comparative approach is to see everything in the light of comparative material. Thus, J.J.M. Roberts criticizes Batto for reading Mesopotamian concepts or ideas into the biblical text when, e.g., he sees humankind's function in the J creation account as providing for the deity, a motif imported from Atrahasis (1995: 102).

There is one aspect I was dissatisfied with. About P, Batto writes (1992: 74): "I will examine how the priestly additions within Genesis 1–11 changed both the storyline and the meaning of the primeval myth first penned by the Yahwist in order to meet the new existential faith needs of his community." This is an important aspect. Apart from a few observations, like that quoted above, however, Batto attends to this aspect indirectly only. In a characteristic way, he short-circuits this question in his last footnote of his 2000 paper (631, n. 30), "Whether and how the Yahwist's view in this matter may be reconciled with the priestly theology of humankind's obligation to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (Gen 1:28) are questions best left to another forum." His reluctance to interpret the canonical text might be due to his methodology as he proceeds diachronically, i.e. first studies the Yahwist account and then the Priestly source. He does not concern himself with the questions, How did PH address the problems of the first audience? What is the theological import of the final shape?

In his 1999 study on the flood narrative, **Norbert Clemens Baumgart** focuses on the final form of the text, thus preferring a synchronic approach (5-7). In his view, PH concludes with the death of Noah (9:29). Both terminology and themes make PH a self-contained unit (8). PH takes place either everywhere or in no concrete historical location (14-16).<sup>21</sup> He elaborates on the links between chs. 10–11 and the Abraham story (18-28). He provides a detailed analysis of the Mesopotamian background, the flood accounts in Gilgamesh and Atrahasis and relates them to Genesis (419-559). Baumgart also discusses flood accounts and motifs in different Mesopotamian traditions like SFS, the Erra myth and Berossus (480-90). He observes that Yahweh demonstrates three clearly different attitudes in the flood: punishing-attacking; benevolently turning to humankind in the punishment; and a readiness to convert to his previous behavior and revaluation of human life (135-52). Baumgart further notices that Yahweh unites in his person aspects of the three Mesopotamian deities known from Gilgamesh: Enlil, Ea, and the Mother Goddess, Ishtar/Mah/Mami/Nintu (422-27). His conclusion is twofold: 1) Yahweh (= Enlil) seeks to destroy all creatures (6:7), on the other hand Yahweh (= Ea) wants to save all life (7:1-3); 2) Yahweh's turning to Noah is his getting involved in the story to start a rescue operation for all creation. Finally, he discusses the link between ark and sanctuary from a comparative religion point of view and relates the ark with the tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple, and provides a helpful treatment of the concepts of ark and sanctuary in Mesopotamia and Israel (496-559).

There had been others first to draw attention to the connection of the *mīs pī* ritual and Genesis 2.<sup>22</sup> But it was **Andreas Schüle** to first interpret Genesis 2 in the light of the *mīs pī* comprehensively. Schüle sees the P material as temporally preceding J in Genesis 1–3, i.e. chs. 2–3 are a corrective of the high and general view of humankind created in the image of God. Based on the similarity with the *mīs pī* ritual, his argument is that the creation of humankind in Genesis 2 proceeds in a way where

God *reacts* and *corresponds* to Adam's needs and desires which he did not anticipate. From a certain point on the *creation* of man becomes more than his *making*. This is to say that *within the space of God's creating* humans start to respond to *their being created*. Adam's longing for a "corresponding

<sup>21</sup> He lists 2:10-14 as an exception but I think, disregarding the Tigris and Euphrates, it is no exception either; see my discussion of the passage.

<sup>22</sup> McDowell (2015: 15-16) finds the first studies relating the ritual and Gen 2 in Müller 1995; Niehr 1997; Berlejung 1998.

other” and his desire for what the tree of wisdom has to offer are such instances of human response that make God change the course of his working on Adam. (2005: 18-19; his italics)

Thus, human responsiveness is crucial for the understanding of the story.

The mouth-washing ritual was performed not just on idols but on several other objects and living beings as well (see Berlejung 1998: 182-83). This ritual thus seems to have played a significant role in ancient Mesopotamia. Still, by alluding to both Atrahasis and the *mīs pī* ritual, the narrator shrewdly attacked Babylonian religion and world view.

After discussing Uehlinger (1990), Schüle attributes universal significance to 11:1-9 (2006: 410-16). The city with its tower stands for empire, the endeavor of humankind is to build empires. Assyria, Babylonia, Persia are but the historical expressions of this endeavor. The story is neither polemical nor political. Rather, the main intention of humankind is to avoid being scattered. 11:1-9 reflects an attempt at coming to terms with the political situation of the Persian era. Its idiosyncrasy is that it does not expect the fate of post-exilic Jewry to change in the present or future, still is convinced that history is in the hand of the Creator God.

Schüle sees PH as a prologue to both the Pentateuch and the OT in that in its way it reflects the threefold division of the canon (428). To achieve this interpretation, historical background is sketched in rather vague terms and a more universal message is conveyed, usually of the Persian period.

### ***1.3 The Narrator's Literary Strategy***

How could Jewish exiles living in Babylonia express their religious conviction? How could they formulate their criticism of the dominant culture? How could they address fellow exiles in an attempt to persuade them not to give up? How would they present an alternative world view to that held and celebrated by the dominant culture of the captors?

The response to these questions significantly depends on the political and social situation as well as the objectives of what the exiles want to achieve. If they aim at ridiculing the other they may take a rather sarcastic and deprecating approach (like, say, Deutero-Isaiah does every now and then). If they are, however, determined to present their world view not just to encourage the like-minded but possibly to persuade those who surrendered to the claims of the winning party, too sharp a polemic will only alienate them. Therefore, a more delicate and subtle strategy is needed, one that is more positive toward the gentile heritage.

PH's author adopted a strategy by which he presented an alternative view to Babylon's imperialistic religion and politics. By referring and alluding to Mesopotamian myths, rites, and heroes, he showed a sympathetic approach to the Mesopotamian cultural and religious heritage. On occasions, however, he leveled criticism at Babylon. Often, it is a tongue-in-cheek polemic critiquing Babylon's treasured rites, heroes, values, and world view. If one understands polemic as “a speech or a piece of writing that argues very strongly for or against sth/sb” (Turnbull 2010: 1171), then, in this narrower sense, PH is not polemical. This is how the word is generally understood and used (see, e.g., Schüle 2006: 63). My use can, for lack of a better term, be called “soft polemic.”

In his soft polemic, the narrator used genres like creation myth and genealogy well-known to Babylonians, alluded to and drew on their beloved epics and elaborated on popular themes such as creation, multiplication of humankind, and the flood. Indeed, he structured his work (or, from the view-point of Pentateuch, the introduction of his work) as one of those epics, Atrahasis is structured. Even vague allusions to themes, persons or works came in handy on occasions.

It seems that PH's author was well-versed in the contemporary issues of 6<sup>th</sup> century Mesopotamian culture, mythology, religion, politics. Had it been different, i.e. had he retreated into the confines of his own religion and (sub)culture, I am sure, PH/Genesis (and much of the OT, for that reason) would not have been written.

It is sometimes argued that allusions or references to Mesopotamian sources are too indirect to constitute evidence of dependence (e.g., Routledge 2010: 73). In this vein, Walton (2011: 3) claims,

When literary pieces are being compared to consider the question of dependency among them, the burden of proof has been on the researcher to consider the issues of propinquity and transmission. After all, if Israelite literature were to be suspected of borrowing an Akkadian text, the claim of borrowing would need to be substantiated by evidence that the Israelite writers were aware of the Akkadian text and could plausibly have had access to it.

This is a helpful observation commending caution. Of course, until an ancient Genesis manuscript with footnote references to the secondary Akkadian sources emerges, seeing references to ANE sources remains a working hypothesis and nothing more. Arguments from silence are suspect. On the other hand, there are too many similarities and parallels with Atrahasis, BCS, Gilgamesh, and the *mīs pi* ritual, to mention just the most important ones, to ignore them as points of reference.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, McDowell (2015: 175-76) contends that the connections of the *mīs pi* ritual and Gen 2:5–3:24 “indicate a historical relationship. They suggest that the Eden author not only knew how divine statues were made but understood the ritual means by which they were activated.”

By laying out his understanding of how P used Mesopotamian literary traditions, Sparks (2007: 628-29) similarly claims

that in some important respects, the Priestly Pentateuch is what Gérard Genette has called a “mimotext,” which imitates specific Mesopotamian textual traditions for polemical reasons. Whether the evidence for this in certain cases is best described as an “allusion” by P, or “influence” on P, or an “echo” in P is not something that matters so much. But the overall case will depend on P’s true allusions to other literature, in which the author utilizes “the marked material for some rhetorical or strategic end.”<sup>24</sup> Any unconscious “echoes” of Mesopotamia in P would only reinforce (but not detract from at all) the argument that P has intentionally imitated Mesopotamian traditions.

Briefly, each case needs to be judged on its own terms.

My interpretation takes the socio-cultural background of the Babylonian context into account by assuming that the exiles, intent on taking on exploitative imperial ideology and, at the same time, putting forward their alternative world view, must have formulated their criticism and the tenets of their faith (i.e. the narrative of Genesis) with extreme caution unless they wanted to face the authorities’ wrath.

Since, at the New Year festival, BCS was recited and re-enacted in Babylon in the Neo-Babylonian period (see Lambert 1963; 1968: 106-07), Jewish exiles were regularly confronted with Marduk’s supremacy and the Babylonian version of what the world looks like. Even if BCS was not a standard Mesopotamian creation myth (so Lambert 1965: 291; Millard 1967: 4), in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia, it was definitely normative and the concept Jewish exiles regularly came across.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, it did not take right-wing nationalist Jews to feel the urge of taking up the challenge and giving their own account of how the world should look like under the reign of their god.

## 1.4 Methodology

Even though this study is not concerned with genetic questions, a brief discussion of some genetic aspects seems helpful. I read Genesis assuming two main sources which I call P and J for the sake of convenience. I posit a J dating in the early Israelite monarchy<sup>26</sup> and can imagine that the original J creation account drew on Atrahasis and as such was more reminiscent of it, as discussed by Batto (1992: 41-72; cf. Carr 1996: 240-46), than the present text suggests. I can also imagine an original

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<sup>23</sup> Drawing on Alter (1989: 111-40), Kvanvig (2002: 91-92) discusses allusion at some length and posits a tradition, oral or written, of “strange primeval beings” and “a specific incident, taking place at a specific time before the flood.” One has the impression that the underlying motive to deny references to ANE material sometimes is a reluctance to pinpoint the historical background. For example, Walton (2011) fails to account for a *Sitz im Leben* of Genesis 1.

<sup>24</sup> Sparks quotes Sommer 1998: 15.

<sup>25</sup> Note, however, that Speiser (1964: 9) calls it “Mesopotamia’s canonical version of cosmic origins.”

<sup>26</sup> J’s existence has recently been questioned (see e.g., Gertz, Schmid, Witte 2002). Wenham (1999) and LaCocque (2006), among others, have argued for J’s priority over P. Hendel (2000) arrives, on linguistic grounds, at an early monarchic dating of J. My argument is not affected by an exilic date suggested, e.g., by LaCocque 2006: 17-21, assuming J is prior to P.



source written in 9<sup>th</sup> century Judah telling a story from the creation of humankind in Genesis to Solomon's ascension to the throne in 1 Kings (see Friedman 1998; cf. Carr 2011: 456-69). My thesis, however, does not depend on the date of J. This is different with P which, in my view, is mainly post-exilic with PH nearly complete in the exile.

As for P, David Carr (1996: 67-68), among others, has argued that P is subsequent to "non-P."<sup>27</sup> He claims (312): "With the priestly document, we come to a comprehensive counterpresentation of the Genesis story, indeed one designed to replace the account on which it is dependent." Whether or not P replaces J is a matter of how one defines their respective theologies and the redaction process. Also, it is possible in my view that 11:1-9 and the Moses/Exodus narrative (or part of it) originally were polemics against Neo-Assyrian cultural and political claims (see Uehlinger 1992; Otto 2000). They have, however, been incorporated in PH as anti-Babylonian polemics first and foremost.

Since my concern is not with the coming-about of the text, I will not deal with what David Carr calls "transmission history" (1996) but with the final work as a literary and theological composition. This is not only because "conventional criteria for determining textual incoherence are hardly convincing" (Stordalen 2000: 194). My main reason for this is that the quest for sources/traditions has contributed little to a theological interpretation of the present literary work.<sup>28</sup> Scholarship now is in favor of literary integrity in general (see Stordalen 2000: 197-98).

Even though I see various approaches to PH as helpful and legitimate, I have opted to read it synchronically, comparatively, and theologically. For instance, I sympathize with the shame interpretation of the nakedness motif in 2:25 but view the animal-like explanation, a comparative interpretation (see Batto 1992), as doing justice to the Babylonian context and fitting PH better than the shame-and-gender or coming-of-age explanation (for this, see, e.g., Schüle 2006: 175).

It is theological interpretation that interpreters often are after. So, I am first interested in the particular: what the text meant to 6<sup>th</sup> century exilic Jews. Whereas theological interpretations often ignore the specifics of historical background and comparative material, I will try to do justice to the particularities while, as step two, aiming at a theological interpretation that is significant for us today. This study basically is a theological commentary on PH.

PH/Genesis was intended as theological literature. This does not mean that it is concerned with "spiritual" things only. To risk a platitude, theological concern for PH means a rather holistic approach to every phenomenon encountered from politics to society, ethics, values, culture, and religion – all seen from a theological vantage point. Bearing that in mind, evaluation of political, social or whatever aspect is a must.<sup>29</sup>

The concern of this study is the theme of PH. However, it seems desirable to read PH in its wider context. That is to say, the theme of PH cannot be studied in isolation from Genesis and the Pentateuch. The literary context of PH is, first, that of Genesis and then of the Pentateuch. I will thus read PH's sections in their immediate and wider contexts and not as isolated literary units. Whatever its literary provenance, the introduction to the flood narrative, 6:1-4/6, for instance, is not to be interpreted as a disjoint fragment of previous literary sources but in its narrower context of chs. 5–8. At the same time, it is an imperative for me to read PH against the cultural-historical background of 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia. Having "bifocal lenses" on will prove profitable I hope.

The attempts by Kikawada (1975; 1981; 1985) to read PH in the light of ANE material as well as a self-contained literary work will be appreciated and improved upon I trust. The approach by David Clines (1976; 1978) will be appropriated by asking similar questions as to the theme of PH and, to a

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<sup>27</sup> See also his criticism of the J material's different putative contexts and dates as well as his proposal (1996: 220-32).

<sup>28</sup> Some studies, like Batto 1992: 15-101 and Carr 1996, have definitely had a positive contribution. But see Stordalen's discussion of how little knowledge of the evolution of Gilgamesh or Atrahasis is needed to understand and appreciate them (2000: 201-05; cf. Baden 2009). Also, scholarship, particularly when source hypotheses and redaction criticism are concerned, too often resorts to arguments from silence. Waschke (1984: 16) has called attention to this fallacy by reference to W.H. Schmidt's thesis (1964) that Israel's credos never speak of creation.

<sup>29</sup> Needless to say, in ANE, there was no dichotomy between religion and society or politics – theology concerned itself with every aspect of human life.



limited extent, how it relates to the rest of Genesis and the Pentateuch. What associations would it evoke in the minds of exilic Israel as they listened to the story? I will try to read PH as one literary work, indeed, as an introduction to a major literary opus. It is also clear that PH is both a self-contained and structured unit. Each section must be integrated in the whole of PH, even those that resist most violently, like 6:1-4 and 11:1-9.

Comparative studies read sections of PH against their cultural, political, social, ideological, and linguistic ANE background. This is necessary if we are to understand what they tried to communicate to the first audience. I will do my best to emulate Uehlinger's political awareness (1990) as well as Batto's (1992) and Baumgart's (1999) comparative approaches – reading the canonical text though. I will try to detect both similarities between the biblical and ANE material as well as differences. To this end, I will adopt what Hallo calls the “contextual approach.”

It is, then, the balance between comparison and contrast, or their combinations in the appropriate proportions, which first provides overall context for the biblical text. [...] The goal of the contextual approach is fairly modest. It is not to find the key to every biblical phenomenon in some ancient Near Eastern precedent, but rather to silhouette the biblical text against its wider literary and cultural environment and thus to arrive at a proper assessment of the extent to which the biblical evidence reflects that environment or, on the contrary, is distinctive and innovative over against it. (Hallo 1990: 678; cf. Hanson 1971: 33)

In other words, it is important to give “consideration not only to the parallels between Israel and the other peoples, but also to the divergences between them; for the differences are likewise instructive, perhaps even more so than the similarities.” Recognizing an important methodological principle, Cassuto (1989: 1; cf. Hasel 1972) stated this in the Preface of his Genesis commentary as long ago as 1944 (Hebrew publication).

One caveat seems necessary, however. The staggering amount of parallels of comparative religion and literature makes one's head dizzy. Sandmel (1962; cf. Van Seters 1992: 109) therefore warns of “parallelomania,” a zealous search for parallels in comparative religion that tempts the scholar. In this respect, John Walton's “cosmological cognitive environment” (2011; cf. Lowery 2013) seems helpful. It is constituted by wide-spread cognitive concepts in ANE world view. Sumerian parallels, for instance, beg the question: how many Hebrews living in the 6<sup>th</sup> century would get the literary allusions. On the other hand, Bosserman (2017) argues that there must have been iconographically “illiterate texts,” i.e. texts unaware of the iconography's original meaning still using its symbols, Genesis 2–3 being one of them.

I will interpret PH with its Babylonian setting in mind. My thesis is that, meant for exilic Jews, PH was an alternative to the Babylonian narrative. It addressed the particular situation of the exiles, more so than perceived by most modern readers, alluding to different Mesopotamian myths, epics, and rites so trying to challenge the rather particularly Mesopotamian narrative by a universal one.<sup>30</sup>

This study will read the text in its putative historical setting as well as “in its integrity and interconnectedness;” it will draw attention to the “alternative view of power and order in the world” presented by PH (see McConville 2006: 11). I will use McConville's idea that Yahwist monotheism was liberating, creating a counter-culture.

Last but not least, I will occasionally use, as a method, imagination,

the capacity within the human mind to create basic images. It is the power of human psyche (conscious and unconscious) to form mental images, either immediately or indirectly derived from perception or sensation, that lead to the attainment of meaning. In relationship to epistemology (experience, perception, and intuition) and cosmology (especially the construction and authentication of worldviews), imagination may range from a rather common ability to arrange and categorize experiences of sense perception to a more creative power to re-describe reality in highly unusual and

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<sup>30</sup> To be sure, because of its universal substance and subject matter, it allows for a more general interpretation (see Stordalen 2000: 25-26).

provocative ways. (Perdue 1994: 263-64; drawing on Warnock 1976: 10; Crites 1981; Scharlemann 1990)

More specifically, my method may be reminiscent of what Perdue calls “common imagination.” It operates when the senses perceive an object, say, for example, the front of a house, and the mind projects that the house has rooms that are not immediately experienced. This projection may be based either on past experience (i.e., the person has been in the house before), or by the more general mental activity of classifying the object in the general category of “house,” which ordinarily has rooms, and interpreting it as such. Thus, common or ordinary imagination completes the fragmentary data of the sense, since we cannot perceive the whole of an object at once. (Perdue 1994: 265)

I will employ my very common imagination to complete, for instance, the fragmentary data of the tower of Babylon story, “since we cannot perceive the whole of” it. To be sure, in the story there is, instead of an object, a whole network of overt or covert references to Babylonian ideology and power claims based on the city-temple-king triad. But the gaps need to be filled in by imagination.

Albright, reviewing Sigmund Mowinckel’s *The Two Sources of the Predeuteronomistic History (JE) in Gen. 1-11* (1938: 230), remarks that “truth is generally found on the side of moderation.” It is not up to me to decide how moderate the views presented here are. But, even though not being an Assyriologist myself, I have made every effort to meet Albright’s second (230) principle that “these days the Biblical scholar must also be a master of the extra-biblical sources from which we must reconstruct the world of the Bible.”

## **2 The Primeval History: An Alternative to Babylon’s Metanarrative**

“Genesis 1–11 is probably unique in the Bible. Although, like other biblical books or blocks of material, it is a clearly definable entity, its position in the Bible and its content give it a ‘foundational’ character,” Rogerson gives expression to an *opinio communis* (1997: 67). “The Primeval History is almost always treated in isolation,” Fox adds (1989: 32). Even though much has changed since Fox’s assertion, the relationship of PH and what follows is not clear. PH is without doubt very different from the successive material. At the same time, however, it is the introduction to Genesis and the Pentateuch.<sup>31</sup> What I am interested in is, What does PH want to communicate? What is its purpose by its use of Mesopotamian material? And in what way is PH, to follow on Rogerson’s observation, foundational for Genesis/Pentateuch?

### **2.1 Dethroning Marduk: The Beginnings, 1:1–3:24**

BCS is an epic statement of Marduk’s supremacy among Babylonian gods. Like other ANE myths, BCS does not discuss the creation of the world *per se*. In it, creation is clearly as much a political statement as a theological one. The parallels with Genesis have been extensively demonstrated. The Genesis narrator is well aware of the world BCS has created and, sometimes overtly, other times obliquely, articulates his view when in disagreement with BCS. At the same time, Genesis makes a strong case for the end of Marduk’s kingship and Yahweh’s supremacy. By redefining creation, Genesis launches its first line of attack on Babylon.

Genesis 1 is cosmogony drawing on BCS. In ch. 2, humankind’s creation is related in more detail. The intertextual backdrop is Atrahasis and the *mīs pī* ritual this time – it is anthropogony. Despite the dissimilarities, the Genesis account is likewise concerned with politics.

#### **2.1.1 Cosmogony, 1:1–2:3**

BCS tells the story of how the generations of gods came to be starting with the well-known words,

When skies above were not yet named  
Nor earth below pronounced by name,  
Apsu, the first one, their begetter

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<sup>31</sup> For an elaboration of PH themes in Genesis/Pentateuch, see Fox 1989; Carr 1998; 1998a.

And maker Tiamat, who bore them all,  
Had mixed their waters together,  
But had not formed pastures, nor discovered reed-beds;  
When yet no gods were manifest,  
Nor names pronounced, nor destinies decreed,  
Then gods were born within them.

With the gods around, Tiamat feels threatened and plans to destroy them. On realizing this, they call on Marduk who accepts the challenge on the condition that he will be head of the gods. Marduk addresses his father Ea,

Lord of the gods, fate of the great gods,  
If indeed I am to be your champion,  
If I am to defeat Tiamat and save your lives,  
Convene the council, name a special fate,  
Sit joyfully together in Ubshu-ukkianakku:  
My own utterance shall fix fate instead of you!  
Whatever I create shall never be altered!  
The decree of my lips shall never be revoked, never changed! (Tablet II)

The deal is struck, a token of which is the “princely shrine” erected for Marduk after his victory. Here, he takes up residence as proclaimed king (Tablet IV).

In the ensuing fight with Tiamat,

The Lord spread his net and made it encircle her,  
To her face he dispatched the *imhullu*-wind, which had been behind:  
Tiamat opened her mouth to swallow it,  
And he forced in the *imhullu*-wind so that she could not close her lips.  
Fierce winds distended her belly;  
Her insides were constipated and she stretched her mouth wide. (Tablet IV)

With Tiamat and her evil allies annihilated, triumphant Marduk sets out to create or organize the world. To this end, he uses Tiamat’s corpse.

He divided the monstrous shape and created marvel (from it).  
He sliced her in half like a fish for drying:  
Half of her he put up to roof the sky,  
Drew a bolt across and made a guard hold it.  
Her waters he arranged so that they could not escape. (Tablet IV)

Next, Marduk makes a new order in the sky.

As for the stars, he set up constellations corresponding to them.  
He designated the year and marked out its divisions,  
Apportioned three stars each to the twelve months.  
When he had made plans of the days of the year,  
He founded the stand of Neberu to mark out their courses,  
So that none of them could go wrong or stray.  
He fixed the stand of Ellil and Ea together with it,  
Opened up gates in both ribs,  
Made strong bolts to left and right.  
With her liver he located the heights;  
He made the crescent moon appear, entrusted night (to it)  
And designated it the jewel of night to mark out the days.  
“Go forth every month without fail in a corona,  
At the beginning of the month, go glow over the land.  
You shine with horns to mark out six days;  
On the seventh day the crown is half.  
The fifteenth day shall always be the mid-point, the half of each month.  
When Shamash looks at you from the horizon,  
Always bring the day of disappearance close to the path of Shamash,  
And on the thirtieth day, the [year] is always equalized, for Shamash is (responsible for) the year.

Enthroned, Marduk makes himself a house, a cult center to confirm his kingship,

I hereby name it Babylon, home of the great gods.

We shall make it the centre of religion. (Tablet V)

So far the relevant passages of BCS.

The first verses of Genesis are notorious as far as translation is concerned. Some 900 years ago and without being familiar with comparative material, it was Rashi first, to my knowledge, to consider the introductory Gen 1:1 being in construct to 1:3, with 1:2 constituting a circumstantial clause (Rashi 1994: 1-2; see Orlinsky 1983: 208). The similar syntax of the starting lines of Genesis and BCS, parallel motifs and the order of events have long been noticed (e.g., Speiser 1964: 9-10). With its incipit, a bridge between this composition and exilic Jews has been constructed (contra Lim 2002: 107). In addition, both creation accounts refer to a watery chaos which is then split by the principal god into heaven and earth; both know of light as existing prior to the creation of the heavenly bodies; both have a very similar sequence of creation; and in both, the number seven plays a significant role (Heidel 1951: 82). Whereas, however, BCS is concerned with theogony, Genesis is not at all, it starts in medias res (see Miller 2019: 32).<sup>32</sup>

In PH, the day-by-day creation process, the filling-in of spaces, prepared to this end, with creatures, the leisurely progress make it all appear as a well-planned job with God as an organized and sovereign chief executive – God’s creating activity is masterly (Levenson 1988: 3; cf. Goldingay 2003: 94-96). Flora and fauna in Genesis are assigned significance in their own right whereas, in BCS, they do not figure at all (see Heidel 1951: 117-18). The world itself and humankind as its crown are the purpose of creation. Creation is seen from the perspective of humankind, not like in Mesopotamia. A rather cosmo- and anthropocentric approach emerges in the first sentences of PH instead of the theocentric view of BCS – creation matters.

Creational acts of days 1-3 prepare the acts of days 4-6, suggested first by Herder (Day 2013: 1), thus lending creation structure. The absence of the *Chaoskampf* motif and the way he creates make God appear in control.<sup>33</sup> Structure, a prerequisite of order and the ensuing work, is always given to things that matter. Thus, structure is being given to the world to be populated. Though there is similar structuring of creation in BCS, that of Genesis, through its day-by-day design and sovereign Creator, seems an organized and well-executed creation (see Heidel 1951: 129; Robinson 1986: 598-99). In Genesis, the world is not created by God at the end of a long sequence of reactions to evil forces but due to proactive decisions.

This sense of a well-ordered and good world is not disturbed by the muted references to Tiamat (1:2)<sup>34</sup> and the *tannînim* (1:21) – nothing and nobody threatens God’s good creation. The plural in 1:26 may be an allusion to other divine beings in the heavenly court (see Garr 2003: 87-92). Even when Marduk creates with peaceful means, there are obvious contrasts to Genesis. Right after his defeat of Tiamat, Marduk’s creation of the sky is told at some length. This is more than understandable, since, for Babylonian religion, astrology was significant. In Genesis 1, creating heavenly bodies is just a day’s work, no more, and they are accorded no astrological significance.

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<sup>32</sup> Jacobsen (1968) has argued that “Marduk,” <sup>d</sup>AMAR-UD in cuneiform, etymologically goes back to the Sumerian MAR-UTU, meaning “son of Wind” which fits the combat scene in BCS where Marduk triumphs by using as weapons various winds. What concerns us in this context is that, at the beginning of the first creation account, we see God’s *ruah*, sometimes translated as “God’s wind” (e.g., Smith 2010: 85), hover over the waters of the deep (1:2). To be sure, in Genesis, there is no battle, no violence. As a consequence of “the Israelite purging of the *Chaoskampf* of its cosmogonic associations” (Levenson 1988: 11), God sovereignly rules and creates with mere words. The muffled echo of Marduk’s triumph over the watery monster may still be heard reverberating from the distant Akkadian epic. For a potential Phoenician background, see Darshan 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Kenneth Gros Louis (1974: 44-45) wonders if the account makes one “somewhat uncomfortable with a God who is so distant, so transcendent.” “The God who emerges is majestic, but distant; omnipotent and transcendent, a God of order and of pattern and of hierarchy.” Gen 2 will rectify this impression.

<sup>34</sup> Like the dependence of Genesis on BCS, the relationship between Tiamat and *têhôm* is not settled. Gertz (2009: 141) misses the hints at a *Chaoskampf*. Given Genesis’ strategy outlined above, the non-naming may well be an element of this strategy along with the anarthrous *têhôm*, unaccounted for by Gertz.

Related to this is naming, a frequent motif in Mesopotamian mythology. It is always gods who name cultural or technological innovations (see, e.g., The Disputation between Ewe and Wheat, lines 10-11). Usually, it is gods who name humankind, just as in BCS. In Genesis, God names things deemed gods in Mesopotamia (Anu, Enlil): the sky (1:8) and land (1:10). They are relegated to a calendar function. God's naming activity comes to an end with day three, however. Startlingly, neither God nor the narrator bothers to name the two most important heavenly bodies of creation, the sun and the moon, worshiped as Shamash and Sin in Babylonia (cf. Hasel 1972: 13-14), even though God had named entities previously created or separated. They are ordered by God to govern the day and the night (1:16). As an afterthought, God is reported to have made the stars (1:16), among them, presumably, Ishtar-Venus, Marduk-Jupiter, Nebo-Mercury, Nergal-Mars.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, heavenly bodies seem to have no light, hence no significance, of their own as light was created on day one.

However, Gertz argues (2009: 144-49) that referring to the sun and moon as "great lights" in Mesopotamian literature was quite common. Moreover, disregarding humankind's creation, that of the planets is the most detailed and complex, with day 4 being the center of the creation week. These all suggest not a marginalization but rather the central significance for P's creation account, i.e. the sovereignty and universality of the one Creator who is superior to all other powers including Marduk (see BCS IV-VII).<sup>36</sup>

God's unrivaled might and authority are underlined in another way as well. Mark Smith (2010: 115-27) has compared Genesis 1 and Psalm 74 and observed that the Genesis account plays down the conflict aspect by stressing God's creating speech and omitting references to the primordial *Chaoskampf*, indeed, to the deep, the sea, and monsters as God's primordial enemies in the psalm. What does Genesis want to achieve by so doing?

The aim would appear to be to substitute divine speech for divine conflict and thus read conflict out of creation. In this way, God can be viewed as a power beyond conflict, indeed the unchallenged and unchallengeable power beyond any powers. Creation does not occur in the aftermath of divine powers in opposition. It is not the result of two wills in opposition, but it evinces a God unopposed, bringing about creation simply by expressing good words. (Smith 2010: 124)

Smith (2010: 127-39) has also compared light in Genesis and in BCS I.101-104 where Marduk appears clothed in light (137-38). Though this vocabulary is more comparable with Ps 104:2, God can in Genesis 1 be seen as compared to Marduk. If so, this feature along with the omission of the conflict element, powerful in BCS, makes God, who creates by speech, superior to Marduk.<sup>37</sup> If BCS is an epic statement of Marduk's supremacy, Genesis 1 is one of Yahweh's unrivaled sovereignty.

Walton has drawn attention to the Akkadian phrases *šimtu*, represented by the gods' Tablet of Destinies, and *paršu*, a concept denoting "control attributes." Though there is no corresponding Hebrew equivalent, these phrases in Akkadian literature denote the world's good order – something similar we see in Genesis 1. Days 1-3 can thus be seen as establishing the cosmos's *parši*, while days 4-6 as determining the destinies of the cosmos's functionaries. With the gods' destinies determined in ANE, powers and responsibilities could be delegated, which resulted in other gods' taking up the responsibilities of work. This is reminiscent of humankind being created in God's

<sup>35</sup> In the subsequent narrative, naming becomes a human privilege (e.g., 2:19-20; 3:20; 4:1, 26), with God occasionally naming human characters (see 5:2; 17:5, 15). Thus, while naming in Mesopotamia is a divine prerogative, in Genesis, it is shared between God and humankind and related to plot and characterization. The reason is not spelled out and I wonder whether it is humankind's being created in the image of God (see below).

<sup>36</sup> As far as the import of Gen 1:14-19 in comparison with BCS is concerned, Gertz is correct except that he ignores the literary effect of the non-naming of sun and moon which seems to be in line with the non-naming of other important Babylonian entities. After all, the moon and sun are named in BCS (Tablet V) and P could have easily named those two heavenly bodies too.

<sup>37</sup> Beginning with the ת of ברשית in Genesis 1 and שמות in Exodus 1, every 50<sup>th</sup> letter added produces "Torah." This might be seen as an alternative to Marduk's 50 names to provide a rationale for the world's structure.



image and having power delegated to them. Significantly, God in Genesis 1 is portrayed as solely responsible for cosmic order (2013: 14).

In Atrahasis as well as in BCS, work is seen as troublesome, unworthy of gods. Therefore, humankind is not the crown of creation but a solution to a problem. Creating for God where he gets his hands dirty, is enjoyable and effortless.

As for the cause of creation in Genesis, one is perplexed to find none. As I have stated, there is no noise challenging God and leading to a bloody theomachy. God states that the created world, with the creatures in it, is good, i.e. good for creation itself and not necessarily because it is useful to God. This impression is reinforced by God's very first command to creation that both animals and humankind multiply (1:22, 28). God is not concerned about overpopulation as his colleagues in Atrahasis are. Seeing this, one is forced to conclude that God created the world for no particular reason – she just felt like creating it. The created things serve their purpose, creation does its job.

In BCS, the apex is reached with the creation of Babylon. It is emphatic whereas the “creation of mankind is in fact little more than a subsidiary theme in the middle of the story of the building of Babylon” (Halla 2010c: 559). Humankind is created for the service of the gods. The alternative to the Babylonian world view is set forth by P in the account of the creation of humankind. Having created the animals, an aspect missing in BCS (Hasel 1972: 18), God says,

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. (Gen 1:26)<sup>38</sup>

This is the only instance in ch. 1 where God does not create by divine fiat but by “making” (Sarna 1966: 14): he seems to be more involved than on the previous occasions (Firmage 1999: 101). And this terminology is more in line with that of ch. 2.

McDowell has pointed out that the term “according to its/their kind,” occurring 10x in 7 verses (1:11-12, 21-25), stresses “the creation and reproduction of each species *according to its own distinctive type or class*” (2015: 132; her emphasis). Contrary to expectations, the creation of humankind is not described by this term but by “in our image, in our likeness” (1:26-27). In this way, the narrator draws “a sharp distinction between humans and the other created beings” (132). Humankind is thus distinct from animals and plants and more God-like though distinct from God.

In other words, humans are not divine, nor are they members of the heavenly host. They are their own category, type, or species, which is defined by being created in the image and likeness of God. However, at some level, humans belong to the divine class or species, that is, humanity's *kind or type is God*. (133; her emphasis)

Humankind is created in the image of God with a mandate of ruling over the world (see Niskanen 2009: 429-30). As argued compellingly by Batto (2004), the two seem to be correlated: being the image of God means rule over creation. This reflects the Mesopotamian (and Egyptian) view where the king was seen as the image of the deity and as such his/her representative and ruler of creation (see Walton 2013: 20-21). God's statement is a theological move where P “does not push the image of the king off its base to make it equal to the people but lifts humankind out of the dust” (Waschke 2008: 503). In other words, in the image concept, the king's status and function are transferred onto the whole of humanity (Waschke 1984: 22; cf. Sarna 1989: 12; Dick 2006: 262; McConville 2006: 26).<sup>39</sup> Embodying God's qualities, humankind is supposed to do the deity's work on earth (Walton 2013: 21). Being created in God's image concerns each individual, the human person and the human family (Niskanen 2009: 428, 434-35).<sup>40</sup>

Back in 1895, Hermann Gunkel, with Assyriology and comparative religion in their infancy, claimed, “we do not directly discern what this image might be.” It is not the rule of humankind over

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<sup>38</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are to the NIV.

<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, being aware of PH's anti-royal attitude and kings as a tough species, why not give a push as PH often does?

<sup>40</sup> Jacob (1974: 10) comments that what 1:27 teaches „is the opposite of racism and emphasizes the unity of mankind.”

the animals, he goes on, that is meant (1984: 29). Even if direct interpretive hints are in short supply comparative material has established itself as a solid starting point. We will also see in what way the concept is linked to human rule over the animals.

The representational or royal interpretation of the image of God concept has virtually become a consensus among OT scholars and contributed to our understanding thereof most significantly in the last one-hundred years or so (see Jónsson 1988: 219-23). It can be summarized in the following way. Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts speak of the king as being the image of the deity. “In these texts the designation of the king as ‘image of the god’ serves to emphasize the godlike nature of the king in his ruling function and power” (Bird 1981: 141-43). The Akkadian word *muššulu*, “image,” occurs “in a proverb quoted by Adad-shum-ušur in a letter to Esarhaddon, in which he refers to the king as *muššuli ša DINGIR(ili)*, ‘the likeness of god’” (Curtis 1990: 33). The primary Akkadian word, however, is *šalmu* to which the earliest reference is in a victory hymn of Tukulti-Ninurta I in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Here, the king is a permanent *šalmu* of Enlil. But most evidences are found in Neo-Assyrian letters of the court astrologers-magicians of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. Here, the king is *šalmu* of Shamash/Bel/Marduk. The image of god concept in Genesis thus probably originates in ANE king ideology. It is not the result of an inner-Israelite democratization of the royal concept though, but, after the collapse of the Judahite monarchy, the result of a universalizing of the lordship concept in which metaphors of the royal ideology are intentionally integrated by P (Waschke, oral communication; contra Bray 1991: 197).<sup>41</sup>

Studying the Tell Fecheriyeh inscription, Dohmen has further clarified the functional aspect of *šelem* as opposed to the representational concept inherent in *dāmūt*. The identity of the picture (humankind) and the one depicted (God) is stressed in this way (1983; cf. Janowski 2008: 149-53). Bray sums it up succinctly (1991: 196), “The former refers primarily to a concrete image, a definite shape; the latter is more abstract—a resemblance, or a likeness.” Janowski (2008: 153; referring to Gross 1981: 260) claims that humankind is not God’s image by virtue of an unknown quality through which he is supposed to rule over the animals but he is God’s image in that he is empowered to rule the animal world. Thus, a double responsibility of humankind is formulated: one toward the Creator and one toward creation. Smith concurs with this:

The statue, this image and likeness, in this case represents the image of the vassal of an overlord. We may read the terms in Genesis 1:26-28 in a similar manner. As the image and likeness of the god, the human person is to be the devoted worshipper of the god who also serves God the sovereign as servant and agent on earth. (2010: 170)

Thus, the application of *šelem* to humankind in Genesis 1 is “an example of both positive and negative influence”. The application is positive in that the *mīs pī* ritual seems to have influenced the image concept in Genesis 1. It is negative in that Genesis 1 reacted to the original concept with a democratization of the royal ideology (McDowell 2015: 181).

For today’s reader “subduing” and “ruling” may be reprehensible; in a culture where both rule and the image of god concept were predicated only on kings, it is rather democratic. Pictures depicting the Mesopotamian king as killing bulls and lions portray him as master of the animals and thus protector of the land from any threat posed by wild animals. “When kings killed wild beasts, symbolically they were acting in place of the divine sovereign, divinely appointed shepherds ridding the earth of threats to the divinely willed peace.” Indeed, Schüle claims that humankind’s rule is meant to forestall violence and destruction (2017: 34-36). Humankind is given the responsibility to rule, i.e. bring order in creation (Walton 2013: 21). This aspect too is democratized in Genesis (Batto 2004: 180-82). “The human race rules (*rādā*, 1:26) the life of each of the three domains, as the sun and moon govern (*māšal*) day and night. And only the human race, by virtue of its climactic sixth-day position and its freedom to respond to the divine word, directly encounters God” (Clifford 1994: 144). The concept thus connotes the representation of the divine by

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<sup>41</sup> The difference between the democratization and universalization of the concept may seem trivial though.

humankind in the created world (see Miller 2019: 35).<sup>42</sup> This is specified to mean rule over the animal world (1:26, 28), further qualified by Goldingay (2003: 113) who takes *kābaš*, the “rarer and more forceful verb,” to refer to the earth’s subjugation only and not to that of the animal world. “More explicitly,” he goes on, “it implies that the way humanity is to go about subjugating the world is by procreation, not by violence—which Genesis abhors (Gen 6:11, 13).” Being created in God’s image and given the mandate to rule demarcate humankind’s place in creation.<sup>43</sup> Along with other aspects, this will be affected by humankind’s disobedience and God’s curse in ch. 3.<sup>44</sup>

The ordered creation also provides for humankind’s physical needs: they can eat every plant and fruit (1:29-30). In contrast to Mesopotamia’s standard view where humankind was created to provide for gods, God in Genesis provides for his creatures (Walton 2013: 21).

As on the previous five days of creation, God’s word proves powerful (1:30; cf. 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24), “And it was so.” The verbs associated with God “connote a being who operates by immediate command and with complete foreknowledge” (Gros Louis 1974: 45). As on previous occasions, God views the work done with gratification, summing up the quality of the created world, in sharp contrast with the quality of creation in Mesopotamian accounts: It is good, indeed, very good (1:31; cf. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; seven times in total). Marduk’s act of creating the first man in BCS comes close to a showing off and an afterthought; it is meant to release the gods from labor. In this way, the social hierarchy of Babylon was “vigorously legitimated. If the purpose of the mass of humanity is to serve the gods, and the king represents those gods as their son and image, then, the gods are served precisely by serving the king, who wills the present social order” (Middleton 1994: 21). The concluding, climactic work of humankind’s creation in Genesis serves humanity en bloc, who takes the place of kings.

In BCS, the purpose of creation is unmistakably the divine world, more particularly Marduk’s kingship and worship as the organizing principle of the world. That is why both the senior and junior gods give their consent to build a shrine and joyfully accept Babylon as their cult center. Marduk’s kingship is the rationale of Babylon’s supremacy. It is noteworthy that any overt reference to a king or shrine in Genesis’ creation account is missing. Genesis 1–2 do not know of kingship based on creation, nor of primeval shrines. As a matter of fact, PH does not mention either. This is the first but not the last instance in Genesis where the lack of such references has the effect of a deafening silence. Here, it is not a temple that is declared holy but a day.

There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness. [...] This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring<sup>45</sup>—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is *holiness in time*, the Sabbath, which comes first. (Heschel 1951: 9; italics his)<sup>46</sup>

That God brings about creation without a temple needs qualification, though. Even if there is no reference to a sanctuary in the creation account Levenson (1988: 82-90) has shown the similarity between the accounts on tabernacle building (Exodus 25–31) and creation in Genesis 1.<sup>47</sup> Correspondence in structuring features, motifs, and terminology of the two accounts “underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment,

<sup>42</sup> Though, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the image concept and the representative function are related to each other with reference to the king (Schüle 2006: 107), Smith notes that in P’s agenda the verb *kābaš* “denotes God’s gift to humanity” (2010: 173-74).

<sup>43</sup> I cannot see why P would not have cared to confront the pagan view as Firmage claims (1999: 100) positing a solely ritual concern to P.

<sup>44</sup> So much so that in 8:15-19 God refrains from commanding this (cf. Gros Louis 1982: 47).

<sup>45</sup> Or, in Babylonia, a holy city.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Heschel’s apt remark (79), “‘The day of the Lord’ is more important to the prophets than ‘the house of the Lord.’”

<sup>47</sup> Schüle (2006: 81-83; cf. Smith 2010: 133-35, 182-84) has also drawn attention to the correspondence between the creation in Gen 1 and the furnishing of the tent in Exodus and concluded that just as creation is completed as a perfect handiwork of God so is the tent by Moses. Still, and as opposed to Mesopotamian texts, the tabernacle is “no integral part of the cosmos” (83).

and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive” (86).<sup>48</sup> The potential effect is that “the Temple within the world is absurd because the world is itself a temple” (89; cf. Goldingay 2003: 124).

Having brought order into and thus completed creation, God lays back (2:2) – a sign of divine sovereignty (Batto 1987: 159): there is no-one posing threat to the created order or the Creator. Rest also connotes disengagement from order bringing activities (order has been created) and engagement of maintaining order (Walton 2013: 23). Mesopotamian gods first needed their temples built so that they could rest. In contrast and as a sign of work well done, God works for six days and rests on the seventh (2:2-3) – without a temple. “While in Genesis God could rest because creation was set in right order, the gods could not rest in Atrahasis, because there were serious mistakes in the creation” (Kvanvig 2011: 259).

The Akkadian word for the 15<sup>th</sup> day, *šabattu*, is cognate with Hebrew *šabbāt* (Dalley 2000: 275, n. 28). The Hebrew narrator is utilizing an Akkadian concept while investing it with new content. Israel commemorated God’s order bringing creation weekly not annually as in Mesopotamia (Walton 2013: 23). Work is seen as something good and rest as necessary after a week’s well-done job. This motif only reinforces the picture we have had so far of a majestic, omnipotent Sovereign with no rival or opponent – a startling difference from the violent theomachy of BCS.

Mark Smith (2010: 180) compares divine rest in Genesis and in Mesopotamian accounts.

In *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*, the creation of humanity allows the gods to rest from their work. These Mesopotamian texts understand that divine rest comes at the expense of human rest. Yet unlike the Mesopotamian perspective, for Genesis 1 rest is designed not only for the deity, but also for humanity as an imitation of the deity. The human person is made for work, but not on the seventh day. On that day, humanity is to participate in the divine rest.

After an effortless creation, God rests in his sovereign fashion (see Millard 1967: 15). Genesis 1 breathes with order and structure, with the sense of a perfect and wonderful world. Jews living in Babylonian exile after the destruction of their national shrine and the loss of their kingdom were definitely given hope by this account. They are ruled by a benevolent, sovereign god and not by whimsical forces, fate, planets, fighting deities, nor by the conquerors’ god, Marduk.

The divine sovereign has delegated his authority to humankind. This is both privilege and duty, it would appear. Every human is anointed to continue the agenda of the divine sovereign by working to eliminate from this world every form of oppression and injustice (chaos) so that peace and universal weal (cosmos) may prevail throughout this universe that God created “perfect” (טוב מאד). (Batto 2004: 185)

God commissions humankind to act as his representative on earth, to rule and manage the affairs of the world. Animals can be ruled by one who is superior to them. To what extent humankind is superior to the animal world will be touched upon in what follows.

### 2.1.2 Anthropogony, 2:4-25

After this bird’s eye view of creation, the narrator takes a closer look at how humankind was made in order to clarify some aspects.<sup>49</sup> From cosmogony, he turns to anthropogony.

In the creation story Marduk, Creator of the World (Foster 2005: 488-89) does the creating.

No holy house, no house for the gods had been built in a pure place,

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Brown’s discussion of the structure of the seven days as a cosmic temple and of God depicted as a royal priest (2010: 37-41, 46-47).

<sup>49</sup> Kikawada (1983) has compared humankind’s creation in the Sumerian Enki and Ninmah myth, the Akkadian Atrahasis, and Genesis, stories similarly structured. He found that all three first told creation in more general and then in more specific terms, i.e. a general account of humankind’s creation followed by a second creation account in some detail. Regarding this, Kvanvig (2002: 99; cf. 2011: 237) claims, “They are not to be read as two actions in succession, but rather like a bicolon in poetry where the second member elaborates the first.” McDowell too argues for a close relationship between the two creation stories (2015: 178-202; cf. also Brodie 2001: 125-28).



No reed had come forth, no tree had been created,  
 No brick had been laid, no brickmold had been created,  
 No house had been built, no settlement had been founded,  
 Nippur had not been built, Ekur had not been created,  
 Uruk had not been built, Eanna had not been created,  
 The depths had not been built, Eridu had not been created,  
 No holy house, no house, no house of the gods, no dwelling for them had been created,  
 All the world was sea, the spring in the midst of the sea was only a channel.  
 Then was Eridu built, Esagila created,  
 Esagila, which Lugalduku established in the depths!  
 Then was Babylon built, Esagila completed,  
 The Anunna-gods — Marduk made them all as one —  
 Named it sublimely “Holy City, Pleasurable Dwelling.”  
 Marduk tied together a raft on the face of the waters,  
 He created dirt and heaped it on the raft.  
 In order to settle the gods in a comfortable dwelling,  
 He created humankind,  
 Aruru created the seed of humankind with him.  
 He created the wild animals, the living creatures of the open country.  
 He created and put in place the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,  
 He pronounced their names with favor.  
 He created the dry rush, the pulpy reed, the marsh, the reed thicket,  
 the stand of reeds, the vegetation of the open country  
 — The world was marsh and canebrake! —  
 The cow and her calf, the bull,  
 the ewe and her lamb, the sheep of the fold,  
 The orchards and forests,  
 The wild ram, the mountain sheep,  
 stood each in its appointed place therein.  
 The lord Marduk heaped up fill at the edge of the sea,  
 He made a dry place (in the) marsh.  
 He provided it with [            ],  
 [He m]ade [            ], he made trees,  
 He created [            ] in that place.  
 [He laid bricks], he created the brickmold.  
 [He built houses], he created cities,  
 [He built cities], he founded settlements,  
 [He built Nippur], he created Ekur.  
 [He built Uruk], he created Eanna. (lines 1-40)

The myth enumerates entities without which creation does not work. This cosmogony does “not express nonexistence abstractly as nothingness, but as a period when essential institutions did not yet exist” (Clifford 1994: 64). The ones most stressed are temples, ziggurats, and cities, unknown in the biblical account. To be sure, there are parallels as well. The way humankind is created in Genesis 2 resembles the way Marduk creates as in both cases soil is used. Genesis tells a detailed story of humankind’s creation – in the above hymn, it is but an aside which is standard in Mesopotamian literature. The reason is clear enough:

In order to settle the gods in a comfortable dwelling,  
 He created humankind...

Genesis 1:26-28 is fraught with the concept of the divine image. The second creation account begins as a genealogy, a *tōlādōt*,<sup>50</sup> followed by a summary statement of creation (2:4), and is set in a garden, itself described at quite some length (2:8-14), with humankind’s formation narrated prior to it (2:7). The setting is prepared by reference to the primitive state of the earth at the dawn of

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<sup>50</sup> For the first creation account concluding at 2:3, see Levenson 1988: 66-68. For 2:4 being both a summary of the preceding and an introduction to what follows, see McDowell 2015: 26-28.



creation. This is reminiscent of Atrahasis where humankind's origin in the soil and their being created to provide for the gods are emphatic.<sup>51</sup> Additional similarities have been observed in chs. 2–3 by Batto (1992: 51-52, cf. Millard 1967: 9-10): the similar setting of wasteland/steppe implying a Mesopotamian background; proto-humans/primeval human created to provide for the gods/God; they are modeled from clay; are implicitly immortal; revolt against the divine sovereign/aspire to divine status.

The “stream” in 2:6 may correspond to the stream in relation to Abzu, the subterranean waters in Akkadian texts bringing fertility (Walton 2013: 25). The problem here is not lack of water but rather lack of adequate water (Tsumura 1989: 119). In 2:5-9, God “gives rain,” “forms,” “breathes,” “plants;” in 2:15, he “takes” and “puts” humankind into Eden; in 2:19, he “forms,” “takes,” and “leads” animals; in 2:21-22, he “takes,” “closes,” “builds,” and “brings.” As opposed to Atrahasis' gods, Yahweh appears as a (pro)active deity, keen to work. Indeed, he provides for humankind a garden well-watered by a river (no need to dig canals) as well as fruit trees.<sup>52</sup> The verbs in ch. 2, as opposed to those of ch. 1, connote a “God who is working with his hands and with his breath to create man and other living creatures” (Gros Louis 1974: 47). We see here a more immanent and error-prone God, not unlike Enlil and Ea (cf. Carr 1996: 64).<sup>53</sup> God is more involved, both physically and mentally, in the second account. God's presence is highlighted by the term “Yahweh God,” occurring 20 times in chs. 2–3 and thus granting God a nearly overbearing presence.

The reader has the impression in 2:8-9 that God plants the garden for humankind. Fauth (1979; cf. Stordalen 2000: 94-98) has amassed massive evidence of ANE kings planting gardens with beautiful and exotic plants and animals for their own pleasure. Here, it is God who plants for humankind. Indeed, Walton sees creation as God's palace, “a sacred spot featuring a spring with an adjoining well-watered park, stocked with specimens of trees and animals” (2013: 28).

Transferring humankind from the “scanty land” to the garden of Eden, probably meaning “abundance” (see Tsumura 1989: 123-37; 2005: 112-25; Walton 2013: 27), and having them cultivate it is a horticultural rather than an agricultural task (Stordalen 1992: 16). Humankind is made to till and guard the garden, not the land (21).

2:10-14 describes the four primeval rivers at some length. Stordalen has studied Eden against the background of ANE topographical concepts (2000: 270-86) with the following agenda (271):

The present study is conducted under the impression that historical etymologies and foreign homonyms are only remotely relevant when it comes to perceiving the sense of the passage to the implied reader. The object is to identify topographic convention rather than historical geography, to study the world as it was conceived to be, not as it was. Of course, there would expectedly be some correspondence between the two. Still, the primary task is lexicographic rather than geographic.

Ancient people were more concerned with theology and politics than with geography or topography when describing spatial quantities or conceptualizing a geographic area. Referring to a 6<sup>th</sup> century copy of an original world map (BM 92687), with Babylon in the center and the uncharted regions on the edges, Stordalen states that it “presents a mixture of topography and cosmology,” which he labels “cosmography” (272). He reads Gen 2:10-14 in these terms.

The chapter decreases in describing details which

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<sup>51</sup> Miscal (1990: 4) has noticed that “negativity infects the narrative,” as opposed to the first account, in the form of negative particles and references to something not good, evil, death, lack, and dissymmetry (4-5). This is also reminiscent of Atrahasis' less than perfect world.

<sup>52</sup> Batto (1992: 50-51) reads Gen 2 against the backdrop of Atrahasis and sees humankind as created to relieve God from labor. This may be correct as far as J is concerned but Batto fails to sufficiently deal with the import of the final text (cf. Levenson 1988: 117). The basic difference between Genesis and Atrahasis is that the former stresses that humankind serves the Creator “in a priestly role in a sacred space” (Walton 2013: 27).

<sup>53</sup> I can well imagine P/the redactor drawing on older traditions as well as resorting to his own theological concepts, as having both a high view of God and creation (ch. 1) and approaching creation and the Creator more critically. After all, good theologians seek to balance transcendence and immanence and P was a good theologian.

is marked by a specific reduction in the number of words employed. The Pishon takes 20 words for its description; the Gihon, 10; the Tigris, 8; and the Euphrates, 4. One river becomes four and twenty words become four. The number of words are halved in two sets; the sets correspond to the unknown and the known.<sup>54</sup> (Miscall 2000: 7-8; cf. Stordalen 2000: 273)

Since, in ANE, “the number four is symbolic, indicating spatial and geographical completeness” the four rivers imply the four corners of the world, hence the whole (Stordalen 2000: 275).<sup>55</sup> The first river, Pishon,<sup>56</sup> unknown to us from elsewhere in the OT, encircles Havilah on the furthest south-east, famous for its gold, resin, and onyx. The second, Gihon, another mysterious river, encircles Cush, “a region on the borders of the world” on the south-west (Stordalen 2000: 280).<sup>57</sup> The third, the Tigris, is the river of Ashur in the north-east, while the fourth is the Euphrates in the north-west. As the most essential for Mesopotamian life, the Tigris and Euphrates are mentioned by name, but only as third and fourth among the rivers. Even Ashur deserves being mentioned but not Babylon in relation to its river. It is not just the two Mesopotamian rivers that matter. Rather, it is four rivers that are the cradles of human civilization.<sup>58</sup> “The picture here is of a mighty spring that gushes out from Eden and is channeled through the garden for irrigation purposes. All of these channels then serve as headwaters, for the four rivers flow out in various directions as the waters exit the garden” (Walton 2013: 29).

To Stordalen, the ancient topographic design is of paramount concern. He concludes (2000: 284) that “being forced by topographical realities to include both Mesopotamian rivers in Gen 2:10-14, the overall scheme threatens to collapse.” In my view, the main intent of this topography is to caricature Babylonian world view and ideology by emphasizing the border areas and deemphasizing the center. Second, there is no geographical place on this globe corresponding to this description – Eden is a non-place (Amit 2001: 43-44; cf. Carmichael 1992: 48; Stordalen 2008; contra Hoffmeier 2015: 32-35), or, in Brown’s terms, it is “half real and half imaginative” (2010: 82). As opposed to the local interest of BCS, Genesis does not serve the national agenda, it is universal in outlook right from the beginning (see Schüle 2006: 65; cf. McConville 2006: 34-36). And third, their origin and water, essential for Mesopotamian society and culture, are not related to any divine being like Ea. The river only provides the garden with the water needed. Genesis’ universalism is making a brief appearance.

We have seen how the similarities in the first creation account and the building of the Tabernacle at the end of Exodus yield a “homology” of temple and created world. Even though no reference to altar, sanctuary, and the like can be found in the Eden story, sanctuary symbolism is very much present. Indeed, Gordon Wenham (1994) has drawn attention to the highly symbolic nature of the narrative by noticing parallel features with the Tabernacle account. 1) God’s “walking,” *hithallēk*, in the garden (3:8) is reminiscent to his presence in the tabernacle in Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6-7. 2) The cherubim were stationed east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life (3:24). Both the tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple were entered from the east, and the Holy of Holies of the Temple was guarded by cherubim (1 Kgs 6:23-28) as the ark was (Exod 25:18-22; cf. Exod 26:31 and 1 Kgs 6:29). 3) As the tree of life gives eternal life, so does the sanctuary through sacrifices; the tabernacle menorah itself can be seen as a stylized tree of life (see Meyers 1976). 4) Adam’s job was to cultivate and keep, *lā’obdāh ûlāšomrāh*, the garden (2:15). The only other occurrence of these verbs in the Pentateuch is Num 3:7-8; 8:26 and 18:5-6, of the Levites guarding

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<sup>54</sup> In this way, “The passage moves from the unknown to the known or, in other terms, from the mythic to the real. The passage announces its literary status” (8).

<sup>55</sup> The rivers do not originate in the primeval river of Eden (2:10), issuing from the divine realm, which, in Stordalen’s view, flows, at the rim of the world, into the world ocean from which the four rivers, from the four terrestrial corners, send Eden water to the regions of Genesis’ world (284-86).

<sup>56</sup> The uncorroborated suggestion of Ottosson’s (1988: 179) that Pishon is identical with the Nile is to be rejected for the latter had a well-established Hebrew name.

<sup>57</sup> By “Gihon,” the brook at the temple mountain may be alluded to (Witte 1998: 266; Stordalen 2000: 286; cf. also Smith 2019: 131, n. 114) and the garden of Eden as a symbolic temple is presented.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed discussion of the rivers’ location as pointers to the four corners of the world, adopted here, as well as the interpretive problems involved, see Stordalen 2000: 273-86.

and ministering at the tabernacle. Adam is then viewed as an archetypal Levite. 5) This priestly role of Adam may be underlined by the note in 3:21,

The LORD God made garments, *kotnôt*, of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them, *wayyalbišēm*.

This vocabulary is applied when Moses dresses the priests (Exod 28:41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev 8:13). 6) The geographical description in 2:10-14 makes several links with the sanctuary. There is the river flowing out of Eden. Water is a powerful symbol of life in the OT (see Ps 46:5; Eze 47). Gold and the precious stones bdellium and onyx (NASB) suggest associations with the tabernacle and Temple (see Exod 16:4, 33; 25:7; 28:9-14, 20; Num 11:7; 1 Chr 29:2). 7) The tree of the knowledge of good and evil “was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (3:6) which may be echoed in Ps 19:8-9 where the law, kept in the Holy of Holies, is described in similar terms. Also, touching or even seeing the ark uncovered brought death (2 Sam 6:7; Num 4:20) as eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge did. The garden, so Wenham (1994), should be viewed as an archetypal sanctuary.

The context supports this interpretation, Wenham goes on. Genesis 1 relates the creation of the world in six days. The parallels in phraseology between the conclusions of the creation account and the tabernacle building account (Exodus 25–40) have been noticed (Kearney 1977; Weinfeld 1981). The six commands in the instructions to build the tabernacle correspond to the six days of creation as does God’s dwelling in the tabernacle to his rest on the sabbath.

In Mesopotamian creation stories, humans are normally placed in cities to build shrines and provide for gods (McDowell 2015: 151). Thus, it is curious to see the human being “put” in a garden. Indeed, it may be more appropriate to translate the verb *wayyanniḥēhû* (2:15) with “install:” “Yahweh installed him there in the office of royal caretaker and watchman, similar to the way a divine statue would have been installed in its own temple, as in the *mīs pī pīt pī*” (158).<sup>59</sup> Whereas Mesopotamian gods had images in their respective sanctuaries to represent them, in Genesis 1–2, God installs his image in his garden-temple so that creation may worship him through the image. Humankind ought to represent the Creator by subduing (1:27), and taking care of, the earth (2:15).

God puts Adam to the test and gives him the task of naming animals. As in Mesopotamian myths, in ch. 1, it was God who named his handiworks (1:5, 8, 10). Now, however, it is up to his image to perform a similar job. God brings the animals to him to see what he would name them; and whatever the human being called each living creature, that was its name (2:19-20). “A name may identify the essential nature of the creature, so that giving a name may be an act of assigning the function that creature will have” (Walton 2013: 31). “He has learned to exercise his capacity for authoritative, divinely sourced, generative speech” (Chapman 2019: 248). Moreover, names establish relationships (O’Connor 2018: 53).

Thus, part of creation was nameless until humankind came along to fill this hiatus. God entrusts the garden of Eden to humankind, planted for them to keep and work (2:15). This task of humankind is part of the mandate to subdue the earth. “By tilling the earth, humans subject it to their will, making it produce what humans subject it to their will, making it produce what humans desire rather than what it would produce if left to its own devices. They relate to the earth as a suzerain would to a vassal” (Turner 1990: 34).<sup>60</sup> “Just as God names his creation as he made it, so the man, in the likeness of God, names God’s creatures” (Moye 1990: 585). The created world receives a more and more ordered form. By naming the animals, the human being proves his superior mental qualities, her ability to rule and, by Mesopotamian standards, his “divine” capacities. From now on, naming will predominantly be a human job in Genesis (cf. Blenkinsopp 1992: 62).

God realizes that no animal has proven a suitable companion for Adam (see 2:19). After the declaration of ch. 1 that the created world is good, being alone for Adam is “not good” which comes as a surprise (Galambush 2018: 27). When God fashions the woman, Adam appears little more than

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<sup>59</sup> I have found McDowell’s argument about humankind being clothed with divine glory (2015: 158-68) unconvincing.

<sup>60</sup> Note, however, the difference in vocabulary between 1:28 and 2:7, noticed and discussed by Turner (35).

an animal.<sup>61</sup> Being formed from the same material, having the same breath of life as the animals (2:7, 19) and unclothed, the human being is closer to the animal world (see Batto 1992: 54-56; Mobley 1997: 220-23, 227; cf. Joines 1975: 7; Good 2011: 26). So, God gets to work by undertaking major surgery on him by refashioning a *šela'*, usually translated “rib.” This sense seems beyond doubt for Blenkinsopp as “no one has suggested a better alternative” (2011: 70). Batto may, however, have done right that.

The image here is that of reworking “one of his sides,” that is, of reshaping the whole into two complementary halves. With this redefinition of humankind, creation has been advanced tremendously, according to the Yahwist. The tiller of the garden now has a “helpmate [‘ezer] corresponding to himself.” The complementarity of the sexes is immediately confirmed in the institution of marriage, which is presented as the natural conclusion of the creation of man and woman. With these advances the distinction between humans and animals is clear; humankind is a species unto itself and subject to an entirely different order. (Batto 1992: 54)

This aspect is buttressed by a further motif. In 2:7, God formed Adam from the ground, in 2:9, he “made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground,” and, again, in 2:19, he formed the animals from the ground, *min-hā’ādāmā* (all 3 times). When God decides to create a companion to Adam, one expects her to be formed from the ground. Instead, the woman is formed from *hā’ādām* (2:22) thus making the point of the interdependence of man and woman yet more poignant (cf. Hauser 1994: 386). Their interrelatedness is also underlined by the *’iš-’iššā* wordplay.<sup>62</sup>

It is important, however, that whereas, in ch. 1, the issue is the two genders constituting humankind, in ch. 2, it is their interrelatedness (*Gegenüber*) (Schüle 2006: 169-70),<sup>63</sup> something, as a mythopoeic theme, unheard of in Mesopotamian literature. Their interrelatedness in marriage (2:24) is set on a new foundation that defies social conventions (172) in both Mesopotamia and Israel. What Adam needs is a companion and not a helper (168-69), with whom he “can share because there is a unique level of correspondence” (Schüle 2005: 15).<sup>64</sup> The woman’s creation is narrated from as much a relational as a functional perspective.

The resumption of the image of God motif by the allusion to the *mīs pī* ritual in its own way stresses humankind’s divine consecration, i.e. their mandate to rule (see 1:26-28) over creation and all creatures. The events in Genesis 2–3 resemble the procedure of the ritual (Schüle 2005: 13) summarized above. 1) God forms Adam, breathes the breath of life into his nostrils, so he becomes a “living being.”<sup>65</sup> 2) A river flows from Eden to water it. 3) God takes and puts Adam in this

<sup>61</sup> It is noteworthy that, in 2:22, the verb applied to creating the woman is *bānā*, cognate with the Akkadian *terminus technicus* *banū*, used to denote creation. This usage may witness to either dependence on or imitation of Akkadian parallels. McDowell (2015: 81-82) cites an Akkadian *mīs pī* incantation as representative of the genre, in which the divine image is “created”, *banū*. Schüle views Eve’s creation as a sign of God’s readiness to make artifacts (“*Kunstfertigkeit*”; 2006: 169). This can be a nice sign of how the ritual is seen and modified in the Genesis narrative.

<sup>62</sup> Although the link may seem weak, note that in BCS (Tablet IV), it was Marduk who, after defeating Tiamat, opens up gates in the female monster’s ribs. In Gen 2, it is Yahweh who uses the rib or side of Adam in order to separate male and female. LaCocque (2006: 117-20; see also Batto 2000: 628; Cotter 2003: 9-30; O’Connor 2018: 55-56; Galambush 2018: 29; for a different view see Chapman 2019) has convincingly argued for Adam being created androgynous. Borgman (2001: 26), citing the Midrash, also sees *hā’ādām* as a sexually undivided creature before 2:23. Whitt (2019: 125) sees the union of man and woman in 2:24 as a recreation of their original state.

<sup>63</sup> Miscall (1990: 3) notes that whereas, in ch. 1, “Humanity is divided into the biological ‘male and female,’” here, it is the human and social aspects that are emphatic.

<sup>64</sup> Whether the creation of man and woman in ch. 2 is to be understood as an elaboration on the first account or a critique of the image concept (Schüle 2005: 14) because ch. 1 “does not account for what human beings aspire to: the unique relationship to a woman/to a man and the knowledge of good and evil as the most fundamental distinction, underlying all human judgment and human action,” the difference to me seems trivial. I consider ch. 2 an elaboration of ch. 1, so seeing chs. 1–3 cohere canonically and thematically to a higher degree. Schüle (2005: 15) overstates his case, fundamental to his thesis, by adding that God is not “the kind of companion for whom Adam is really longing, and we might take that as the first indication that Gen 2 is somewhat suspicious that the idea of man as the image of God could possibly cover this special human need.” 1:27 hints at the second account and agrees with it that humankind’s being created in the image of God is closely related to humankind’s being created as male and female as well as the need of a companion. The author did not elaborate on this in ch. 1 but did so in ch. 2.

<sup>65</sup> McDowell (2015: 150) remarks of Adam, “The notion that his ears, mouth, and eyes were opened is not stated but it



garden of plants and animals. Animals are named by Adam. The woman is made out of a rib of Adam. God comes into the garden in the coolness of the day. 4) Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge and are expelled from Eden. They cultivate the *'ādāmā* and Eve becomes the mother of all living.

The general similitude between the ritual and the second creation narrative cannot be denied. Indeed, there are more points of correspondence. To begin with, the Genesis section is introduced by the first *toledot* formula in Genesis (2:4). The noun *tōlādōt* is a derivative of the verb *yālad*, “to bear,” a cognate with Akkadian *walādu*, the term used to denote the creation of the deity in the ritual’s texts. The Genesis author could not imagine God as giving birth to Adam. In the heading, however, he alluded to the birthing terminology of the ritual. The verb’s application in the ritual’s texts and 2:4’s allusion to this may also explain why the formula is not placed before the first creation account.<sup>66</sup>

Schüle notes (2006: 163) that God “takes” humankind and “lets him rest.” In this picture, he sees the image transported through the wasteland to the garden by human hands and coming finally to rest. There are two points, noticed by Schüle (2006: 165), where the Genesis account departs from its model and these deviations are of crucial significance. First, at the point where God’s image in Eden is completed, humankind needs a companion so that he is not alone (2:18) because God’s company is insufficient. In my view, that is an ingenious way that the narrator chose to comment or elaborate on 1:27 where both “image” and the qualification “male and female” occur. As we have seen, through the intertextual reference to the ritual, “image” is the “implicit tenor” of ch. 2, while gender separation is the explicit essence of humankind’s creation. It is being male and female that makes up humankind being created in God’s image (see Tribble 1978: 15-21).

The second modification concerns the end of the story: at the point where the image is carried from the garden to its final destination in the shrine, humankind leaves the garden to return to the soil he was taken from. This again is a genuine contribution to the divine image concept as well as a motif pointing forward. Even though he was created in God’s image, humankind cannot enter the sanctuary. Indeed, humankind is exiled. God will, however, make amends by initiating covenant, first with Noah, then with Abraham and then with Israel. A major aspect of this covenant will be the sanctuary designed by God. Israel will worship God and her representative will enter this shrine.<sup>67</sup>

Obviously, the goal of the ritual is the consecration of the divine image so that it can represent the deity. After the night spent with the gods in the garden, the image “belongs entirely to the divine sphere. It has become the bodily appearance of a God [sic], the very medium through which he enters the world of created life and, correspondingly, through which he can be addressed by prayer, worship and sacrifice” (Schüle 2005: 12). Something similar and something totally different can be claimed of the divine image presented in humankind in ch. 2. Humankind is created in order to represent God in a bodily appearance and therefore belongs entirely to the sphere of creation, this world. There is no consecration. However, that does not make humankind less precious. Indeed, in the subsequent narrative, human life will be seen as the highest asset (4:10-11; 9:6). And it is humankind bearing God’s image who can address the Creator in prayer, worship, and sacrifice.

The two-day pattern of the ritual has virtually no parallel in Genesis 2, as, in ch. 1, the creation of humankind is executed on day six. Still, with the “anesthesia” motif and by not making it two days (2:21), the narrator provided a parallel and, at the same time, made the two creation accounts concur with each other as to how long the creation of humankind took (see 1:27; 5:1-2).<sup>68</sup> And finally,

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is implied by the fact that God spoke to him about what he could and could not eat, that he named all the animals paraded before him, and by his exclamation of delight at the creation of Eve.”

<sup>66</sup> The *toledot* formula often elaborates on an aspect of some motif already mentioned (Baumgart 1999: 41-46).

<sup>67</sup> There may be yet another modification in Genesis of the ritual. As clear from extant texts, the *mīs pī* was to be done “on a favorable day” (see Walker and Dick 1999: 72-73, 84-85). As opposed to this, the “partition” of the human being ends successfully after a trial and error procedure. The man’s acclamation, however, makes it a favorable day.

<sup>68</sup> The author of ch. 2 could have easily made his account resemble the ritual to a higher extent by dividing the one day in ch. 2 into two with God performing the “operation” on Adam at night. By sticking to the one-day pattern, he made the two accounts on the creation of humankind correspond to a higher degree.



unlike idols, human beings cannot be adorned with precious stones and gold leaves. That is why these commodities are transferred to Havilah, the land of the river Pishon with its fountain in Eden. After these parallels, let us now turn to the theological import of the second creation account in relation to the ritual and the first creation account.

The texts reflect the major ideological problem of these procedures as their being carried out by human hands, although only the God or the Goddess [sic] whose image it was about to become was seen to be the real craftsman. No human being, but only the deity was able to lay his/her features into the statue so that it was really his/her image. (Schüle 2005: 12)

By this observation, Schüle has put his finger on one of the crucial issues. For the *mīs pī* ritual, it is a dilemma how a deity can be fashioned by human hands. To solve the problem, at one point during the ritual, the hands of the craftsmen were cut off in a symbolic way and they were to take an oath of having never even touched the statue (12). Genesis 2's solution of the problem is more radical and, concerning the ritual, this appears to be the most important aspect that has escaped the attention of interpreters. By a profound recasting, the narrator turns the ritual and the roles in it upside down – now, it is not humans shaping the divine image but the divine craftsman forming, *yāšar*, the human being in his image.<sup>69</sup> God is involved in a rather dirty process of creating in ch. 2: he plants a garden, shapes various animals as well as humankind, then, performs surgery on him. This is a very material God in a very material world (contra Dauphinais and Levering 2005: 32).

In 1:26-27, the reference point of God's image was the king in Mesopotamia, as the representative of the deity. In ch. 2, it is the image of the deity that is to be consecrated and used to represent the god. Priestly connotations are here present (cf. Chapman 2019: 246-47). The underlying question that moves the narrative forward is: To what extent is humankind the image of God?

In David Carr's view (1996: 74-75, 317), the P creation account was placed before the non-P account in order to replace it. Mark Smith (2010: 215) sees it slightly differently. "To my mind, the effect was not so much to replace but rather more to redirect and refocus the audience's attention by giving the initial account pride of place."<sup>70</sup> This approach seems to better account for both the similarities and dissimilarities of the two chapters.

In conclusion, one could say that the first account seeks to found a sort of theocracy of the God of Israel over the entire world, while the second account wants to show how much the creator God was attentive, from the beginning, to the conditions of life for the humanity which populates the promised land. (Ska 2008: 21)

Bernard Batto has made a good case for the J account's dependence on Atrahasis (1992: 41-72).<sup>71</sup> As the story stands now, however, it clearly demonstrates signs of reworking. By combining references to Atrahasis and the *mīs pī* ritual, the narrator has achieved something remarkable. By allusion to the detailed procedure of the ritual and Atrahasis' motifs, as well as borrowing and putting motifs of the ritual and the epic into the context of the second creation narrative, he provided a framework of reference. By so doing and placing his account after that of P, the editor, has qualified and clarified P's image of God concept, at the same time, however, insisting that it "is the one God Yahweh, also called Elohim, who authors this world-order that is marked out from the type of world-order imagined in the religious environment" (McConville 2006: 24).

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<sup>69</sup> Only P calls humankind the image of God, as Schüle correctly claims (2006: 86; but cf. McDowell 2015). This does not entail as he thinks, however, an antagonistic stance toward the concept of humankind's creation in ch. 2. As he himself makes it clear (2005) the second creation account is based on the creation of the *god's image*.

<sup>70</sup> I think Smith hits the nail on the head here. His argument, however, of the Priestly tradition defeating the other creation traditions, including that of ch. 2 (226-27), seems to run counter to his view quoted above. Ska (2008) also sees in the two accounts more incompatible views and political-theological interests behind them. Note also that in his *opus magnum*, Carr, by using milder language and referring to P as reworking "earlier alternate traditions to offer a different account of events" (2011: 295), seems to have modified his former stance.

<sup>71</sup> See also his comparative study of 2:18-24 where he convincingly argues for its dependence on Atrahasis. I can well imagine that the original J account was based on Atrahasis and as such was more reminiscent of it, as "reconstructed" by Batto (1992: 41-72). (P certainly could have used J's "Yahweh" by modifying it into "Yahweh Elohim," and added some details like the river account and the tree motif.)

Marduk's victory over the anti-creation forces in BCS is made complete when the gods are relieved of the burden of labor and when a capital city for Marduk's dwelling is built with a temple and ziggurat (Tablet VI). Marduk had been declared king and endowed with the power of fixing destinies. Tellingly, none of these is so much as hinted at in Genesis 1–2. There is no kingship,<sup>72</sup> no city, no temple-ziggurat – the triad of Babylonian mythology is absent. Creation in Genesis is fine and complete without them. What remains is a garden. Humankind created in the image of God is the ruler of earth. The garden is the city where the first couple are at home, the temple and the ziggurat where God dwells (see 3:8). It is the garden that bridges heaven and earth, it replaces the achievements that Mesopotamian people were so proud of. There is no talk of fixing fate as this will depend on humankind's decisions (cf. Otto 1996: 190-191). The end result of the creation narrative of Genesis, both by what it narrates and what it keeps quiet about, is the dethronement of Marduk: without capital city, without shrine, without kingship he is unable to rule.

The image of God concept introduced, in ch. 1, by God's decision to create humankind in his image and set against the background of the Mesopotamian king image is both liberating and democratizing as well as a polemic against the status quo – there is no need for kings as humankind is the image of God, and they as a community will perform their mission to rule over creation. Even if the term is not mentioned the concept is very much present in the creation of humankind in ch. 2. By being set in the ritual context of mouth washing with no temple and city, we can hear a definite anti-cult polemic – there is no need of cult statues, as the image of God is humankind themselves consecrated to represent the Creator in this world.<sup>73</sup> Humankind is simultaneously image *and* worshiper of the image maker. Stemming from two different traditions, the creation account is still a literary unity (cf. Stordalen 1992a: 173; Sawyer 1992: 64-66; Otto 1996: 73; Wenham 1999: 253-56).<sup>74</sup> Indeed, it is a theological unity.

In the Babylonian exile, creation was formulated in its unexcelled version, trying to give hope by announcing the end of the old and outlining a new world.

### 2.1.3 In the Garden, 3:1-24

For ANE people, including Israel, one of the vexing existential questions was, “why is man so like the gods in that he has knowledge and yet so unlike the gods in that he is mortal?” (Clark 1969: 266). What is the explanation Genesis provides for this? How does Genesis communicate its world view so that it makes sense to exilic Jews? And how does Babylon fare in Genesis' view? After BCS and Atrahasis, the Genesis narrator here has stories like Adapa and Gilgamesh as well as various mythical characters and motifs in mind. The following interpretation will be an attempt at highlighting the multiple threads of this colorful fabric.

Whereas, in Mesopotamian thought, the created world was not very good, i.e. evil was inherent in creation, in Genesis, God creates a very good world, i.e. evil is subsequent to creation (see Blenkinsopp 1995: 7; LaCocque 2006: 49-50). Eternal life was something desired in Mesopotamia. In the Adapa story, Anu is angry with Adapa who broke the wings of the South Wind. When Adapa is ordered to report to Anu, Ea deceives him by advising him not to accept food or drink from Anu (so, e.g., Joines 1975: 7; Batto 2013: 207-08). Meanwhile, however, Anu changes his mind due to the good impression Adapa made on him, and what he offers is the bread and water of eternal life.

<sup>72</sup> Comparing the two-stage creation of humankind or possibly the creation of two classes of humankind in the late Assyrian epic Creation of the King (see Foster 2005: 496-97) with creation in Genesis, Schüle (2006: 121-24) observes that the stem מלך is not used in Genesis 1 possibly to avoid a two class society consisting of kings and commoners.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Brueggemann 1972 where he, after studying several OT texts, argues that the point of 2:7 is the enthronement of humankind. A royal interpretation of 2:7 may be boosted by the fact that the mouth washing ritual was performed on kings too (see Berlejung 1998: 182).

<sup>74</sup> Otto considers the first account the elaboration of the second (1996: 183-88) while Smith views the first as a commentary on the second (2010: 216-28). Wenham claims of Gen 1–3 (1994: 404): “Whatever the stylistic differences between the sources, our interpretation suggest that ideologically the J and P sources are much closer to each other than is usually held.”

In obedience to Ea's advice, however, Adapa refuses them, so unwittingly robbing himself of eternal life. In this myth, eternal life is represented by food as in Genesis.

The motifs of eternal life, plant, and, importantly, serpent occur in the Gilgamesh epic (Tablet XI). Gilgamesh, intent on acquiring eternal life, travels to Utnapishtim. After failing the first test, he is given a second chance. Gilgamesh gets the plant from the bottom of the sea but, alas, when taking a bath in a pool, a serpent smells the fragrance of the plant and steals it. When Gilgamesh realizes what happened, he breaks down in tears.

The most significant similarities between Mesopotamian myths and Genesis 3 are summed up by Skinner (1930: 92),

In both we have the idea that wisdom and immortality combined constitute equality with the deity; in both we have a man receiving the first and missing the second; and in both the man is counseled in opposite directions by supernatural voices, and acts on that advice which is contrary to his interest.

There are differences too, however, between the Mesopotamian myths and the biblical account. The first is that both Adapa and Gilgamesh sought to acquire something they had not possessed. As opposed to them, Adam and Eve forfeited eternal life they had possessed. Adapa and Gilgamesh are post-diluvian heroes as, in Mesopotamia, humankind seems to have enjoyed eternal life which, however, changed after the flood when humankind was decreed mortal. Again, what the Genesis story does not explicate but implies is that humankind was not created immortal; with an open access to the tree of life (2:9), however, they practically had eternal life (similarly Beattie 1985: 68; Herion 1995: 56; LaCocque 2006: 99-102; cf. Schmid 2008: 64; McKeown 2008: 33; Stordalen 2011: 12).<sup>75</sup> This is buttressed by God's preventive action of expelling the first couple from Eden after their disobedience so that humankind is unable "to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (3:22).

Now, does the serpent, the antagonist of the story, represent a benevolent or an evil force?<sup>76</sup> Serpents in ANE world had an ambiguous role. Now, they were linked to wisdom, fertility and health, now, to chaos, threat and destruction (cf. Walton 2013: 34). Since what the serpent says comes true but the effects of his words are partly negative for humankind in particular and creation in general, the answer to the question is as ambiguous as the serpent itself. I suggest that to evaluate the serpent's role correctly, we need to look for clues in Babylonian mythology. I shall draw particular attention to some specific parallels ignored so far.

In Mesopotamia, snakes not only accompany major "gods, but are also their allies against evil, acting as fearsome champions of law and order. From the late third millennium B.C.E. onwards, inscriptions attest to the presence of snake-dragons guarding the entrance to temples." Three dragons (*ušumgallu*, *mušḫuššu*, *bašmu*) are known as guardians of temples (Takayoshi 2004: 26). Because of its appearance, history, and perceived significance, one of them is of particular importance for the interpretation of Genesis 3.

Babylonia's patron god, Marduk is often depicted or associated with his symbol, a snake-dragon, the "most important dragon in ancient Mesopotamia [...] known from the Old Akkadian period down to the Seleucid period" (Takayoshi 2004: 25), called *mušḫuššu*, "fearsome serpent" (Lambert 1985: 87, n. 1). Nabu, the god of science, who gained prestige in the Neo-Babylonian empire as Marduk's son, was also associated with the *mušḫuššu*. It became associated with the supreme god/s of Babylon after a long and battered history of changing masters from Ninazu to Ningishzida to Tishpak, tutelary god of Eshnunna, who is said to have vanquished it (see Lewis 1996: 29). With Hammurabi's conquest of Eshnunna, the monster became related to Babylon's patron deity and his son Nabu. These two, as opposed to the previous deities, were never associated with other dragons, only with the *mušḫuššu* (Wiggermann 1993-97: 457-59).

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<sup>75</sup> Batto (1992: 57) claims "that humankind's status was not as yet entirely defined, that the human experiment was still in the developmental stage."

<sup>76</sup> Westermann (1976: 323-25) does not deem the serpent, a creature of God, to be in opposition to the Creator.

At earlier times, the *mušhuššu* had a beneficial, apotropaic function in Babylonian religion and was regarded as a champion of law and order. A fearless warrior, it was supposed to watch over the just rule of its masters and attack evildoers. Also, it was among those that repelled evil influence (Wiggermann 1992: 159). From Middle-Babylonian times on, however, it became associated with Tiamat and her monsters (BCS I.121; II.27; III.31, 89), and so had a somewhat qualified positive function. This was mainly due to the fact that in BCS IV.116, after his defeat of Tiamat, Marduk sets up the images of the vanquished monsters in the gate of Apsu with the *mušhuššu* among them (Wiggermann 1992: 169; 1993-97: 455, 458-61).

Thus the new theology preserves the apotropaic quality of images of the m. [*mušhuššu*] (and of the other monsters): whereas earlier they reminded evil of the m.'s active intervention on behalf of law and order, they now discourage it by exemplifying the fate of rebels at the hands of Marduk. (Wiggermann 1993-97: 461)<sup>77</sup>

The *mušhuššu* is generally portrayed with the long neck and head of a snake, with a forked tongue protruding from its mouth and with the front paws of a lion and, as hind paws, the talons of an eagle. The body, neck, and tail are scaled (Wiggermann 1993-97: 456). “Here, then, is a combination of three of the most awesome creatures from the animal kingdom: the lion, king of beasts; the snake, feared and admired everywhere for its uncanny gait and power to inflict sudden death; and the eagle, king of the birds” (Lambert 1985: 87; cf. Gen 3:1). Of the many depictions of the *mušhuššu* (see Lambert 1985: 87-88), specimens can be seen in rows 2 and 4 on Babylon’s Ishtar gate reconstructed by Nebuchadnezzar II. They were supposed to guard the gates of the city against enemy attack as other representations of the serpent from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods make it clear (Lambert 1985: 87-89).<sup>78</sup> Snake-dragons at temple gates were to “spatter enemy and foe with deadly venom” (Langdon 1912: 132 v 64-vi 8).

I suggest that the Genesis account draws on various Mesopotamian myths and motifs related to the immortality topos, as recognized by many, and the character of the Genesis serpent is modeled on ANE serpents, particularly the *mušhuššu*. I propose that 1) its association with Marduk and Nabu in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia, 2) its being endowed with some protective function,<sup>79</sup> 3) its portrayal as a legged serpent, and 4) its perceived significance in contemporary society make the *mušhuššu* a particularly good candidate for being cast in Genesis’ subversive counter-narrative as, instead of protecting God’s garden,<sup>80</sup> leading humankind astray and being the main instigator of humankind’s disobedience. The *mušhuššu* is a metonymic representation of Marduk and his son Nabu.

One minor, and less serious, aspect may buttress this metonymic interpretation. As noted above, the *mušhuššu* had changed hands quite a few times in its long history. Its frequent handing-over must have had a harmful effect on its psyche. On its appearance in Genesis 3, it may be fed up with its present master and has its own scheme by intending to change hands once again, this time from Yahweh/Marduk to humankind. Moreover, as observed (e.g., LaCocque 2006: 174), the serpent might be envious of the woman for taking its place in ch. 2. These are possible reasons for it to instigate humankind to eat from the tree so that they become gods too. By finally wanting one of its kind, another animal-like creature, to rule over the animal world, it tries to sneak out of Yahweh’s control.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> This positive evaluation of the *mušhuššu* had only gradually come about, however. Originally “a death dealing monster,” Wiggermann (1989) suggests, it was created by Enlil and Tiamat to restore order in the society bent to anarchy without a king by, paradoxically, killing off the population. Wiggermann (1989: 125-26) therefore calls it a “death demon.” Its negative and positive sides will concern the discussion of Gen 3.

<sup>78</sup> The portrayals of the *mušhuššu* are more or less consistent from the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium to Neo-Babylonian times, “a striking testimony to continuity in ancient Mesopotamia of the use of these creatures” (Lambert 1985: 93).

<sup>79</sup> In Middle-Assyrian times, figurines of the *mušhuššu* were used to prophylactic ends under house floors (Albenda 1978: 18).

<sup>80</sup> Dragga (1992: 6-7) also claims that the serpent’s role was to guard the tree.

<sup>81</sup> Despite being animal-like, humankind enjoys a special relationship with God (see 3:8), so much so that, Bailey speculates (1970: 143), the serpent was envious of this.



Genesis 3 starts by calling the serpent “more crafty” than any other animal God created (3:1).<sup>82</sup> Moberly sees the epithet ambiguous, claiming it should alert the reader’s suspicion. Also, the serpent misquotes God’s order. The enmity between humans and snakes and the persistent opposition of the serpent to God again raise the alarm in the reader (2009: 79-80). In any case, the “serpent recognized the prohibition for what it was, a ploy on the part of the Creator to preserve his own turf” (Batto 1992: 59).<sup>83</sup>

On the other hand, by its introduction, the serpent is associated with Nabu the god of wisdom. It is noteworthy, though, that it is one of the creatures of God, not an autonomous being. It appears as God’s antagonist by its attempt to induce the first couple to disobey their Creator. The serpent’s suggestion for the woman to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil<sup>84</sup> seems noble but leads to unwanted consequences, even if, as it turns out, based on truth (see Barr 1992: 8, 60-61; Dragga 1992: 7; Stordalen 1992: 24). With their eyes opened (3:7), the final act of the *mīs pī* ritual is completed: by becoming animated, the divine image gets fully functional (Schüle 2017: 43-44).

By persuading them, the serpent rules humankind and so subverts creation order (cf. 1:26). Having eaten the fruit, “the nature of their newly acquired knowledge was the kind that made them aware of their nakedness.” Children “are not ashamed of their nakedness, but mature people, wise people, those who have a knowledge of good and bad, are” (York 1996: 405, 409).

This is the conventional interpretation of the nakedness motif. Bernard Batto, however, looks at the Mesopotamian evidence afresh. In both Sumerian and Akkadian texts, primitive, unclothed humans are as good as animals, in need of the gifts of civilization, clothes among them, to be bestowed by the gods. Clothes made humans different from animals and closer to the gods, who were also clothed. As we have seen, the first human being, even with God’s breath in his nose, was closer to animals than to the divine world. Batto thus takes 2:25, “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame,” as a statement of their animal-like status. Similarly, he sees 3:7 as the recognition “that they were closer to animalhood than to the divinity to which they aspired.” Their making clothes (3:7) is then “an act of defiance of their creator and a grasping at divinity.” “Ashamed of their nakedness but unable to make proper clothes for themselves, they hide from the deity whose status they aspired to. For his part the deity, in recognition that these humans had indeed proven to be more godlike than animallike, eventually clothes them” (1992: 53-56).<sup>85</sup>

Reading Genesis 3 against the background of the Adapa myth may yield a parallel interpretation. For an audience well-versed in Babylonian mythology, one character of the myth might be dimly recognizable in the Genesis story. The two guardians of heaven granting Adapa entrance were Tammuz, god of vegetation and Ningishzida, likewise god of vegetation and gate-keeper of the underworld as well as a tree god, his name meaning “Lord of the right tree” (Wiggermann 1998-2001: 368). He is often associated with snakes as on the libation vase of Gudea where he is flanked by two *mušhuššu*; elsewhere, he is often depicted as a serpent with a human head. Ningishzida is a reliable God as is obvious from his name. He is involved with law both on earth and in the underworld. His most common title refers to his function, “chamberlain of the netherworld,” and, in Standard Babylonian texts, he is called “lord of the netherworld.” In this capacity, he upholds world order. To this end, reliability is essential to him, “encoded in his name (-zi-da)” (Wiggermann 1998-2001: 371). Ningishzida was evidently a serpent with a human head – that is why it could speak.

<sup>82</sup> I fail to see that this note is supposed to warn the “audience to beware of the serpent” as Boomershine (1980: 117) suggests, without giving rationale.

<sup>83</sup> In a comment, Batto clarifies his stance (61), “Certainly mythology contains ample evidence of gods lying. But in the case of Genesis 3, I am inclined to think that the Yahwist intended to portray Yahweh as innocently mistaken.”

<sup>84</sup> Clark (1969: 267) claims that the phrase “good and evil” (3:5) is not original but does not provide reasons. I see it as an epexegetical remark.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Jacob 1974: 31: “nakedness is animal-like.” Galambush (2018: 32) asks from where the human couple “got the idea of clothing and belts in the first place.” In effect, similarly to Batto, she suggests that they saw God, obviously clothed, walk in the garden. Thus, they decided that, to demonstrate their new and more exalted identity, they needed clothing (cf. Smith 2019: 60).



Indeed, the guardian of heaven opened the door not to eternal life but to his realm, the underworld. Death, previously unknown to humankind, is now part of their fate.<sup>86</sup>

How are the serpent and God respectively to be evaluated? In his *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, after a discussion of James Barr's treatment of the Eden story (1992), which he considers "Gnostic" (2009: 71-78), Walter Moberly sums up the problem,

The words that YHWH speaks (2:16-17) are the first words of direct, personal address, such that one might reasonably suppose them to have keynote significance: Here are the creator's instructions for his creation, in some way determinative of the relationship between them. What context other than that of creation could be more weighty? If this is a foundational portrayal of the God whose people Israel know themselves to be, then high expectations naturally attach to the portrayal of God here. Specifically, if God's warning of death as the penalty for disobedience here (2:17) is an empty warning, then why should other warnings from God elsewhere be taken seriously? The heuristic assumption for the reader must surely be that God's words here are reliable. (78-79)

The lack of justification or explanation on God's part of his prohibition and warning, Moberly goes on, is natural – he is the maker and his words are reliable. That is the working assumption of the audience. Again,

when the snake continues by flatly denying God's warning of death, insists that the result will be beneficial, and fills the silence about God's initial motive in a suspicious way – grudging repression, not benefit, was God's concern (3:4-5) – then the reader's working assumption is that the snake will be proved wrong. (80)

Since trust in God is a weighty issue in the opening chapters of the Bible with enormous theological ramifications, "the classic Christian instinct to resist a reading of Genesis 2-3 in which God is untrustworthy and his words unreliable fully deserves to be tried out heuristically" (83). Moberly does so by taking alienation, hostility, burdensome work as the outworking of death in God's threat. Thus, because our initial expectation, the "prima facie sense of the warning," is not fulfilled, a new look at the words may find that they hold true "in a sense other than that initially imagined" (83-85). So, he suggests that we

look again at those principles already held and dig deeper, as it were, so as to ask whether they may indeed be true even if such truth is no longer at a surface level in the kind of way that was initially supposed. This, I propose, is the strategy employed within Genesis 2-3 – to lead the reader into deeper understanding of what is, and is not, meant by "death" as the consequence of disobedience to God. (86)

I feel somewhat ambivalent about Moberly's interpretation. He seems both to ignore the ANE background and to downplay the fact that the snake's words come true as opposed to those of God. He also appears to disregard the positive effect of the act of the first couple, namely that they acquire wisdom – the result is double-sided. On the other hand, he has rightly emphasized (the partly) harmful outcome of the snake's offer, often overlooked. And most importantly, he has put his finger on a nerve of the passage: What deity do we have portrayed here? How can we trust such a god? I will discuss this question in due time, i.e. after the flood narrative when we are given more pieces of the puzzle to fill in the picture.<sup>87</sup>

I have mentioned the "crafty" serpent's possible association with Nabu, god of wisdom in Babylonia. The close propinquity to the wisdom tradition of Genesis 3 is well-known. David Carr (1993: 589) lists the similarities.<sup>88</sup> 1) The tree often stands for wisdom. 2) The serpent, likewise a symbol for wisdom in ANE, is characterized as "prudent, 'ārūm," a term used in Proverbs to stress the contrast between the wise and the fool. 3) The woman's perception of the desirability of the fruit (*taāvā, neḥmād, haškīl*; 3:6) resembles wisdom terminology. The story is a polemic against wisdom

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<sup>86</sup> The Ningishzida connection is only valid if his relevance in the Neo-Babylonian era was perceptible. For Adapa as representative of humankind, despite being an *apkallu*, see Lowery 2013: 223-24.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Stordalen 1992: 22 who applies a Greimasian scheme.

<sup>88</sup> For a more comprehensive list of vocabulary and themes, see Stordalen 2000: 206-13.

tradition, Carr goes on (589-90) that “is characterized by a reasoning based more on collected human experience than divine *fiat*.” He helpfully summarizes.

Since wisdom literature tended to focus on investigation on the order of creation, a creation story like Genesis 2–3 would be particularly effective at undermining wisdom thought. This can be seen through comparison of this story with wisdom’s song in Proverbs 8. In this song a female wisdom figure calls on her audience to seek her because of her early role in God’s creation. This role in creation then makes it possible for her to grant fame, prosperity, long life, and divine favor to those who seek her. Likewise, in the Garden of Eden story a female figure is prominent in creation and then plays the dominant role in the search for independent, wisdomlike knowledge of good and evil (3:6). But this search is evaluated quite differently in Genesis 2–3 than in Proverbs 8. Here, the eating of the fruit of knowledge leads not to fame but to shame (3:7), not to divine favor but to disfavor (3:8–24), not to prosperity but to suffering (3:16–19), not to long life but to death (3:19).

Finally, in the process of arguing against the wisdom enterprise, the Garden of Eden story builds on the celebration of woman in Genesis 2, but inverts it. Previously the crown of creation, she is now blamed for a prominent role in expulsion from the garden. The early creation story in Genesis 2 shared with Proverbs 31:10–31 the *general aim* of praise of the able and wise wife. But now the Garden of Eden story *picks up specific terminology* from Proverbs 31 in the process of contradicting its picture of the wise woman point by point: the woman knows “good” and “evil” (Prov 31:12, 17), but this brings disaster (Gen 3:6–23). Rather than “girding” herself with strength (Prov 31:17), she and her husband now “gird” themselves with fig leaves (Gen 3:7). Like the good wife in Proverbs (Prov 31:26), the first woman opens her mouth in wisdom (Gen 3:1b–5), but this leads to negative results. Finally, the Proverbs text ends with a call to “give her of the fruit of her hands” (Prov 31:31), while the Garden of Eden story argues that this “fruit of [the first woman’s] hands” leads to alienation and endless toil. (590-91; italics original)<sup>89</sup>

Mark Smith (2019: 43-45), comparing Genesis 2–3 to Ezekiel 28, sees the narrative as criticizing not wisdom in general but more specifically the royal worldview of wisdom.

Wisdom can be used for good and ill. By using it with ambiguous effects, I suggest that the serpent served as well as betrayed humankind’s interests. It furnished them with wisdom but, at the same time, did not guard the garden from enemy attack (see Van de Mieroop 2003: 267) by spitting venom at them – rather, it spat its lethal venom at humankind. In fact, the narrative implies, it led enemy attack by sneaking in. Consequently, the garden is to be guarded by cherubim (cf. Dragga 1999: 12) rather than by Ningishzida/the *mušhuššu* (see 3:24).<sup>90</sup> The story accounts for both the gains and limits of wisdom.

*Divide et impera*, that is God’s tactic in dealing with disobedient subjects. He acts by doing justice to the divine order, and poetic justice at that. The fate of the serpent, the ringleader of the rebellion against the divine status quo, is humiliation<sup>91</sup> and enmity with the woman and her offspring, i.e. humankind (3:15; see Wenham 1987: 79; Phillips 2000: 237). The “punishment suggests a crime of arrogance. The one who presumed to be higher than all the other creatures, high enough to dare to enter a conversation with the woman, will be forced to live lower than most animals, on its belly in the dirt” (Chapman 2019: 258). It took the scene as *’ārûm*, now cursed, *’ārûr*, it departs (Phillips 2000: 237, 241).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This also explains why it is the woman and not the man who is approached by the serpent (contra Bailey 1970: 148). Clines (1974) argues that the tree of knowledge should be seen as the Law in Psalm 19. For a more theological wisdom reading, see Moberly 2009: 83-86.

<sup>90</sup> Note that the *mušhuššu* was supposed to guard the city Babylon. In PH’s alternative world, however, there is virtually no city – it is a garden that is to be guarded.

<sup>91</sup> Sjöberg (1984: 222; but see George 2003a: 896-97) questions that it is a serpent that stole the magical plant from Gilgamesh. The phrase *nēšu ša qaqqari*, “earth-lion,” in XI.296 denotes a chameleon instead, he suggests. As a matter of fact, the serpent in Genesis 3 is not said to lose its legs (cf. 3:14) but from now on is to go in a subservient position (Walton 2009: 35). If Sjöberg’s suggestion holds the reference to the *mušhuššu*/Ningishzida is even more likely.

<sup>92</sup> As opposed to the man and the woman, the serpent is not interrogated by God (Arneth 2007: 118). This might be another hint at the narrator’s stance toward it – Yahweh as good as ignores it in the court.

Since the woman misled the man, even though she will attempt to control him, she is cursed to a subject status (Foh 1975)<sup>93</sup> and labor pangs, *'iṣṣābôn* (3:16), but not disabled or dead children as in Atrahasis.<sup>94</sup> The relationship of trust with the woman that the serpent took pains to effect as well as the relationship between man and woman that the man so much needed are now ruined (Walsh 1977: 168). Man's work is also cursed into *'iṣṣābôn*, along with the ground, the sphere and subject of his work. As a result of man's eating from the forbidden plant, his work will be futile, producing "thorns and thistles," plants, he cannot eat, whereas the subject of his work will become his grave (3:17-19).

Yahweh's judgment thus affects his initial blessing of and mandate to humankind (1:28) negatively. Humans will multiply but only through painful childbirth. They will subdue the earth but this will come by sweat, thistle, and thorns. And their rule over animals will be an ongoing struggle. (Note the chapter's underlying theme of humankind's original place in the animal world.) Since, beforehand, animals were subjected to human rule (1:28) the curse on the serpent is rather double-edged. In their struggles with humankind, animals prove their equal which, rather than demotion, is promotion. On the other hand, human dominion over the animal world will result in the latter's inferiority and defeat. "Thus, 3.14-15 announces a decisive shift in human-animal relations. Conflict has replaced simple dominion, with the guarantee of victory going to the human side" (Turner 1990: 23, 45). Indeed, the serpent's initial intention might be to reverse God's creation mandate of humankind to rule over the animal world (Turner 2000: 30-31).

The enmity between the serpent and the woman (3:15) can be illuminated by reference to the wisdom motif outlined above by Carr. Even though wisdom, for which the woman stands, has proved an ambiguous blessing, Yahwistic wisdom/faith is both something to be followed and ever at loggerheads with any other, that of the empire, represented by the *mušḥušu*, in particular. But in the long run, the former will triumph over the latter. This interpretation also makes the puzzling reference to the woman's offspring, i.e. the adherents of Yahwistic wisdom, as opposed to those of the serpent, less problematic.

Yahweh's curse strikes Adam and Eve in their very existence – Eve in her function as wife and mother, Adam in his providing for the family. Both curses are etiological, not unlike Enkidu's curse and blessing of the harlot. Finally, Eve's naming by Adam and becoming the mother of all humankind underlines the difference between the two women. The harlot is never elevated above the role of an agent and a seductress. Eve is an equal companion, a spouse, a mother (Bailey 1970: 149-50).<sup>95</sup>

This is obviously not what was meant in 1:26-28's commissioning of humankind to rule and subdue creation. We have seen that the peaceful co-habitation of humans and animals is over. Man and woman are not helpers at each other's side – the egalitarian world of creation gives way to a world

<sup>93</sup> Schüle (2006: 175-76) claims that the connotation of the verb *māšal* in the OT is always positive and here it contains a function of caring for and representing the woman by her husband in ANE societies that, in the curse, gets distorted. What is negative is not the competence but the fact that the woman/wife is not allowed to perform this. In other words, it is a patriarchal society into which she is cursed. I find Foh's argument more compelling though (1975; cf. Longman 2016: 67). She argues on the basis of 4:7, where *tāšûqâ* recurs, that the noun has no sexual overtones (see Lohr 2011) but, in both passages, a desire to control, the man and sin respectively. Turner (1990: 24, n. 3) seems to have got her wrong as well as the evidence in Genesis where not only Rebekah (27:5ff) but Sara (21:9-14), Leah (29:23; 30:16), and Rachel too (31:34-35; cf. 35:2-4) got their ways.

<sup>94</sup> As the harlot initiated Enkidu into civilization, so does the woman, an agent of civilization and not a temptress, with the man. The result of the initiation is knowledge of good and evil. But whereas, in Gilgamesh, Enkidu alone is initiated, in Genesis, both woman, the initiator, and man are. When discovered, the man blames the woman for her role as the initiator. This is analogous to the curse of the dying Enkidu of the harlot. "Come, Shamhat, I shall fix a fate for you! [Curses (?)] shall not cease for ever and ever" (VII.iii.6-7). At Shamash's challenge, Enkidu retracts this, wishing the harlot a successful life of a courtesan: "Because of you, the mother of seven, the honoured wife, shall be deserted" (VII.iv.11) (Bailey 1970: 147-48).

<sup>95</sup> One more similarity to Gilgamesh is when the couple realize that they are naked and clothe themselves. This echoes the harlot's clothing Enkidu (Bailey 1970: 149).

of kings and subjects.<sup>96</sup> The vegetarian diet of humankind is cursed too, by implication, along with work which becomes hard and futile toil.

I have referred to the Adapa myth and Gilgamesh. They demonstrate that, in Mesopotamia, it is only kings or sages who come close to acquiring eternal life. In Genesis, however, it is humankind en bloc that possesses eternal life only to forfeit it. One of the basic differences from the biblical story is that Adapa is the prototype of priesthood, Gilgamesh that of kingship, whereas Adam stands for humankind (Liverani 2004: 22). Genesis' world is egalitarian in its outlook.<sup>97</sup>

God's first commission is not abolished but upheld – in a cursed form though. God's image is not shattered but corrupted, i.e. humankind cannot, in a benevolent way, completely and exclusively rule for creation's sake but does it in a self-centered, violent, and destructive way. Humankind has achieved knowledge with its ambivalent consequences.<sup>98</sup> Thus, with God's recognition that humankind has become godlike, knowing good and evil (3:22), it is underscored "that in the area of intelligence and understanding, and perhaps even in moral decision, humans are more godlike than animallike. What it means to be human has become clearer" (Batto 1992: 61).

Humankind has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil (3:22; AT),

God states before driving them out of Eden. But what exactly is it for human beings, above animals and below gods, to "know good and evil?"<sup>99</sup> By the reference to human subjugation by humans (3:16), humankind's failure to execute their original mandate and instead rule over each other has been hinted at. Chs. 1–3 thus narrate why rule by humankind over creation has gone awry. By ch. 11, it will only get worse. Reading on, we see the story unfold.

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. (3:20)

By naming, the man assigns the function to the woman (cf. Walton 2013: 31) and, through names, relationships are established (O'Connor 2018: 53). More importantly, the remark is out of place here and would rather fit right before 4:1. By placing it here, however, the author created a chiasm thus providing for a transition between humankind's primitive status and multiplication.

A Adam speaks and names his wife: she is mother of all living, 3:20

B God's care, 3:21

C God speaks: his statement and decision, 3:22

C' God acts: his preventive/punitive action, 3:23

B' God's judgment, 3:24

A' Adam knows his wife: she becomes mother and names her son, 4:1

In A–A', we see Adam and Eve, with the emphasis on Eve, even though she acts only in 4:1bc, as well as two namings. B is about God's recognition of humankind's deed anticipating the statement in C. By clothing them, God does not just acknowledge humankind's rising above animals and becoming godlike but demonstrates care toward them.<sup>100</sup> God's judgment in B' is the reverse. In C, we read first God's judgment about humankind's newly acquired status as well as his determination to stop them from eating from the tree of life and live forever. In C', God's decision is put into action. Note the verbs *šlḥ* and *lqh* in C–C': "humankind" has become godlike; so that they cannot "send" their hand and "take" from the tree of life (C), God "sends them away" to work the "humus"

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<sup>96</sup> The husband's royal superiority to his wife, expressed by the verb *māšal*, is even more poignant, given PH/Genesis' egalitarian attitude.

<sup>97</sup> But cf. Batto's observation that Adapa is more than the prototype of priesthood as he is elsewhere parsed as *amīlu* and is thus the equivalent of Hebrew *ʾādām*, "humankind" (1992: 194–95, n. 23). I still think that Adapa (and Atrahasis) is portrayed as a social and religious authority, i.e. king (and priest) rather than a commoner (see Tablet 1 in particular).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Schüle's statement (2006: 158): "The theme of Gen 2–3 is the wisdom and its ambiguous consequences." K. Schmid (2002) seems to understand "good and evil" not just as a reference to wisdom but in the sense I do.

<sup>99</sup> Goldingay (1998: 50, n. 1) gives a short list of the uses of "good and evil" in OT.

<sup>100</sup> Importantly, it is God who dresses humankind and not themselves (cf. Enkidu being dressed by Shamhat). The human and divine roles of Mesopotamia are subverted in Genesis.



from which they were “taken” (C’). In this way, the opposing intentions of humankind and God are once again underlined: while the former strive for divine status the latter is intent on maintaining the present order.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, it is not immaterial that the way the Pentateuch commences Israel’s history is prefaced by the creation of humankind “which place[s] humanity as such in universal or unspecified settings” (McConville 2006: 35). Aspects of this universalism will be elaborated on in what follows.

## **2.2 Challenging Imperial Hegemony: The Multiplication of Humankind and the Beginning of Civilization, 4:1–5:32**

Uniformity and centralized empire go hand in hand just as equality and diversity do. Genesis values a diverse culture and an egalitarian society. This is emphatic in chs. 4 and 5.

### **2.2.1 A Diverse Culture of Commoners: God’s Image and Knowing Good and Evil, 4:1-26**

The story of the creation of humankind is fraught with theology. Its apex is the theme of God’s image. In this chapter, I will study Genesis 4 and its antecedents with an eye on this concept. Then, I will discuss the concept’s recurrence in the subsequent chapters.

On day six of creation, God sets out to do his ultimate job.

“Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, *bəṣalmēnū kidmūtēnū*, 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.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (1:26-27)

To clearly see the term’s meaning, a comparative religion approach is indispensable as I have shown. However, cannot we expect the concept to unfold as the narrative unfolds? This expectation of ours seems to be justified by Robert Alter’s narratological observation that, in OT narrative, there is no “free motif” (1981: 79), each phrase or motif serves the intention of the narrative. Now, what is this intention? Does this concept have any import beyond chs. 1–2? In what follows, I will read the first chapters of Genesis in the light of this motif, humankind created in the image of God, assuming that its relevance reaches beyond chs. 1–3. I will note the ways in which the narrative makes use thereof in implicit or explicit ways and consider the implications.

In PH, humankind’s creative activity is a major theme. This, however, is prepared by two motifs. In the act of creation, God first blesses sea creatures and birds,

Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth. (1:22; cf. 8:17)

Secondly, God’s first command or blessing to humankind is,

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth... (1:28)

This blessing is repeated after the deluge in 9:1 and, with some modification, in 8:17 and 9:7.

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<sup>101</sup> As well-known, in the first creation account, God is referred to by his generic name, Elohim, while, in the second by his proper name, Yahweh. The combination of the two names as well as “Elohim” (3:1, 3, 5; J source), however, has given a headache to scholars (see, e.g., Nielsen 1972: 12). I wonder whether we are not witnessing the reworking and literary strategy of the narrator. That is to say, the narrator attributes the creation in the first account to “Elohim,” the universal godhead. When, however, he starts the second account of the creation of humankind (2:4), the narrator uses “Yahweh Elohim” through the end of ch. 3. Yahweh, the national god of Israel, takes the scene in ch. 4 only. In this way, the narrator has not only equated the two gods but created a smooth transition from general cosmogony to a more particular anthropogony, as well as from the universal creator god to that of Israel’s national deity who are one and the same (similarly Sarna 1989: 17; McConville 2006: 24). Otto’s suggestion (2009: 597-99) concerns narrated and narrative times but in effect point in the direction I have delineated. See also LaCocque’s different explanation (2006: 57-58). Van Seters (1992: 108) regards the technique as “a deliberate use by one author (or redactor)” but fails to elaborate. Outside Gen 2–3, the compound “Yahweh Elohim” occurs in Exod 9:30 only.



Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.” (9:1)

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. (8:17)

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

Procreation belongs to humankind’s humanness (cf. Miles 1995: 25-84). The blessing in 1:28 is preceded by God’s deliberation to create humankind in his own likeness. Smith (2010: 224) notes that “to be fruitful and increase” “is suggestive of a further, priestly sense of the image and likeness, namely that the human person is also a creator in a manner somewhat analogous to the divine creator.” The blessing of humankind differs from that of other creatures in that it is supplemented. Humankind is to subdue the earth and

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (1:28)

“Just as God previously created light (day 1) and, then, transferred this responsibility to the heavenly luminaries (day 4), so, here, he transfers dominion over creation to human beings” (Turner 2000: 24).

Humankind’s creative capacities and activities begin to unfold only when they are out of Eden. God’s creating activity is carried on by humankind so that by acquiring the knowledge of good and evil and so becoming godlike humankind does not need the mediation of gods and *apkallu* of Mesopotamian culture (Melvin 2010). We can see this happen right at the beginning of ch. 4.

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.” (4:1)

Cain’s birth is a confirmation of the strength of the command in 1:28 – the first couple has started their mandate to fill the earth, corroborated by the subsequent genealogies (Turner 1990: 25). The naming is typical of Genesis, a popular etymology with some theological flavor. “Cain” can be derived from Hebrew *qānā*, “to get, acquire” (e.g., Gen 47:22; Jer 32:9; Neh 5:16; see Cassuto 1989: 198-202). Borger (1959) refers to two Assyrian personal names, Itti-ili-a-šam-šu, “I have bought him from God,” and Iš-tu-aš-šur-a-šam-šu, “I have bought him from Ashur.” In these, the Akkadian *itti/ištu* stands for “from” which, Borger argues, is similar to the rather odd *‘et* in Gen 4:1. Van Seters refers to the myth Marduk’s Creation where line 21 states, “The goddess Aruru created the seed of mankind together with him [i.e. Marduk].” He considers Gen 4:1 corresponding, phrase by phrase, with the above sentence (1992: 123-24).

In six instances and in relation to God, the verb *qānā* means “to create” (Gen 4:1; 14:19, 22; Deut 32:6; Ps 139:13; Prov 8:22). Taking the preposition *‘et* in its simplest sense, the meaning of Eve’s words is, “I have created/acquired a son with the help of Yahweh.” Confirming this explanation, Kikawada (1972: 35) calls attention to the creation scene in Atrahasis (1.201) where the corresponding Akkadian phrase is applied. Here, the creatress Mami modestly declines Enlil’s order by claiming the task is “with Enki.” In Atrahasis, Mami does not do anything on her own but only in cooperation with the other creator god, Enki. Gen 4:1 may be dependent on this motif in which case Eve’s success is seen as coming from Yahweh. Thus, Eve’s words can properly be rendered, “I have gained/created a man with the help of/together with Yahweh” (Kikawada 1972: 36-37). The “first woman, in her joy at giving birth to her first son, boasts of generative power. The Lord formed the first *man* (ii 7), and I have formed the second *man*” (Cassuto 1989: 201; emphasis his;<sup>102</sup> cf. van Wolde 1991: 27-28; Alter 1996: 16). Eve is deprived of the associations with Mami’s divinity but preserves some remarkable vestiges of the parallel: Mami is the creatress, Eve is the first created woman. “Eve receives some of the attributes of the creatress in addition to the character of the created, and thereby a transparent added image is superimposed upon her” (Kikawada 1972:

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<sup>102</sup> I do not share Cassuto’s rather negative conclusion that Eve saw her birthing equal to God’s creating, hence standing equally with Yahweh “in the rank of creators” (1989: 201; his emphasis).

35; cf. Batto 1992: 63). This interpretation is backed up by the LXX: *ektēsamēn anthrōpon dia tou theou*, “I have acquired a human being by God.”<sup>103</sup>

Still, Eve does not claim that the birth is identical to God’s creating planets, plants, animals, and humankind. For this very reason, the verb used here is not one used in the creation account. Thus, her wording is pretty exact: she produced Cain with the help of Yahweh. Due to the events in ch. 3, humankind’s work and existence are doomed to decay. This is emphasized by the naming of Abel (4:2), meaning “breath.” The names and deeds of Cain and Abel (farmer and stock-breeder; God’s rejection and approval; the anger of the “One Acquired” at and envy of “Breath”; and finally the slaughter of “Breath” by “The One Acquired”) characterize created existence in a kind of merism by mentioning both good and bad possibilities open for human beings (see my interpretation of 3:22). Through begetting and birthing, however, humankind creates new life. It is this paradox that characterizes human existence: it seems futile but not to the extent it was considered in Mesopotamia.

The beginning of the next genealogy confirms humankind’s creative capacity by reapplying the phrase known from 1:26,

When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, *kāṣalmô bidmûtô*; and he named him Seth. (5:3)

By begetting a son, Adam reiterates God’s creating deed (see Alter 1996: 23). Offspring takes after parent as humankind bears the image of their Creator. This is reminiscent of BCS that states, “Anshar made his son Anu like himself, and Anu begot Nudimmud in his likeness” (I.15-16). In this picture, heredity is implied as the image of God (see Walton 2009: 43).<sup>104</sup>

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. (4:2)

“Not only do the Man and Woman reproduce (multiplication), but their progeny keep sheep (dominion over the animals) and till the ground (subjugation of the earth)” (Turner 2000: 35). In this way, the narrator not only signals a fulfillment of God’s initial blessing in 1:28 (Turner 1990: 25) but indicates the division of agriculture into cultivation of plants and animal husbandry as well as the antagonism concomitant with this, well-known from Mesopotamian literary works. The Sumerian poem The Disputation between Ewe and Wheat is built on this motif. In this epic, however, the two branches of production providing for the life of humankind are as good as deified in that they are metonymically represented by the deities Ezina-Kushu, wheat, and U, sheep, respectively. However, in Genesis, the two branches of production are the products of humankind’s invention, not divine creation (cf. Miller 1985: 239). Indeed, religion in PH is a human invention (Kawashima 2004: 496-98).

Cain’s gift,<sup>105</sup> rejected by God, is a crux for interpreters. Spina (1992) has argued that the ground for the rejection was the ground, i.e. Cain’s close association as a farmer, *’ōbēd hā’ādāmā* (4:2), with the cursed ground (3:17) and that the plants Cain offered were the products of this “ground.” In any case, Cain is envious of his brother, which catches God’s attention.

Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? (4:6-7; ASV)

“Thus YHWH’s words do not have Cain’s supposed wrong in view, but rather make the point that the disappointment written large in his face can be remedied if he handles the situation well” (Moberly 2009: 96-97). Moreover, Schlimm suggests that לָפַתָּה of 4:7 be repointed into לָפַתָּה and interpreted: “But if you do not do good, then at sin’s entryway is a רָבִישׁ,” read as an active participle, or as *rabiṣ* and referring to a Mesopotamian demon (*rabiṣu*), a lion or a similar beast of prey (2012:

<sup>103</sup> In a novel way, Stordalen (2000: 296-97) suggests that “man” refers to Adam, not Cain, thus ironically recording the coming-of-age of the man, in Eve’s view, and finally attaining sexuality.

<sup>104</sup> Importantly and as opposed to ANE religions, however, in Genesis, and the OT, this did not have as a consequence fertility cults nor the imaging of Yahweh.

<sup>105</sup> Note that at this point, there being no institutionalized religion, PH knows only of “gift, *minhā*,” presented to God and of no altar and “sacrifice, *’ōlā*” (cf. 8:20).

411-12; Walton 2013: 38). “Ancient readers of Genesis 4,7b would likely have caught one or both of these associations and understood the verse as warning Cain about the potential consequences of his anger by alluding to these threatening creatures” (411-12). Figures of monsters were used at entrances to apotropaic ends.

They presented a threat to those outside the gate or door, warning that entry may entail great harm to themselves. By evoking this leonine imagery, Gen 4,7 briefly but vividly makes clear the warning given to Cain. Should he enter sin’s doorway, his life will become endangered. In what follows 4,7, Cain enters the doorway to iniquity by killing his brother (4,8), and he consequently fears for his life (4,14), much as God’s words here forecasted. (413)<sup>106</sup>

Adopting Crouch’s suggestion (2011: 256), Schlimm argues that the crouching beast craves for Cain who must rule over it (2012: 413; cf. Crüsemann 1980: 165-67). But Cain is defeated – he kills Abel. The Creator’s curse is visible in that humankind will return to the soil whence he was taken: it received Abel’s blood, who fell victim to Cain’s rancor. In a similar way, it will open its mouth to receive the perpetrator’s corpse. Here, Abel is seen as one returned to the ground prematurely and violently (see Hauser 1980: 302).

In ch. 3, alienation between husband and wife, humankind and ground, humankind and vegetation, humankind and animal-world was the result of humankind’s independent action. Now, it is alienation of kinship. Humankind, created in the image of God, has really gotten to know good and evil.<sup>107</sup> Murder, however, threatens humankind’s mandate to fill the earth (Turner 1990: 26).

The ground is doomed to be infertile because of man’s disobedience (3:18), the fruit of which man eats (3:17, 19, and 4:12a). God sees Cain’s deed as a crime more severe than that committed by his father. Because of Adam, the ground was cursed (3:17-19). Now, Cain is more cursed than the ground (4:10). Adam’s lot was a cursed ground that made work and life difficult. Cain’s fate is worse: the ground will not yield its fruit, compelling him to a permanent unsettled life (Spina 1992: 327).<sup>108</sup> Due to his sin, Cain is to become “a restless wanderer on the earth” (4:14). He will have no hope of settled life but will have to move on and on. No wonder that, hearing God’s curse, Cain is desperate:

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. (4:14)

“The city makes possible human existence at some remove from the soil, and it may even function here as a type of asylum, allowing Cain to settle in the land without polluting it” (Kawashima 2004: 490). Cain finds a place to settle down – in Nod, the land of “wandering” (4:16). “As in Mesopotamia, Cain’s status as a wanderer marks him as undesirable. This wandering is in contrast to being a city-dweller. In fact, it is in his line that the arts of civilization are developed (4:17-22)” (Walton 2009: 39; see also Steinmetz 1994: 203). Seeing this and his achievements in city building, for a cursed wanderer, Cain does pretty well (cf. Kaminsky 2007: 26).

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. (4:17)

Whereas building cities is seen as all-important in Mesopotamia, in Genesis 4, it is only marginal. Due to God’s punishment and with the non-farming skills of Cain’s descendants indirectly affirming God’s curse on the ground (Galambush 2018: 37), Cain’s line, with the exception of Jabal (4:20), become city dwellers. They are also the first musicians and smiths (4:21-22). In this way, God’s curse of the ground is made ineffective for his offspring (cf. Crüsemann 1981: 18; Schüle 2006: 184; Waschke 2009: 76). Theirs are achievements of human endeavor and neither of these lifestyles is superior. In 4:15, Yahweh is seen as having pity on Cain and showing compassion.

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<sup>106</sup> As opposed to ancient translations the MT does not cite Cain’s words in 4:8. Simon (2020: 56-57) tries to interpret this very feature of the story by claiming the narrative’s gist is the dialogue that dissolved into thin air.

<sup>107</sup> Smith (2019: 69) sees Cain and Abel “emblemize two different moral capacities and potentialities issuing from the human knowledge of good and evil gained in Genesis 3.”

<sup>108</sup> Even though Spina has noticed these important links, he does not abandon the conventional translation, “from the ground,” in 4:11 (327).

From a Mesopotamian perspective, it is definitely a paradox that the first man-slaughterer becomes the first city-builder, a role, if not divine, much honored in Mesopotamia. “In the context of the Kenite genealogy, which stresses the novelty of arts and sciences attributed to this line of ‘culture-heroes,’ this can only imply that he became the first builder of a city, i.e. that the building of cities began with him” (Hallo 1970: 64; 2010c: 551).<sup>109</sup> “In the biblical version of antediluvian traditions, we hear of no kings, and of only one city, named for the son of its builder Enoch, Irad, reminiscent of the city Eridu mentioned as the first city in the SKL” (Hallo 2010: 669). As a matter of fact and as opposed to SKL, the word “king” does not even occur in PH. Hallo (1970: 64; similarly Hess 1993: 40-41) has proposed to see in Irad (and Yered, father of Enoch in the Sethite line; 5:18-19) “a name equal to that of an antediluvian city, specifically Eridu.” If Hallo’s proposal holds, city in general and the first city Eridu (or the famous “divine” cities founded in primordial times), in particular, once again, are rendered relative. In Genesis, Eridu is not even referred to as a city but, in the person of Irad, only as the son/grandson of the founder of the first city. It is the more pertinent to our topic as in one Babylonian poem at least, Marduk, Creator of the World, Babylon is referred to as Eridu (see Foster 2005: 488, n. 2).<sup>110</sup> In Genesis, it is humankind that are assigned important cultural, social, and political functions, not cities.

Wilson (1977: 154; cf. Hess 1989: 246) has observed the similarities between Mesopotamian genealogies and that in Genesis 4.

Both the Mesopotamian and biblical traditions speak of seven figures or seven generations of ancestors who lived before the flood and who were the founders of the various arts of civilization. Both agree in placing the origins of artistic skills and the building of cities in this period, and both also place the beginnings of cultic worship at this time (cf. Gen. 4:26).

The seven antediluvian *apkallu*, creatures of Ea, first referred to in the third millennium but “becoming very popular in the art of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods” (Takayoshi 2004: 22; cf. Greenfield 1999: 73), are said to have brought learning and the arts to Sumer. Just like the seven antediluvian sages, the seven generations starting with Cain are portrayed in terms of cultural inventions like city building, the crafts, and arts. The divinization of cultural inventors is rejected in Genesis, however. In addition, the “seven-day divine creation of the cosmos is paralleled by these seven generations of human creativity” (Sarna 1989: 36). “Genesis removes technological progress from the realm of the gods and places it solely within the sphere of human activities” (Lowery 2013: 93). The other side of the coin is that, through their behavior, the *apkallu* occasionally angered the gods (see Reiner 1961: 4-5). Cain’s offspring are no demigods but human to the core. They bring arts and craft to humankind, but at least one of them shows the human capability of evil (4:23-24) – like father, like son.

The similarity of the genealogies in Genesis 4 and 5 has been noticed.<sup>111</sup> Albeit not concerned with Genesis, Finkelstein (1966: 98) has observed that several members of the Assyrian King List correspond to members in the genealogy of the Hammurabi dynasty. This harmonizing tendency may be behind the correspondence between the genealogies of Genesis 4 and 5. That is to say, the resemblance of Genesis 4–5 to MKL may suggest that the narrator adopted from the king lists the “correspondence device” in order to “democratize” his genealogies.

To another descendant of Cain, Lamech, significant cultural feats are attributed:

<sup>109</sup> The subject of the Hebrew can be Cain just as well as his son Enoch, overlooked by Hallo. Kvanvig (2011: 247-49) argues for Enoch’s being the subject claiming “Enoch, the founder of the first city, Irad/Eridu, [comes] fairly close to the first sage in Mesopotamian traditions, U-an/Oannes, who taught humankind how to build cities.” Miller (1985: 240) deems the text, or tradition, unstable by seeing a gloss here and reconstructs 4:17-18. I wonder, however, whether the ambiguity is intended, and thus the author succeeded in tainting the identity of the founder of the first city, so significant in Mesopotamia.

<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Babylon had a district called Eridu.

<sup>111</sup> Finkelstein (1963: 50, n. 41; cf. Hess 1989: 246-47) has noticed that each of the seven *apkallu* bore names similar to the particular king in whose reign they appeared. This, again, makes the dependence of Gen 4–5 on Mesopotamian material as well as its soft polemical intention possible.



Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. (4:20-22)

Cain was not only the father of city dwellers but nomadic people also originated with him. Genesis in this way signals two defining ways of life, that of city life and that of country life. In Mesopotamia, city life was considered superior to country life (Oppenheim 1964: 110-11; Hallo 1970: 57), with cities occasionally deified (Hallo 1970: 59). Genesis 4 does not refer "to an achievement (e.g., domestication) but to a lifestyle. Just as Mesopotamians believed cities and kingship originated with the gods, so did pastoralism, agriculture, and other lifestyles. Again, in contrast, Genesis sees them as human developments" (Walton 2009: 41). Culture "is a human invention" (Kawashima 2004: 485). Significantly, within the same genealogy, city life and country life are presented as originating with the same ancestor. Cain is the forefather of musicians as well as of metal workers.<sup>112</sup> He knows both evil and good (cf. Van Wijk-Bos 2005: 96-97; Longman 2016: 102-103), he "constitutes a type of everyman" (Kawashima 2015: 264).<sup>113</sup> But how does the account of Lamech fit in here?

Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah. (4:22)

First, apart from Eve who names Cain and Seth (4:1, 25), only this entry of all the antediluvian genealogies mentions women by name, a characteristic of WSL (see Malamat 1968: 163). The names of Lamech's wives and daughter could have easily been dropped or the entry reformulated as they are not essential. Surprisingly, however, they are included in the list. Also, Lamech is the seventh from Adam. He boasts,

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. (4:23)

Cassuto (1989: 242-43; his emphasis) senses here "a kind of antithetic parallelism to the statement at the beginning of the section" (4:1). "Eve gloried in the fact that she had formed and given birth to a *man*; Lamech prides himself on having cut off the life of a *man*. The earlier boast was *with the Lord*; the later, *against the Lord*."<sup>114</sup> While Eve's "creation" was a manifestation of being created in God's image, Lamech's violence is the undoing of this creation, which is ethically reprehensible for Yahweh (see Cassuto 1989: 244). Moreover, Lamech boasts of committing a bigger crime than Cain (see Gevirtz 1994: 410-11; Kawashima 2015: 268). Humankind's knowing good and evil is on full display in ch. 4. In this context, Wilson's observation (1979: 19) of linear genealogies (as that, partly, of Genesis 4) stressing the relational aspect is of interest as it is relations that suffer the most in this chapter. "There is an increase of violence throughout (vv. 8, 15, 24), and the verb 'to kill' appears five times (vv. 8, 14, 15, 23, 25)" (Cotter 2003: 41).

The beginning and closing of the chapter may contain another hint at Genesis' view of culture. Thematically, the protagonist is Cain, whose main acts are his fratricide as well as cultural inventions. Structurally, the chapter is enclosed by an *inclusio*. Its first half reports the births of Adam and Eve's first and second son, while the second half that of their third son.

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." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. (4:1-2)

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<sup>112</sup> Wenham (1987: 111) also recognizes that one of the themes in ch. 4 is that technology is not God(s) given but a human achievement. However, while he thinks "that all aspects of human culture are in some way tainted by Cain's sin" (111), in my view, culture in the chapter, and in Genesis in general, is more positively portrayed. Wenham sees Genesis as a black zebra striped with white, I see it as white with black stripes.

<sup>113</sup> Machinist (2011: 212) claims, "the knowledge of good and evil is a knowledge of what rules or conventions govern earthly society, as part of the larger cosmos, and further that this knowledge is not simply pure information; it is knowledge that is implemented in action."

<sup>114</sup> Note that, in 4:1, Eve gives birth, *yālad*, to a "man," *īš*, not, what might be expected, a *yeled*, while Lamech boasts of having killed a man, *īš*, and a boy, *yeled* (4:23). It is also noteworthy that the two nouns, *peša'* and *ḥabbūrā*, occur in the *ius talionis*, Exod 21:25.



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.” Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. (4:25-26)

Between these birth accounts, Cain’s two stories are wedged in. In the fratricide (4:3-16), he, the first perpetrator and embodiment of manslaughter, is pictured in a bad light. 4:17-24 is the other side of the coin. Cain is being depicted as, by Mesopotamian standards, someone starting successful and noble projects. He founds cities and his seven descendants prove rather innovative in the realm of culture paralleling God’s creative acts in ch. 1. In this way, the narrative unveils the paradox of creating culture and civilization.

Ch. 4 concludes with the sentence:

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD. (4:26)

At this point of human history, there is no chosen people as yet, only human beings exist (Enosh means “human being”) who feel in need of turning to the transcendent. In Mesopotamia, cult is derived from creation and humankind is created to relieve the gods from labor and to provide food for them – culture and cult are closely linked. In Genesis, cult and religion originate in primeval times (Waschke 1984: 113). In some myths (Rulers of Lagash; Ewe and Wheat), humankind is created in two steps: bare existence is followed by the divine grant of culture (Clifford 1994: 44). Developing human culture contributes to the welfare of the gods (Westermann 1967: 240). In Genesis, humankind is created to care for creation and to create culture – no reference is found to cult in chs. 1–11. 4:26 mentions the worship of Israel’s deity thereby exemplifying the universalistic conviction of PH that, before and outside Israel, there was Yahweh worship.<sup>115</sup> For this, neither shrine nor ziggurat is needed. It is the more remarkable,

As with the other beginnings in the chapter, in the ancient Near East the beginning of religion is not associated with humans but with the gods (oddly enough). That is, the gods establish cultic sites for themselves (since the temples were their dwelling places). When humans are created, they are to serve the gods—the implication being that sacred space existed before humans. (Walton 2009: 42)

It is not religion only that is the invention of gods. In Mesopotamia, “the prerogative of invention reverts to the gods, who assign arts and crafts to humanity and thereafter stay in control, maintaining the responsibility for good running order” (Castellino 1994: 93). The seven *apkallu* taught humans the crafts before the flood. The Sumerian epic Enki and Ninmah attributes to Enki the invention of crafts, while SKL to kings. SKL refers to kings Etana and Lugal-banda, both shepherds (Col. 2, line 16 and Col. 3, line 12), i.e. kings, Mes-he, a smith (Col. 3, line 31), Magalgalla, a skipper (Col. 4, line 24), Nannia, a stonecutter (Col. 6, line 19). These references might be to culture and civilization, similar to those in Genesis 4 (similarly Cassuto 1989: 188). SKL mentions these occupations with reference to kings who are often demigods. It is thus no coincidence that the craft *par excellence*, kingship “was lowered from heaven,” as stressed in various Mesopotamian literary works (see SFS, line 88), most notably, SKL emphasizing it twice. As opposed to this, PH does not take notice of kingship. What is more, both arts and crafts are human achievements with no divine assistance (cf. Melvin 2010: 11), and social order is human responsibility.

Related to this is how work is seen. In Mesopotamia, it is something troublesome, possibly avoidable, and detested by gods, meant for human beings or smaller deities only. This is succinctly hinted at in Atrahasis’ incipit,

When the gods instead of man  
Did the work, bore the loads,  
The gods’ load was too great,  
The work too hard, the trouble too much... (1.1-4)

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<sup>115</sup> Alter (1996: 21) speaks of “the universalism of the monotheistic idea.” Note also Moberly’s judicious analysis of the verse (1992: 67-70) as well as McConville’s support for his interpretation (2006: 41-42), adding that “The unexpected allusion to Yahweh-worship in antediluvian times is a careful splicing of the universal and particular.”

This existence is unbearable, gods are not supposed to work. So, they decide to create humankind to be relieved of the burden of labor. Alberty (1980: 56) notes that all the Akkadian phrases related to work in the epic, due to the concept of hard labor, have negative connotations.

In the Genesis account, God himself does work (see 2:2-3, 7, 19, 22) and, after the well-done job, rests unchallenged and contented so setting an example. By being an extension of God's creating activity, in Genesis, work belongs to the goodness of creation. Humankind, created in God's image, is to emulate the Creator. Adam is placed in the garden of Eden "to work it and take care of it" (2:15). It is humankind that names the animals (2:19-20) as a sign of being made in the image of God and of humankind's creative faculty. In Sumerian mythology-cosmogony, naming is an important literary motif denoting divine power and skills as it is only gods who are involved in naming tools and cities, among other things (see *The Song of the Hoe*; Enki and Inanna). Only after work is cursed (3:17-19) is it troublesome in Genesis, so matching human experience. And only after the curse does the keeper become the one from whom the garden is to be kept (see the verb *šāmar* in 2:15 and 3:24). Sweat, thorns, and thistles notwithstanding, work remains humankind's creative and hence satisfying activity, as implied in Genesis 4. "Human sin has not changed God's good creation into an evil creation" (Fretheim 2005: 78).

As opposed to Mesopotamian epics, the first book of the Bible implies culture's potential of creating works of art, human innovation, and ingenuity while at the same time hinting at the capacity of human inventions and ingenuity to destroy. Beneficial and harmful effects are both inherent to humankind's ingenuity. Forged tools, of hunting or agriculture, can also be used to kill (see 4:22); wine can cause drunkenness (see 9:20-21) (cf. Westermann 1967: 240). Being mindful, however, of these risks and "side effects," by virtue of their creative and procreative activity, humankind carries on God's creating work thus witnessing to being created in God's image (cf. Niskanen 2009: 431-34; see 1:27; 5:1).<sup>116</sup> Ironically, this might be suggested by the serpent's enticing words to the humans,

For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [or: gods], knowing good and evil. (3:5)<sup>117</sup>

And God's statement after their disobedience,

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. (3:22)<sup>118</sup>

Indeed, humankind has become like God, knowing good and bad.<sup>119</sup> The first thing the couple realize with their eyes open is that they are "naked." They may have become like God, but what they first learn entails the awareness of incompetence. Paradoxically, their "knowing good and evil" is the result of the serpent's being more crafty than not just other animals but themselves.

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<sup>116</sup> Schüle (2005: 17) considers knowing good and evil "wisdom as a source of human creativity," being fruitful, and taking dominion. "Each act of procreation is an imitation of God's original creation of man," in Sarna's view (1989: 41; cf. Fretheim 2005: 60-61).

<sup>117</sup> The Hebrew is ambiguous and can mean "like God" or "like gods." Only a minority of interpreters has entertained taking the phrase plural (see Speiser 1964: 23; von Rad 1967: 71; Alter 1996: 11-12).

<sup>118</sup> In conventional Christian theology, God is denied attributes associated with evil. But what if, as this verse may be taken to imply, God is really capable of both good and bad but has restricted himself? That is to say, in Genesis, God is portrayed as a deity who creates a good, indeed, very good world and who is perhaps not as wanton as deities in Babylon are. Still, there are two stories (chs. 3 and 6-7), at least, in PH where God's motives are not clear, to say the least. God's furnishing cloth for the first couple right after their curses (3:21) as well as his words in 8:21-22 make him appear to be sorry for the judgment. God, Schüle thus claims, "like each deity in ANE, is familiar with feelings, is moved by inclinations as well as questionable motives such as suspicion and jealousy" (2006: 417). For Babylonian Jews, acquainted with destructive and benevolent deities alike, this god certainly made sense.

<sup>119</sup> Contra Reicke 1956: 201, who claims that "the paradise narrative regards knowledge as a dangerous matter." Rather, it regards knowledge as neutral with the potential of being used for good and ill.

It is, however, important to note that this achievement is not tantamount to omniscience as Gerhard von Rad takes the phrase to mean (1967: 63). In fact, humankind's previous naïve, thus immature status has matured into one that is capable of making decisions for good and bad.<sup>120</sup>

As God created nature so does humankind culture. Nature and culture, created by God and humankind, are manifestations of God's blessing (cf. Goldingay 2003: 187). The beauty and goodness of both are to be maintained and enjoyed. Their enmity, however, brings about curse. The peaceful living together of human beings and animals has given place to enmity of the two realms commenced at humankind's disobedience. As a consequence, the animal world is cursed as well. God's creatures are set against and live in fear of each other.

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. (3:15)

We have seen a snapshot of PH's diverse view and egalitarian attitude toward the world. In Genesis 5, there is more to come.

### **2.2.2 An Egalitarian World of Commoners: The Ten Generations, 5:1-32**

Genesis 5 connects the flood to the preceding story of creation and humankind's growth (see Levin 2001: 33). Its function, however, is not just this but, by virtue of the genealogy, to provide an alternative to the Mesopotamian view of civilization. SKL, one of the obvious parallels to Genesis 5 (cf. Sarna 1989: 40; Carr 1996: 71-72), contains a number of names of mythic heroes. It purports to go back to times before the flood. Between the extant SKL manuscripts dating from the early centuries of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium and Berossus' *Babyloniaca* from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, there is a considerable time gap with one small fragment from Ashurbanipal's libraries that lists nine antediluvian kings and has the beginning of a bilingual version of the deluge (Lambert 1973: 270). Thus, it seems that, in at least one literary composition of mid-first millennium Mesopotamia, the flood story was prefaced by a genealogy, just as it is in Genesis.

SKL is divided into two parts, the kings before and the kings after the flood. The reigns of the former are incredibly long. The shortest is 18,600, the longest 43,200 years. After the flood, reigns are rarely longer than 1,000 years.

In PH, the deluge also marks a disruption with genealogies preceding and following it. Genesis 5 lists ten antediluvian generations. Before the flood, SKL mentions eight kings. The antediluvian section of SKL does not list the first man nor the flood hero though. Hence, Walton suggests that, in Genesis 5, they should not be counted (1981: 207). This is, however, not the only list related to our topic. In Mesopotamian sources, including the chronicle by Berossus, prior to the flood, eight, nine or ten kings ruled (see Lambert 1965: 292-93) or, in one list, perhaps seven (Lambert 1973: 272). The similarity of, approximately, ten generations in the lists is striking just as the difference is: most of the Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian lists have kings (see Walton 2009: 44) as opposed to the list of Genesis where commoners are named. Ten generations seem to have been the optimal pattern of genealogies in Mesopotamia (Malamat 1968: 165, 169; cf. 1973: 135). Borrowing from Mesopotamia on the part of the Hebrews appears certain (Lambert 1965: 293).

In Mesopotamia, numbers had both numerical (the real value) and numerological (representing the sacred or pointing beyond the mundane) significance. In mythical texts, such as SKL, the latter was seen as more important. In Babylonia, the numbers 3, 5, 6, 7 and 101 were granted special significance. Bearing that in mind, the total of the six generations before Methuselah, from Seth to Enoch, for example, is 4,949 years, i.e.  $7 \times 7 \times 101$  years of which the total of the first three generations (Seth, Enosh, Kenan) is 2,727, i.e.  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 101$  years. Abraham's age is 175, i.e.  $7 \times 5 \times 5$  years; that of Isaac 180, i.e.  $5 \times 6 \times 6$  years; that of Jacob 147, i.e.  $3 \times 7 \times 7$  (note that the multipliers in these three cases add up to 17); that of Joseph 110, i.e.  $5 \times 5 + 6 \times 6 + 7 \times 7$  years. In Mesopotamia, "holy numbers" were used in connection with gods, kings, famous individuals as well as, in mythic-

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<sup>120</sup> Ezekiel 28, often referred to when interpreting this verse (e.g., Wenham 1987: 64), seems to support this: Having misused his privileges and power, the king of Tyre is cast down from God's presence.

religious contexts, lending religious dignity to the individual or holy text (Hill 2003: 241-42; Johnson 2004: 152-53; Lowery 2013: 185-89; cf. Ruppert 1976: 272; n. 5; Heinzerling 1998; Ziemer 2009).<sup>121</sup>

Enoch, special in ch. 5 by virtue of being taken by God, is similar to Enmeduranki/Enmeduranna in two versions of SKL as the seventh in the list but only in Berossus is he seventh in the ten-member list. “Enmeduranki was specifically associated with Sippar, the city of the sun god Shamash, and is also said to have entered the presence of Shamash as well as of Adad” (Day 2013a: 69).

Enmeduranki’s relation to Shamash is matched by Enoch’s age 365 in ch. 5, corresponding to the days of a solar year (Hutzli 2012: 151).

It may also appear important that, in 5:1-18 (without “Enoch”), there are 200 words; after “Enoch”, 5:18-24 contains 65 words and 5:25-32 100 words. This makes up a total of 365, the days in a solar year as well as the age when Enoch begot his first son (Heinzerling 1998: 582-83). In addition to Enoch’s solar-year age, “Lamech’s 777 years (5:31) equal the synodic periods of Jupiter + Saturn, and Yared’s 962 years (5:20) equal the synodic periods of Venus + Saturn” (Waltke 2001: 111). (Note that Jupiter was associated with Marduk, Venus with Ishtar, Saturn with Ninurta.) Kraeling (1947a: 292) also notes that the Babylonian flood hero was a solar figure while, in the Priestly source, the flood lasts a solar year and 6:9 has Noah, like Enoch in 5:24, walk with God.

SKL stresses, “After the Flood had swept thereover, when the kingship was lowered from heaven” (Col. 1, lines 40-41). In Genesis (and the Pentateuch), kingship is never seen as heavenly. It is a late, limited, and *human* institution (see Deut 17:14-20). The preoccupation with kings in Mesopotamia is partly owing to the fact that it was kings that bore the image of god. As we have seen, the world view of PH is different: each human being bears the image of God, regardless of their color of skin, social status, or gender. Enoch was taken as an “everyday mortal,” not as someone distinguished in his royal or heroic capacity but due to his ethical stance: he walked with God (5:22, 24) (cf. Wenham 1987: 146).<sup>122</sup>

It can be objected that even though no antediluvian person is named a king in PH, the named figures can be regarded as archetypal and not as mere humans. In Genesis 5, each of the named characters not only had a named son (i.e. the successor archetype) but also had additional, unnamed sons and daughters (i.e. the true commoners?) (Batto, personal communication). I find it significant though that the 10 patriarchs are not referred to as kings which is in keeping with PH and Genesis’ general socio-political stance.

Regarding the similarities in the genealogies in chs. 4–5, it is worth comparing the individuals bearing identical names. Interestingly, they are among those who deviate from the monotonous scheme of the list by revealing some further information. Enoch in 4:17, in one reading, is the first city builder, whereas his namesake is the one to have walked with God (5:24). Lamech in ch. 4 is the embodiment of brute force; indeed, he boasts of his violence as if claiming that it is power that solves problems. His counterpart in 5:29 is the embodiment of resigned hopefulness as, possibly, a consequence of the experience of what violence entails. “Furthermore, Lamech’s age of 777 years in the MT of Gen 5 functions as a nod to the seventy-sevenfold revenge in Gen 4:24” (Hoopen 2017: 181). These two individuals in ch. 5 counter the highly ambitious and doubtful project of city building as well as violence, two aspects of kingship itself. The two Lamechs are transitional figures each bringing an era to conclusion (Hess 1991: 25). “Though the Cainites contribute some

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<sup>121</sup> After considering Sumerian and Babylonian evidence, Young (1990) concludes that the authors of both SKL and PH were educated in the same mathematical curriculum. Young (1988) also sees Babylonian mathematical evidence for the background of figures in the Noah story as compelling.

<sup>122</sup> Hoopen (2018: 8, 17) argues that Utnapishtim in Gilgamesh XI.205-206 is similarly “taken” (Akkadian cognate *leqū*). The two stories thus attest to a similar *Entrückung* concept. Hoopen adds (11), “Although the author remains vague about this location, the connections between Adam and Enoch laid out above make it likely that Enoch was perceived to be taken to the place where one walks with God: a place like the garden in Eden.” Hoopen (17) claims that, as opposed to Utnapishtim in Gilgamesh, in Genesis, it was Enoch “taken” and, because of his drunkenness, not Noah. In my view, however, PH tried to discredit the Mesopotamian tradition in this way transferring to Enoch the “being taken” motif from Noah so to emphasize both heroes’ humanness.



material and cultural gains to the human enterprise (Gen 4,17.20 – 22), the Sethites provide the needed religious and spiritual dimension” (Spina 1992: 329). Cain brought about a number of achievements of culture but, by slaying his brother, he failed in morality. Enoch did not achieve anything worth mentioning. Indeed, he lived the shortest life in his genealogy but “walked with God.” For PH, ethics matters as much as achievement.

Genesis 5 nearly always follows the next pattern: “And N was x years old when he begot O. And, after the birth of O, N lived another y years begetting sons and daughters. And N’s total age was thus z years and he died.” All this in three verses each. The monotony is interrupted at three points: at the first one on the list, Adam (5:1-5), at the last one of the list, Noah’s father Lamech by whom Noah was named (5:28-31), and at Noah’s great-grandfather, Enoch. He is the seventh member in Seth’s line and as such contrasted with the seventh member of Cain’s line, Lamech, the “vengeful murderer who boldly sings of his violent deeds” (Waltke 2001: 112).

Both Enoch and Noah, men who walked with God so deserving special attention, have their Mesopotamian forerunners in the *apkallu* and the flood hero-priest figures who were instrumental in culture and cult. The Genesis narrator, however, robs Enoch and Noah “of their primary prerogatives. Neither sacrificial cult, nor revelations of divine wisdom could be placed in primeval time” (2011: 255-58).<sup>123</sup> There is no institutional cult in PH’s world.

Clines (1976: 492) has pointed out that the second part of this pattern (total age and “he died”) is rather unnecessary (but see Ziemer 2009: 10). They add nothing to the information, instead emphasize their mortality. This is in stark opposition to SKL which, by never mentioning their deaths, is virtually a list of semi-divine kings.

In their different forms, MKL served to legitimize dynastic claims to power. As such, they were mutually exclusive.<sup>124</sup> The two genealogies of Genesis 4–5, with many similarities or overlaps,<sup>125</sup> were apparently included to demonstrate that although they appear different and exclusive of one another both are part of humankind’s universal history.<sup>126</sup>

All the three extant SKL tablets have a total of a six-digit year period. In comparison to SKL, the patriarchs before the flood in Adam’s genealogy (ch. 5) died as infants. Longest lived Methuselah dying aged 969 (5:27) not reaching year 1000, seen as the threshold of virtual immortality (Barr 1992: 79-81). He too died a mortal (Alter 1996: 23).<sup>127</sup> In addition, while SKL in particular, and king lists in general, were written to justify power claims of cities and dynasties, Adam’s genealogy lacks any such purpose – it has the whole of humankind in view.

Having listed the most relevant characteristics of Mesopotamian genealogies, SKL in particular, we can consider their basic differences from the genealogies of Genesis 5. The long ages in SKL are countered with relatively short life-spans in Genesis. As opposed to “semi-divine” kings in SKL, in PH, we see mortal humans – commoners versus kings. To PH, the existence of god-kings or divine men is as good as unheard of. There are commoners only, no kings and no priests.

Semi-divine men will appear at the start of the next chapter. But first the transition,

When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. 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.” After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Lamech lived a total of

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<sup>123</sup> Kvanvig (258) adds, „these prerogatives came much later in history, linked to Aaron and Moses.” His conclusion is somewhat different than mine.

<sup>124</sup> Alternative “versions are not viewed as contradictory by the people who use them, however, for the people know that each version is correct in the particular context in which it is cited” (Wilson 1977: 166).

<sup>125</sup> Wilson (1977: 161) links each member, except for Jabal, Jubal, and Noah, in the list in ch. 5 with a member in ch. 4.

<sup>126</sup> For a different interpretation, see Hoopen 2017. It may be noted that, in Assyrian and Babylonian king lists, there is a King Adamu and a King Atamu, second and fourth in the lists respectively (Malamat 1968: 165). Adam’s role in his genealogy seems to be that it is “Adam,” the forefather of humankind who matters, not kings.

<sup>127</sup> Lambert and Millard (1969: 17) refer to three copies of SKL with a total of 241,200, 456,000, and 186,000 years respectively. The total of the 9 patriarchs’ years in Genesis 5 is a modest 7,625.



777 years, and then he died. After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth. (5:28-32)

Since the soil is cursed, Lamech expresses his hope “that, through Noah, the curse on the soil will be mitigated if not revoked.”<sup>128</sup> In 8:21, this “prophecy” is, in a sense, fulfilled (Herion 1995: 63). Lamech’s hopeful resignation aptly concludes the section characterized by the despair of the curse and exile, fratricide and violence (cf. 6:11) in humankind’s most recent history. But how will Noah bring comfort?

### 2.2.3 A Diverse Creation and Society: “According to Their Kinds” – Excursus

Genesis’ emphasis on diversity as opposed to uniformity is already seen in the first creation story. The way God created the world has implications for society. In Genesis 1, one of the key expressions is “according to their kinds,” *lāmîn*. The narrator applies this to the creation of the flora (day 3) and fauna (days 5-6).<sup>129</sup>

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, *lāmînô*.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds, *lāmînēhû*, and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds, *lāmînēhû*. And God saw that it was good. (1:11-12)

So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, *lāmînēhem*, and every winged bird according to its kind (*lāmînēhû*). And God saw that it was good. (1:21)

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds, *lāmînâh*: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind, *lāmînâh*.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, *lāmînâh*, the livestock according to their kinds, *lāmînâh*, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds, *lāmînēhû*. And God saw that it was good. (1:24-25)

In these five verses, the phrase “according to their kinds” occurs 10 times, so stressing the diversity of the created world. Seeing the beauty and usefulness of this colorfulness, it is stated each of these days (1:12, 21, 25), “And God saw that it was good.” What delights God is “the sheer, abundant variety of creatures” (Bauckham 2011: 219).

The term’s, *mîn*, “focus is on the comprehensive nature of God’s work of creation. It is its ability to express *variety* (not division, differentiation, or delimitation)” (Neville 2011: 218; his italics). The “expression conveys variety in order to establish the comprehensiveness of God’s creative work. God created everything of every kind” (226).

To say that this passage recognizes biodiversity is an understatement. It *celebrates* biodiversity. It paints a picture of a world teeming with many, many different forms of life. Another formula that occurs in the accounts of the fifth and sixth days is the statement that ‘God blessed them’ (1:22,28). God’s blessing is his gift of fecundity. He enables the creatures to ‘be fruitful and multiply’. Not only diversity but also abundance belongs to the Creator’s will for his creation. (Bauckham 2011: 218; his italics)

Later on, in ch. 6, when God decides to annihilate creation, he does so, however, by making sure diversity is upheld. God instructs Noah:

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<sup>128</sup> In the Atrahasis introduction to the flood, it is Enlil who has no rest because of the noise of humankind, created in the first place to relieve the gods from labor. The Genesis narrator may have this in mind. It is not just rest that is needed, and it is not the gods who need it, but comfort to humans laboring with the ground cursed by Yahweh. Noah is the only hope of a new creation after the divine judgment and the futility of human toil. This aspect is underlined by the series of namings in PH. Noah’s is the fourth naming so far followed by some rationale. On the first occasion, Eve was named as “the mother of all the living” by Adam (3:20). Then, Eve named her firstborn in a rather triumphant way, full of hope and vigor (4:1). Her third son Seth was named in full awareness of the need of divine assistance and in a hopeful tone, though marked by the previous loss (4:25). Lamech’s naming of Noah (5:29) is even more desperate, defined by resignation to the inevitable, with only a glimmer of hope. This series shows a deterioration of the human condition from creation to the flood. This is only implied in these namings, never explicitly stated nor elaborated on.

<sup>129</sup>

You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, *lāmîṇēhû*, of every kind of animal, *lāmîṇāh*, and of every kind of creature, *lāmîṇēhû*, that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. (6:19-20)

And that is what Noah does: the phrase occurs another 4 times in 7:13-15. After the deluge recedes, the narrator emphasizes that the animals leaving the ark to repopulate the earth did so “according to their kinds, *lāmîṣpəḥōtēhem*”. (8:19). Here, adherence to a flamboyant, multifaceted world is articulated, and this theme is elaborated in the book in greater detail.<sup>130</sup> The diversity of creation is emphasized here as well as in the following narrative.

In chs. 10 and 36, diversity is reemphasized. This time, it is not nature’s species though, as in ch. 1, but the organizing units of socio-political life. In the genealogy of Noah’s three sons in ch. 10, the three genealogies conclude with a similar wording:

From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans, *lāmîṣpəḥōtām*, within their nations, *bəḡōyēhem*, each with its own language, *lilšōnō*. (10:5)

These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, *lāmîṣpəḥōtām lilšōnōtām*, in their territories and nations, *bə’aršōtām bəḡōyēhem*. (10:20)

These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, *lāmîṣpəḥōtām lilšōnōtām*, in their territories and nations, *bə’aršōtām bəḡōyēhem*. (10:31)<sup>131</sup>

The next sentence in its turn concludes the genealogy of ch. 10:

These are the clans, *miṣpəḥōtām*, of Noah’s sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations, *lātōlādōtām bəḡōyēhem*. From these the nations, *haggōyîm*, spread out over the earth after the flood. (10:32)

At the same time, this sentence hearkens back to the first sentence of the genealogy:

This is the account, *tōlādōt*, of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. (10:1)

10:32 and 10:1 thus form an *inclusio*, embracing the genealogy.

The theme of ch. 10 is clearly the division of languages, lands, and nations. If some taxonomy is granted, “language” denotes culture, “nation” denotes society and politics, “clan” within nation denotes a smaller socio-ethnic unit, while “land” denotes the geographical territory necessary for society. It is worth noting in this context that the word “spread out,” *pārad*, in 10:5 and 10:32 first occurs in 2:10:

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

The separation, or spreading out, of the river is meant to provide for the abundance of the created world. Its dividing (*pārad*) into four creates life as well as diverse cultures.

The “spreading out” of Noah’s descendants in 10:5 and 32 can be taken as the basis for ethnic diversity. 25:23 uses the same verb (*pārad*, niphāl) in the sense of ethnic differentiation. Desperate Rebekah is encouraged about the twin brothers in her womb,

Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated, *pārad*; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger. (25:23)

The genealogies of Abraham’s descendants, those of Ishmael (25:12-18), Isaac (35:28-29), Esau (ch. 36), and Jacob (37:2), are introduced by the *toledot* formula (see Wilson 1977: 182). The pattern of ethnic identity recurs in the genealogies of Ishmael and Esau. That of Ishmael begins as follows:

This is the account, *tōlādōt*, of Abraham’s son Ishmael, whom Sarah’s maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth, *bišmōtām lātōlādōtām...* (25:12-13)

<sup>130</sup> But, whereas, in 1:28, God commanded humankind to subdue creation, here, God refrains from saying so. “With this phrase omitted, we know that God has learned something about man” (Gros Louis 1982: 47).

<sup>131</sup> Schüle (2006: 273) has also noticed the relationship between the creation account and the genealogy in ch. 10.

These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers, *nāšî'im* *lā'ummōtām*, according to their settlements and camps, *šāmōtām bəḥaṣrêhem ûbātîrōtām*. (25:16)

Origin denoting identity (“tribe”) is emphatic here as well as the origin of individual tribes (“in the order of their birth”, or, alternatively, “according to their names and origin”) just as the phrase “according to their settlements and camps” is (in Hebrew, two phrases denoting camps) underlining the nomadic way of life. The tribal rulers, *nāšî'im*, and subunits (“settlements and camps”) are noted as well; in contrast to Babylonian values, nomads are not ignored. The word “tribe,” *ummâ*, used in the OT, in addition to 25:16, only three times (Nu 25:15; Pss 2:1; 117:1), emphasizes socio-political organization, similarly to “nation,” *gōy*, and unlike the other frequently used phrase for “nation,” *am*, which rather connotes religion and individuals.

Esau’s genealogy consists of different subunits from that of Ishmael’s. This is just what one expects as Ishmael’s descendants were nomads while Edom settled down. The genealogy uses patterns known to us from the previous parts of the book:

These were the Horite chiefs, *‘allûpê haḥōrî*, according to their divisions, *lā‘allûpêhem*, in the land of Seir. These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned... (36:30-31)

And the list of Esau’s “aristocratic” descendants starts,

These were the chiefs descended from Esau, by name, *bišmōtām*, according to their clans, *lamišpəḥōtām*, and regions, *limqōmōtām*... (36:40)

Again, “kind,” that is, the category of socio-political stratification (chief, clan, region, individual), is emphatic. It makes the organizing of Esau’s tribal descendants into a nation possible. “Chief” (or “tribe”; *allûf*) is used in the OT with reference to Edom only (Gen 36:15-19, 21, 29-30, 40-43; Exod 15:15; 1 Chron 1:51-54).<sup>132</sup> The king list in Gen 36:31-39 is reminiscent of those in Kings, even if simpler. Its pattern is plain: 1) N, the son of O reigned after P; 2) the name of N’s capital city (or his birth place); 3) N died. A comparison with Israel’s/Judah’s kings might not be far from the narrator’s intention as the commencing sentence makes it obvious:

These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned... (36:31)

This note can be considered a homage to Edom, the kingdom, and so the statehood, which long preceded that of Judah or Israel (cf. Num 20:14). Edom’s offspring, however, does not only consist of kings. Indeed, the chapter begins with Esau’s genealogy (36:1-30).

The genealogies of Ishmael and Esau are interesting examples of creating civilization (cf. McConville 2006: 37). Conspicuously, the genealogies in chs. 25 and 36 deal with Abraham’s descendants. The related tribes of the Ishmaelites and Edomites, however, were seen as foreigners. Edom (after Genesis, the Ishmaelites are not referred to), even though not to be annihilated in Deuteronomist theology (see Deut 2:1-8), was a permanent nuisance for Israel (see, e.g., 2 Sam 8:13-14; Isa 34). Edom’s role in Jerusalem’s looting in 586 begs the question: If the Pentateuch took its final shape after the exile, what made the editor view Edom in such a positive way? Why is Esau, exceptionally, allotted two *toledot* formulae (36:1, 9)? And why are Esau’s descendants listed at this length (43 verses; cf. Wenham 1999: 244)? In any case, it is to be explained why the narrative of Genesis got to contain these two *foreign* genealogies. The narrator drew the contours of an alternative world to that of the Babylonian empire that had place not just for relatives, but for those not belonging to the family as well (cf. Goldingay 1998a; 2003: 159). This also explains the placement of Esau’s genealogy (contra Wilson 1977: 199).<sup>133</sup>

It is worth comparing MKL with Edom’s and Ishmael’s lists of rulers. Malamat (1968) has pointed out the difference between Mesopotamian and West Semitic genealogies. Whereas the former are vertical or linear, i.e. tracing the family from father to son to grandson etc., the latter tend to take account of horizontal relationships as well, often mentioning female members, so forming a family

<sup>132</sup> The phrase is used also in Zech 9:7 and 12:5-6 where, however, several scholars read it with a different punctuation, *‘elef*.

<sup>133</sup> In this way, the promise to Abraham (12:2; 15:5; 17:6, 16) is fulfilled (McConville 2006: 37).

tree and “revealing a genealogical panorama of a single tribe or of an entire group of peoples” (Malamat 1968: 163).

The list of Edom’s kings resembles MKL with an emphasis on continuity in the royal line. This is, however, counterbalanced by the impression given by its kings being apparently elected rather than hereditary, as well as by the first list which is more in the fashion of WSL stressing tribal relations. The same holds for Ishmael’s offspring.

Like the stratification of flora and fauna, the coming about of countries, nations, and languages as well as that of the socio-political stratification of Ishmael’s and Esau’s descendants are regarded in Genesis as something valuable. The former (ch. 1) entails natural, the latter (chs. 10, 25, and 36) socio-cultural diversity. Both are indispensable in the world.<sup>134</sup> They not only make life bearable but diversity grants the world and life their God ordained role.

The only exception in the diversity of creation is humankind. The author, most strikingly, does not stratify humankind as opposed to flora and fauna; “the multiplicity of animals is contrasted with the ‘unity’ of human beings, an opposition also indicated by the consistent absence of *mîn* whenever references are made to human beings” (Beauchamp 1997: 290; cf. Cotter 2003: 18). Having seen how much God enjoys diversity in creation, the explanation must be: there is only one human race and any subordination within humanity is a denial of the Creator’s intention. In other words, diversity in the socio-cultural world is not a “creation order” but, like culture itself, a human achievement.

Equality within the human race is propagated in the account of Genesis 1. God sets out to create humankind:

“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.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (1:26-27)

Clearly, animal species consist of male and female individuals as well. Still, the narrator notes only of humankind that it was created male and female. The human race bears God’s image only through its being “stratified” into male and female (see Tribble 1978: 17; Goldingay 1995: 94).

### **2.3 The Flood: A New Beginning by Destruction, 6:1–9:19**

Genesis 6–9 relates the flood, preceded by an enigmatic story of supernatural beings. As well-known, Mesopotamia also had its own versions of the flood predating that of Genesis, as well as myths and epics about supernatural beings. These provide the background to the Genesis story that draws on its Mesopotamian source and polemicizes with its theology.

#### **2.3.1 Before the Flood: Of Demigods, Giants, and Heroes, 6:1-8**

“This is unquestionably one of the obscurest sections of the Torah, and all the varied views advanced concerning it by later generations not only did not contribute to its elucidation, but, on the contrary, served to cloud its significance and make it more and more incomprehensible.” Even though we have gained much insight on the section since this statement by Cassuto (1973: 17) was first made in 1942-43, it has not become entirely dated. Certainly, it is, now as before, one of the obscurest sections of the Pentateuch. Part of the problem lies in the fact that it is arguably the most mythic section of the OT (Petersen 1979: 49), without preceding or succeeding discussion. It is about divine beings and demigods, heroes and giants, and, related in some way to these, the limitation of human life span and Yahweh’s decision to destroy creation.

This enigmatic passage presupposes acquaintance with the mythological background of *nēpīlīm* and *gibbōrīm*, gods’ sons and their marriage with women (Schüle 2006: 225), or “underlying versions of the flood story” differing from and alluded to by 6:1-4 (Kvanvig 2002: 90). I will study this

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<sup>134</sup> Slivniak’s deconstructionist reading (2003) stresses the opposition and interdependence of nature and culture.



putative background and try to determine the function of the passage as the introduction to the flood story.

6:1-4 is placed in its narrower and wider contexts of 6:1-8 and the flood. Having a new context, it receives a new content as well. That is to say, whatever the original was, it is now to be understood as the preface to the flood.<sup>135</sup> As such, it is difficult to read it as not providing a rationale for the flood.

Of 6:1-4, Cassuto (1973: 25) claims, “The passage is in no way connected with the account of the Flood.” Though noticing the discordance, Wenham disagrees. While it “appears to have little connection with the preceding genealogy, it is in fact closely integrated with it.” “By focusing on God’s ‘making’ and ‘creating man’ in 6:6, 7 and 5:1, 2, it also forms a loose *inclusio* with the opening paragraph 5:1-5” (1987: 136).<sup>136</sup> 6:1-7 serves as the introduction to the flood (cf. Longacre 1979: 93). Seen in this light, the concordant elements of the section are emphasized, with discordance acknowledged. To be sure, there are quite a few of the latter (see Kvanvig 2002: 79-90), with the first word signaling a new time setting in contrast to the foregoing (Kvanvig 2002: 81; cf. Baker 1980: 191-92).

The genealogies in chs. 5 and 10 are reminiscent of SKL, consisting of ante- and postdiluvian sections and interrupted by a reference to the flood. Ch. 5 leads up to the flood hero (5:29, 32). Readers familiar with SKL should at this point expect some remark on the flood. And, indeed, it starts in 6:9. It is, however, prefaced by the strange section on demigods, giants, and heroes.

The following structure may help us recognize the main motifs and thrust of 6:1-7. In demarcating the unit’s limits, it is necessary to bear in mind that the episode does not end at v. 4 as if it were an intrusive remnant of some myth (contra Cassuto 1973; Westermann 1976: 491-517; Gohán 1988: 82-86).<sup>137</sup> Indeed, it has integrating features.

**A** Humankind increases,<sup>138</sup> “and daughters were born to them, *ûbānôt yullədû lāhem*,” 6:1

**B** “The sons of God saw, *wayyir’û*, that the daughters of men were good, and they married any of them they chose,” 6:2 (AT)

**C** Yahweh utters his decision, *wayy’ômer yhw̄h*: humans will have 120 years to the flood; 6:3

**A’** “The giants 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, *wəyālədû lāhem*,” 6:4

**B’** Yahweh sees, *wayyar’*, that humankind’s makings are evil, so, he regrets having created them; 6:5-6

**C’** Yahweh utters his decision, *wayy’ômer yhw̄h*, to destroy the earth; 6:7

**A-A’** portray the first step leading to the crisis. A’ (along with B) refers to mythical beings who marry the daughters of humankind. Led by theological considerations interpreters (e.g., Calvin 1847: 104; Keil 1949: 131-34) sometimes deny or play down the story’s mythical character, thought to be foreign to the Bible. They do not take the “sons of god” in its obvious ANE sense as divine

<sup>135</sup> This canonical context is often ignored by interpreters. A good case in point is Kvanvig’s otherwise excellent study. He puts 6:1-4 in context with a short sentence (2002: 111): “First when we read 6,1-4 in the context of 6,5 ff the perspective changes: The multiplication of humans in v 1 increases the multiplication of sin in v 5.” Petersen (1979: 50) suggests that the function of 6:1-4 is the ordering of human cosmos but fails to demonstrate this in context.

<sup>136</sup> Wenham makes these statements of 6:1-8 and 6:5-8 but, apart from “Yahweh,” the keywords he mentions (“man,” “God,” “sons,” “daughters,” “make,” “create”) do not occur in v. 8. In addition to this, disregarding the chiasm of 6:5-8, v. 8 is not material to the introduction of the flood but rather starts the story itself.

<sup>137</sup> This seems to be the upshot of Schüle’s analysis too (2006: 219-46,) who in a novel way suggests that 6:1-4 is a creation text. 6:1 clearly “dates” the episode at the period of the multiplication of humankind though.

<sup>138</sup> Kvanvig (2002: 95) notices the similarity in terminology between the Atrahasis and the Genesis introductions to the respective flood stories.



beings (see Pss 29:1; 89:7; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; cf. Deut 32:8, LXX).<sup>139</sup> The LXX renders the term *'uioi tou theou*. The oldest Jewish interpretations also took it in this sense (Cassuto 1973: 19, 21), and the mythic content of the phrase is not only supported but elaborated on by several ancient translations. The Hebrew term's possessive can be singular, "God's sons," or plural, "gods' sons."<sup>140</sup> This latter rendering can be found in Aramaic rabbinic sources (*bānê 'ēlāhayyā*) as well as in Aquila's translation (*'uioi tōn theōn*) (Cassuto 1973: 20). Alternatively, "sons of god" sometimes refers to kings in Babylonian texts (Kline 1962; cf. Millard 1967: 12). For the first audience, this equivocalness perhaps granted the opportunity to see the "sons of God/gods" as, first of all, heavenly beings but also as rulers.

The difference and similarity between **B** and **B'** are that **B** refers to the perception of God's sons while **B'** to that of God, expressed in both cases by the verb "see." Whereas the latter, as far as its result is concerned, is negative, the first is positive – they are contrasted. The perception of the sons of God underlines that God's creation is *good*, stressed in the creation account seven times (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) and implied in the account of the woman's creation (2:18-24) (contra Kaminski 2008: 457-73). Opposed to this is God's perception. But what exactly does he see as evil?

**C-C'** report Yahweh's two decisions: 1) human lifespan is cut or, alternatively, humans will have 120 years to the flood; 2) the annihilation of created life. Regarding neither of God's decisions is there a consensus among scholars. The structure above points in the direction that the giants (6:4) and Yahweh's decision (6:7) are in some way related, as were Yahweh's decision in 6:3 and the cohabitation of divine and human beings in 6:1-2. At the same time, it should be emphasized that no sin or transgression is explicitly pinpointed in the preface.

The next section starts at 6:9, signaled by the *toledot* formula (cf. Longacre 1979: 93; Wenham 1987: 155). The two units, 6:1-7 and 6:9-22, make 6:8, however, appear as a redundant, disjunctive note. The reference to Noah's finding mercy with Yahweh, a preparatory sentence, can be seen just as isolated in its context as Noah himself was in his generation.

6:1-2 speak of the multiplication of humankind to whom daughters are born, *yullədû*. Immediately before it, however, we read of Noah fathering, *yôled*, three sons (5:32). This is repeated in 6:10 so enveloping the section on the events on earth and God's reaction to them. Also, the second note on Noah's sons is right after the note on Noah's righteousness (6:9) and before mentioning Yahweh's perception of humanity's corruption (6:11-12). By juxtaposing the births of humankind's daughters and Noah's sons, human violence and Noah's righteousness, two human groups and two ways of life are contrasted and God's decision and choice become clearer.

Importantly, in **A**, the protagonist is humankind, while in **A'** it is the sons of God and giants; in **B**, it is the sons of God,<sup>141</sup> while, in both **B'** and **C-C'**, it is God himself. Seeing the developments on earth, God gets more and more involved, finally taking over the initiative. God does not do this because of rebellion, i.e. vertical sin, but because of ethical concerns, i.e. horizontal sin, as I will

<sup>139</sup> Cassuto (1973) does not make a distinction between "divine beings" and "angels," a consequence of his preference for an "angelic interpretation." He regards both the plural and singular genitive as of the same semantic content (1973: 20, n. 18), his argument, however, is not compelling. He distinguishes between angels of lower and higher ranks and thinks 6:2 refers to the former (23). Angels of higher and lower ranks might be known in some passages of the OT, acknowledged by Cassuto elsewhere (1989: 294). The Pentateuch does not know of a developed angelology though.

<sup>140</sup> In some instances (e.g., Deut 14:1; 32:5; Ps 73:15; Hos 2:1), the phrase obviously refers to Israel, but is to be taken in a polemic sense: it is not divine beings but Israel who is Yahweh's sons. Calvin (1847: 238; see also Keil 1949: 131-34) expresses his stupefaction over the mythic interpretation: "That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity, and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious." James Barr (1992: 84) deems interpretations of Calvin's kind as the demythologizing of the passage. On the three main interpretive options and one similar to mine, see Wenham 1987: 139-41.

<sup>141</sup> Sure, it is the sons of God who act in 6:2. Their action may be an "acting upon," still, their "taking" the daughters of humankind is not against the will of their future wives as if they were just puppets in the hands of male power (so Baumgart 1999: 113-14).

argue. God's growing frustration and taking the initiative are signaled by the multiple references to God's perception in 6:5-13.

In Greek mythology, gods and goddesses frequently established intimate relationships with mortals. In Hellas, this was such a well-known topos that, risking an overstatement, human beings without some divine pedigree or demigod relation were the exceptions to the rule. While, in ANE, divine-human marriage, disregarding the sacred marriage topos, does not seem to occupy such an important place, it is not unknown.<sup>142</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that the motif of divine-human marriage was well-known in Israel's neighborhood. From Egypt to Canaan to Mesopotamia, fertility cults were practiced, in which the marriage of the fertility goddess (Innin in Sumer, Ishtar in Babylonia) was dramatized. This resulted in cultic prostitution, an abhorrent thing for Israel.<sup>143</sup>

In the Gilgamesh epic, popular in 7<sup>th</sup> century Assyria and in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia, the goddess Ishtar happens to see Gilgamesh bathe and falls in love with him. Gilgamesh himself is a demigod, the son of King Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun.<sup>144</sup> In Tablet VI, Ishtar resorts to sweet-talk.

Come to me, Gilgamesh, and be my lover!  
Bestow on me the gift of your fruit!  
You can be my husband, and I can be your wife.

But Gilgamesh rejects the proposal by reminding Ishtar of her fickleness,

Which of your lovers [lasted] forever?  
Which of your masterful paramours went to heaven?  
Come, let me [describe (?)] your lovers to you!  
He of the sheep (?) [... ..] knew him:  
For Dumuzi the lover of your youth  
You decreed that he should keep weeping year after year.  
You loved the colourful *allallu*-bird,  
But you hit him and broke his wing.  
He stays in the woods crying "My wing!"  
You loved the lion, whose strength is complete,  
But you dug seven and seven pits for him.  
You loved the horse, so trustworthy in battle,  
But you decreed the whip, goad, and lash for him,  
You decreed that he should gallop seven leagues (non-stop),  
You decreed that he should be overwrought and thirsty,  
You decreed endless weeping for his mother Sililu.  
You loved the shepherd, herdsman, and chief shepherd  
Who was always heaping up the glowing ashes for you,  
And cooked ewe-lambs for you every day.  
But you hit him and turned him into a wolf,  
His own her-boys hunt him down  
And his dogs tear at his haunches.  
You loved Ishullanu, your father's gardener,  
Who was always bringing you baskets of dates.  
They brightened your table every day;  
You lifted your eyes to him and went to him  
"My own Ishullanu, let us enjoy your strength,  
So put out your hand and touch our vulva!"

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<sup>142</sup> Contra Fockner (2008: 436; cf. Schüle 2009), who claims marriage between gods and humans in ANE was unknown.

<sup>143</sup> Lambert (1968: 106-07) claims that we have conclusive evidence of the sacred marriage as far back as the III. dynasty of Ur. Note, however, that, by Neo-Babylonian times, the sacred marriage ritual was celebrated but not re-enacted (Sefati 1998: 46-47).

<sup>144</sup> Even though "demigod" might be a controversial term, I use it in its general sense, "a minor god, or a being that is partly a god and partly human" (Turnbull 2010: 403). On Gilgamesh's being a demigod, see George 2003: 119-35. Bührer (2011: 512) has also noticed the link with the Gilgamesh tradition.

By supplying “unsolicited” information (see Kreuzer 2006: 42), this passage seems self-explanatory: although rarely attested, human-divine marriage or cohabitation is assumed as something obvious or possible in Mesopotamia (similarly Walton 1990: 202-03). The epic begins with the following portrayal of its hero:

[Of him who] found out all things, I [shall te]ll the land,  
[Of him who] experienced everything, [I shall tea]ch the whole.  
He searched (?) the lands (?) everywhere.  
He who experienced the whole gained complete wisdom.  
He found out what was secret and uncovered what was hidden,  
He brought back a tale of times before the Flood.  
He had journeyed far and wide, weary and at last resigned.  
He engraved all toils on a memorial monument of stone.  
He had the wall of Uruk built, the sheepfold  
Of holiest Eanna, the pure treasury.  
See its wall, which is like a copper band,  
Survey its battlements, which nobody else can match,  
Take the threshold, which is from time immemorial,  
Approach Eanna, the home of Ishtar,  
Which no future king nor any man will ever match!  
Go up on the wall of Uruk and walk around!  
Inspect the foundation platform and scrutinize the brickwork!  
Testify that its bricks are baked bricks,  
And that the Seven Counsellors must have laid its foundations!  
One square mile is city, one square mile is orchards,  
one square mile is claypits, as well as the open  
ground of Ishtar’s temple.  
Three square miles and the open ground comprise Uruk.  
Look for the copper tablet-box,  
Undo its bronze lock,  
Open the door to its secret,  
Lift out the lapis lazuli tablet and read it,  
The story of that man, Gilgamesh, who went  
through all kinds of sufferings.  
He was superior to other kins, a warrior lord of great stature,  
A hero born of Uruk, a goring wild bull.  
He marches at the front as leader,  
He goes behind, the support of his brothers,  
A strong net, the protection of his men,  
The raging flood-wave, which can destroy even a stone wall.  
Son of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, perfect in strength,  
Son of the lofty cow, the wild cow Ninsun.  
He is Gilgamesh, perfect in splendour,  
Who opened up passes in the mountains,  
Who could dig pits even in the mountainside,  
Who crossed the ocean, the broad seas, as far as the sunrise.  
Who inspected the edges of the world, kept searching for eternal life,  
Who reached Ut-napisthim the far-distant, by force.  
Who restored to their rightful place cult centres (?)  
which the Flood had ruined.  
There is nobody among the kings of teeming humanity  
Who can compare with him,  
Who can say “I am king” beside Gilgamesh.  
Gilgamesh (was) named from birth for fame.  
Two-thirds of him was divine, and one-third mortal. (Tablet I)

Gilgamesh, two-thirds god, is of enormous stature: eleven cubits, roughly 5 meters (cf. Walton 2009: 45).<sup>145</sup> The height of his companion Enkidu is noteworthy too.<sup>146</sup> They were attributed feats like the killing of the lion, the heavenly bull, and the monster Huwawa.<sup>147</sup> At the same time, Gilgamesh was dreaded in Uruk for his tyrannical rule and, importantly, the *jus primae noctis*. “So it is clear that even if specific sources for Gen 6:1-8 cannot be identified, Genesis is making use of well-known oriental ideas” (Wenham 1987: 138). Gilgamesh belongs to the “heroes of old” (similarly Wenham 1987: 146).<sup>148</sup> The *apkallu*, the semidivine sages and heroes before the flood, also marry human daughters, whose descendants were considered infamous (Kilmer 1987; cf. Walton 2013: 45-46).

Yahweh’s decision to shorten human life may thus be seen as a soft polemic against the high view of the Mesopotamian antediluvian kings on the respective lists. “Even this race of supermen, or a humankind with superman at its head, is still *bāšār*, is Yahweh’s appropriate dictum” (Kraeling 1947: 198). Divinely sired men do not live immensely long lives either (200). The problem with this interpretation is that there is only one major character in Genesis who did not live 120 years, Joseph dying at 110 (Hartley 2000: 96). Based on a comparison with Atrahasis, Kvanvig argues (2002: 98-99; cf. Fockner 2008: 451-52) for the alternative that the 120 years in 6:3 are the time gap between God’s decision and its execution by the flood. He also proposes that *yādôn* in 6:3 might be a derivative of Akkadian *danānu*, “be strong, powerful.” If so, it is a nice play on the word “heroes” in 6:4 (109).

Positing a Mesopotamian background, Clines (1979: 39-40; similarly Kvanvig 2002: 107-10; 2011: 285) suggests that the phrase *bāšaggam* consists of the preposition *b* plus a noun cognate with the Assyrian verb *šagāmu*, “to bellow, howl,” echoing the Atrahasis epic where people begin to multiply (see 6:1) and their bellowing disturbs Enlil.

The obscure word *napilīm*, recurring in Num 13:33 only, is translated by the LXX as *gigantēs*. The narrator of 6:4 may have giants of ANE myths like Gilgamesh in mind. These figures lived both before and after the flood, were heroes, and were venerated.

Three further remarks on 6:4 seem in order. First, whatever its origin, the verse’s present “mutilated” form suggests that the narrator, by not dwelling on these heroes, wanted to limit their perceived significance to a minimum. Second and related to this, the identity as well as ancestry of the giants and the heroes remain enigmatic. Both seem to be introduced on the assumption that the audience is familiar with them. To the present-day reader, at least, the clause “They were the heroes of old, men of renown” is ambiguous as to its reference. Is it the giants now identified with the heroes or, rather, is it the offspring of the human-divine marriages to whom the narrator refers? If this syntactical ambiguity is intended and the referent was not clear to the first audience either, the narrator may intend to make an ambiguous distinction between giants and heroes and shroud them, and their descent in particular, in mystery. In this way, he leaves more room for interpretation by

<sup>145</sup> Buttressed by line 34 of a Gilgamesh fragment from Ugarit found in 1993 (see George 2007: 240, 242).

<sup>146</sup> Batto (1992: 66-67) also sees the Enkidu parallel as significant. The “giants,” he considers a reference to the *lullû*, the divine-human primeval man in Gilgamesh and Atrahasis.

<sup>147</sup> Not only mythic prehistory, however, but historic memory too reports of such heroes. Naram-sin attributed to himself divine prerogatives. Tiglat-Pileser I gained fame as a builder and hunter. Reportedly, he embarked on a sea trip to hunt big sea animals. Still, he was remembered not only for his hunting or building achievements but as a conqueror who pushed the borders of his empire as far to the West as the Mediterranean. Wenham (2015: 90) mentions the ancient belief that Gilgamesh, Alexander the Great and Augustus, among others, were great men of the past, fathered by gods.

<sup>148</sup> Another Mesopotamian tradition, along with a late tale of Ailanos, intimates that the circumstances of Lugalbanda and Ninsun’s marriage resulting in Gilgamesh’s birth were highly unusual (Wilcke 1989: 563). It is not less unusual for the readers of Genesis to learn of these divine-human marriages. In addition, Anne Kilmer (1987: 39-41) notes that four semi-divine postdiluvian *apkallu* could probably mate with the daughters of humankind and were endowed with special powers and wisdom. By using those powers for good or ill, they could both offend and impress the gods. In addition to Gilgamesh, heroes like Enmerkar or Lugalbanda were also born of such marriages (cf. Schüle 2006: 222). On the poem Lugalbanda and Ninsuna, narrating King Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun’s wedding, see Jacobsen 1989.

the first audience.<sup>149</sup> Third, the narrator has managed to populate his narrative world with sons of gods, giants, and heroes by, at the same time, making God the main protagonist of pre-flood events. PH views the heroes in an ambiguous way. In the religion of Babylonia where giant heroes and demigods had an enormous religious significance, their import cannot be overlooked. Although low-key, it still appears to be a polemic against Mesopotamian myths and religion. On the other hand, these heroes did achieve something to become men of renown. Therefore, they are not to be regarded as “horrible people” (so Waltke 2001: 118). The narrator would have had plenty of possibilities to characterize them more negatively but he did not. Rather, bearing the reservations above in mind, these heroes are presented in a positive light, while at the same time, in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, relativized.

Rüdiger Bartelmus (1979) has studied the concept of heroes in Sumer, Ugarit, and Greece, of which Sumer concerns us.<sup>150</sup> He has found that the hero concept is linked to a heroic age and probably aims at the legitimation of the reigning dynasty or king (46). Clearly, the effect of 6:1-4 is just the opposite: by relativizing these heroes, royal claims are downplayed. And there is no follow-up to kings or dynasties.

This interpretation seems to be underscored by a look at early Mesopotamian kingship. Sjöberg’s extensive list of Sumerian and Old-Babylonian kings (1972) shows that divine descent was the norm. Sjöberg mentions by name some three dozen kings descended from Mesopotamian deities from the three senior gods Anu, Enlil, and Enki to Marduk, Shamash, Sin as fathers, to Ninlil, Ninhursag, Ninsun, Nanna, and Nanshe as mothers. No doubt, this development in Mesopotamian royal ideology was used for political ends. This may be a parallel to 6:2. As for the lack of any reference to kings in Gen 6:1-4, we should not miss them – PH’s narrator is not aware of royals.

If human-divine marriage was well-known in ANE and something abominable to Israel, Yahweh’s decision (6:3) can be explained as a punishment for crossing the boundary between the divine and human worlds (so Wenham 1987: 146) or as a preventive action.<sup>151</sup> “The sexual mingling of the Sons of God and the daughters of men creates an imbalance and a confusion in the cosmic order. The birth of the demigods threatens the fabric of the cosmos” (Hendel 1987: 23; cf. Brueggemann 1982: 72). But is it really the cosmic order God is concerned about? Is it not rather the social order that is giving God a headache? I will interpret the section with an eye on PH’s view of egalitarian society and its broader context. As for this context, I have referred to Sasson’s chart (1980: 218; cf. Tomasino 1992; Carr 1998a: 329), which I slightly modify.

A	Creation, 1:1–2:15	A’	Flood: Anticreation, 6:9–9:3
B	Prohibition and warning, 2:16-17	B’	Prohibition and warning, 9:3-17
C	In and out of the garden, 2:18–4:16	C’	In the garden, 9:18-29
	Curses, 3:14-19; 4:11-12		Curse, 9:25
D	Genealogies, 4:17–5:32	D’	Genealogies, 10:1-32; 11:10-26
E	Heroes, 6:1-8	E’	Tower of Babylon, 11:1-9

<sup>149</sup> I am inclined to see “they” (6:4) as referring to the “giants/nephilim,” thus equating the giants and heroes (similarly Hamilton 1990: 270; contra Kraeling 1947: 196). Kraeling (1947: 203) attributes the identification of giants and heroes to an editor’s correction of the author’s work. Gese (1973) sees in the note a critique of Mesopotamian death cult. Ingeniously, Sarna (1989: 46) suggests that “nephilim” is used “for oratorical effect, much as ‘Huns’ was used to designate Germans during two world wars.”

<sup>150</sup> Unfortunately, he does not study Akkadian literature.

<sup>151</sup> Hendel (1987: 18-19) calls attention to Hesiod’s Catalogue of Women where Zeus is intent on preventing the birth of demigods stemming from the wedding of gods and human beings. Gese (1973) emphasizes the similarity to ch. 3 where the boundary between humankind’s mortality and God’s immortality is established. Oden (1981: 214-15) sees divine order breached by humankind’s violence as the main reason contributing to the flood. He points out that both Atrahasis and the Genesis flood story conclude with divine regulations, similar or dissimilar in content, portraying “humans aspiring to divine status – which status is ultimately denied them” (215).



Concluding their respective sections, E and E' correspond to each other in vocabulary and theme. 6:1 speaks of the beginning of multiplication of humankind, whereas 11:6 of the beginning of what humankind will do; 6:1-4 relates actions of the “daughters of humankind” and “sons of God,” whereas the tower is built by the “sons of humankind” (11:5); 6:4 refers to “heroes of old, men of name” (AT), whereas Nimrod, another “hero” (10:8), is implicitly among Babylon’s builders making themselves a name (11:4). I see in both cases the sin committed against creation and not the Creator directly.

Regarding theme, I will argue that 11:1-9 is about an attempt at a centralized, homogeneous empire defying the Creator’s original plan. Reading 6:1-4 in this light means that humankind’s sin here is not a violation of human-divine boundaries either. Rather, their elevation above their fellow humans creates a boundary between themselves and the rest of humankind – the heroes violated interhuman relations. God’s original creation was meant for one human species. This is changing with the appearance of heroes and superhumans – human society becomes stratified and hierarchic.

Finally,

The LORD was grieved, *wayyinnāhem*, that he had made, ‘*āsā*, man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain, *wayyit’asšēb*. So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, *hā’ādāmā*—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved (*nihamtī*) that I have made them, ‘*asītim*.” (6:6-7)

God’s grief plays on Noah’s naming by Lamech.

He named him Noah, *nōah*, and said, “He will comfort us, *yanaḥāmēnū*, in the labor, *mimma’āsēnū*, and painful toil, *mē’iṣṣābōn*, of our hands caused by the ground, *hā’ādāmā*, the LORD has cursed.” (5:29)

“Lamech’s hope for comfort turns into God’s repentance for the creation of humanity. This leads to the Flood in which Noah continues to play a key role” (Hess 1993: 116-17).

Richard Hess observes of the conclusions of the respective genealogies (chs. 4 and 5) that

both Lamechs play pivotal roles in their lines and both have statements recorded in the text. But Cain’s Lamech utters a cry of vengeance and with that terminates his line; while Seth’s Lamech expresses the hope for a better life for his descendants, and with that introduces the offspring who will continue his line and play a role in trying to fulfill his wish. (1993: 142)

The fulfilment of Lamech’s wish takes place in the flood to which I now turn.

### 2.3.2 The Flood, 6:9-8:19

Ever since George Smith delivered, on December 3, 1872, his groundbreaking lecture on “The Chaldean Account of the Deluge” that came to be known as the Gilgamesh epic, comparing Gilgamesh and the Genesis flood account has been a preferred way of approach.

In ancient Mesopotamia, the flood was a landmark event of orientation. In historiography, there were antediluvian and postdiluvian times (see Lambert and Millard 1969: 18). The flood not only divided “real” human and primeval histories but also marked a qualitative shift. Before, humankind was immortal and essential cultural inventions were mediated by the mythic sages, the *apkallu*, who were therefore instrumental in Mesopotamian culture. Afterwards, it was “normal” human history.

The Atrahasis epic begins by reference to the hard labor the junior gods have to suffer as a consequence of the senior gods’ ordering the world. After forty years, the Igigi mutiny and the rebellion results in a compromise between them and the Anunnaki. The decision of creating humankind is made and duly executed. Now, it is humankind who bears the load of the Igigi – the gods are relieved and can enjoy the fruit of humankind’s work, i.e. the offerings. Apparently, however, an unforeseen problem mars the life of the gods: through multiplication, humankind gets noisy/rebellious so depriving Enlil of much needed sleep. He decides to decimate the human populace first by plague, then by famine, by drought, and finally by other calamities. All these do not, however, achieve the aim intended as there is a saboteur within divine ranks, Enki, who frustrates Enlil’s plans by communicating them to the pious and wise Atrahasis. Finally, Enlil

grows suspicious and orders the annihilation of all humankind by a worldwide flood. But again, Enki outsmarts his colleague by telling Atrahasis to build an ark. During and after the flood, the gods are portrayed as terrified as well as angry with Enlil because the destruction of humankind in the seven-day flood robs them of sacrifice food. With the waters receding, Atrahasis disembarks from the ark and offers sacrifice to the gods who gather “like flies over the offering.” Enlil is of course angry on learning that there are survivors. An argument between Enlil and the other gods ensues, concluded by a compromise of making humankind mortal and stopping unlimited multiplication by birth control measures.

This account of the deluge was not acceptable without modifications for the Jewish sages (see Müller 1985: 299). Thus, Genesis offers its own version with remarkable similarities as well as telltale differences. The reason for the annihilation is made clear. It is evident that overpopulation, a rather questionable *casus belli* (see Kilmer 1972: 172-74), is not Yahweh’s concern in Genesis. Indeed, after the flood, God commands humankind to be fruitful and multiply (9:1, 7; Kilmer 1972: 174-75). Instead of overpopulation or opposition to divine authority, it is wickedness on earth that impacts Yahweh, coupled with the establishing of boundaries in human society. In God’s perception, conditions are pretty bad:

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. (6:5)

This statement is surprising for two reasons. As we have seen, ch. 4 presents a balanced picture of humankind’s capability of good and evil: even the first murderer achieves things that, in Mesopotamian mythology, were attributed to gods or divine beings. Second, 6:1-4 addressed some issues like the cohabitation of divine and human beings, the existence of giants and heroes that can be interpreted negatively. Still, the narrator did not draw the conclusion Yahweh did; in his view, humankind knows good and evil and not “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” The narrator’s and Yahweh’s perceptions do not seem to match.

6:11-12 further underlines Yahweh’s view of a world beyond redemption.

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. (RSV)

If Yahweh’s perception does not match reality and it is his overreaction that partly causes the flood, this may be morally disturbing. It is, however, in line with the cause of the deluge in Atrahasis. There, the gods, with their ringleader Enlil, similarly overreact.

The state of affairs on earth is emphasized by the term in v. 1 “the face of the earth” recurring in v. 7 thus forming an *inclusio*:

When men began to increase in number *on the face of the earth*... (6:1; AT)

So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, *from the face of the earth*...” (6:7)

Importantly, it is “in God’s sight” that the earth is corrupt (6:5, 11). Yahweh has taken a big step from his rather reserved, matter-of-factly-observing self in 3:22 noting the change in the conditions of humankind, to a more agitated and involved deity. And it is not only Yahweh’s overreaction that he has in common with Mesopotamian gods. There are other features shared by Genesis and Atrahasis.

In Atrahasis, Enlil grows angry because of the noise of the growing human masses, or because of their rebellion (so Pettinato 1968; Batto 1987: 160; 1987a: 192-93; Kvanvig 2002: 107-10; differently Albertz 1999). Here, it is human violence and evil that lead to Yahweh’s judgment. Even though violence is not elaborated on, in 4:1-16 and 17-26, it is dominant (cf. Carr 2011: 293). Indeed, Batto claims that the narrative in ch. 4 intends to provide rationale for the flood (1992: 86). This is emphasized by the parallel arrangement of Cain and Lamech who concludes Cain’s genealogy which is, in this way, enveloped by two murderers (see Hess 1991: 21-22). In 6:11-13, both the narrator and Yahweh state once again that due to the spread of violence earth cannot be spared.

Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 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." (6:11-13)

"Violence," *ḥāmās*, occurs here for the first time, and, the lack of previous usage notwithstanding, must be connected with the shedding of blood (Stoebe 1971: 586; Frymer-Kensky 1977: 153; see 4:8, 23).<sup>152</sup> The same earth God created and saw as very good (1:31) has become corrupt (cf. 1:31 and 6:12; see Hendel 1995: 46) and humanity has corrupted itself, *hišḥîṭ* (6:12), so God decides (6:13) to destroy it, *mašḥîṭām* (Clines 1972-73: 135). This only reaffirms what 6:5 has already claimed of Yahweh's concern about human wickedness. God intends to destroy corrupt creation and start all over with humankind. God is troubled by what he "sees," humankind's wickedness and corruption (6:5, 12). For God, horizontal aspects are decisive in his decision of annihilation of the world. Thus, the punishment is justified even if it seems to be out of proportion. God in Genesis is concerned with social and inter-human realities. Vertical aspects are not mentioned. Seeing this, Pettinato's claim that Atrahasis provides a firmer ethical basis than Genesis where humankind's sin and sinful behavior are described in rather vague terms (1968: 200) seems off the mark.

In ch. 7, two apparently insignificant statements are made.

Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. (7:6)

And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. (7:10; but cf. 7:17 too)

These may be allusions to SKL which also mentions twice that the flood came. Needless to say, Noah's story, introduced by the *toledot* formula (6:9), is not one of a king nor is his a royal genealogy, as Babylonians would expect, but of a commoner – unlike Atrahasis/Ziusudra/Utnapishtim, Noah is no king and no priest.<sup>153</sup> He is a commoner and a just one at that (6:9). His righteousness is as much emphasized as that of Atrahasis or Utnapishtim (Gilgamesh 11.27).<sup>154</sup> The Genesis story seems to imply that Noah was righteous in that he was innocent of the violence of his society. This might be hinted at by the unusual *toledot* formula.

This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. (6:9-10)

The brief genealogy is interrupted by the reference to Noah's righteousness. Since PH is the story of the whole of humanity and Noah is the post-flood ancestor of all humanity, this reference adumbrates God's goal for creation (McConville 2006: 36). Noah's righteousness "is the quality that must characterize humanity if the world is to survive" (42). The reference to Noah's walking with God makes him resemble his ancestor Enoch (see 5:24) which raises the question, What will happen to Noah, since Enoch was taken by God? Will he be likewise rescued from his generation (Baumgart 1999: 106-07)?

Anderson (1978: 38; letters denoting the chiasm are provided by me) structures the flood story as follows.<sup>155</sup>

Transitional introduction, 6:9-10

A Violence in God's creation, 6:11-12

B First divine address: resolution to destroy, 6:13-22

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<sup>152</sup> The word *ḥāmās* "is virtually a technical term for the oppression of the weak by the strong" and denotes sins like that of Lamech and Cain (Clines 1972-73: 133).

<sup>153</sup> In the Eridu Genesis, Ziusudra is king and priest. Davila (1995: 199) sees Ziusudra only as a king. He is right in that neither Atrahasis nor Utnapishtim is called king. However, Jacobsen draws attention to an incident in Gilgamesh. Before setting out against Huwawa, Gilgamesh consults the city council. Similarly, in XI.35, Utnapishtim is supposed to confer with the elders of Shuruppak about building the ark (1943: 166, n. 44). Atrahasis likewise speaks to the elders of the city about leaving it. Thus, even if neither of the Akkadian flood heroes are *called* kings they are definitely *depicted* in royal capacities (cf. Kvanvig 2011: 246).

<sup>154</sup> Noah is 600 years old at the flood. In Atrahasis, periods of 600 years divide the plagues before the flood.

<sup>155</sup> For a similar albeit more detailed structure, with 8:1 marking the turning point though, see Wenham 1978.

- C Second divine address: command to enter the ark, 7:1-10
  - D Beginning of the flood, 7:11-16
    - E The rising flood waters, 7:17-24
      - F God remembers Noah, 8:1a
    - E' The receding flood waters, 8:1b-5
  - D' The drying of the earth, 8:6-14
- C' Third divine address: command to leave the ark, 8:15-19
- B' God's resolution to preserve order, 8:20-22
- A' Fourth divine address: covenant, blessing, and peace, 9:1-17

Transitional conclusion, 9:18-19

This scheme may help us see the ascending water of destruction and its descent, the undoing of creation and the advent of new creation as well as Yahweh's change of determination from destruction to blessing and covenant. The turning point is provided in F when God remembers those in the ark. It makes God's change of mind clear. The chain of events starts when

The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." (6:6-7)

God's conversion is denoted by the verb "regret," *nīḥam* (6:6-7). Seeing the violence compels him to undo creation. Even though the verb does not recur after the flood, God undergoes a change.

Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. (8:21)

The Genesis flood account is a story about God's conversion or, more precisely, God's conversions. Baumgart has studied from this perspective the roles of the different divine protagonists in Atrahasis and Gilgamesh (1999: 419-95). The gods together make the decision of destroying life on earth. Wise and benevolent Enki, however, resolves to save the world. The mother goddess is also deeply touched by the death of her people and makes an emotional and successful attempt in the midst of the gods to save humankind and restrain them from all such actions in the future. In Genesis' monotheism, Yahweh embodies all these characters and the characteristics of Enlil, Enki, and Mami. The teamwork of the gods and the conversion in their world present Yahweh in terms of a drama of conversion. The mother goddess characteristics could not have been developed for the male deity as pointedly as they characterize Mami in the Akkadian myths, still, the conversion dimension is the most decisive for Yahweh. In the monotheistic theology of Genesis, these observations imply that Yahweh is not an apathetic, unchanging deity (cf. Kessler 1974: 16).

In comparison with Gilgamesh, Baumgart states, the analysis of 6:5-8 and 8:20-22 demonstrates that

JHWH beim Flutgeschehen umgekehrt ist: Die Menschheit und das, was sie hervorbringt, sind für JHWH vor der Flut vernichtenswert; fast die gleiche Menschheit und das, was sie hervorbringen wird, sind für JHWH nach der Flut nicht mehr vernichtenswert. Verfehlt erwies sich daher die Interpretation, dass JHWH aufgrund von Noachs Opfer umkehre, weil dies ihn beschwichtige. Die Darstellung JHWHs zielt vielmehr darauf ab, dass seine bleibende Umkehr, aufgrund derer der Mensch und das Leben bei ihm und bei seinem Reagieren fortan anders vorkommen, *an den gesamten Bogen der Fluterzählung gebunden* ist. Der Mensch und das Leben haben während der Flut JHWHs Innerstes erobert. Der mesopotamische Text erklärt den Wandel während des Flutgeschehens mit einer neuen göttlichen Motivation: Die Muttergöttin, die einst die Flut mitbeschloss, manifestiert emotionsgeladen inmitten des Flutgeschehens, dass das Ergehen der Menschen bei ihr eine neue Sicht und einen neuen Hang in der Bewertung des Menschen evoziert:

Die eigenen Menschen sind ihr doch zu teuer, als dass sie preisgegeben werden dürfen. (1999: 444; italics his)

Baumgart (444-45) further notes that, in Genesis and in Atrahasis, the phrase “all living creatures,” *kol-ḥay*, occurs in comparable places, i.e. before the first births of children of humankind.

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of *all the living*. (3:20)

3:20 concerns not just Eve’s particular birthings but the origin of all lives. “Mother of all living” in turn alludes to Mami’s title, *belet kala ili*, “mistress of all gods” in Atrahasis I.246-48 (Kikawada 1972: 33-35).<sup>156</sup> Baumgart sees it as probable that the Genesis text alludes to the Mesopotamian mother goddess. More importantly, he links 3:20 to 8:21 where we find the phrase *kol-ḥay* after Noah’s sacrifice, when Yahweh declares his resolution never again to destroy humankind. Besides, both 3:20 and 8:21 are in contexts with future life in view.

And never again will I destroy *all living creatures*, as I have done. (8:21)

This happens exactly at the point when, in the Akkadian tradition, at Atrahasis/Utnapishtim’s sacrifice, the mother goddess makes a similar declaration (Atrahasis III.5.30-6.4; Gilgamesh X.156-59). Baumgart concludes that having witnessed the large-scale destruction of life, the phrase *kōl-ḥay* is used by Yahweh to make clear that he has changed his mind. In this, he may have been touched by his mother goddess part (447-48). The mother goddess does not only reproach the gods but also manipulates Anu lest such a disaster should happen again (476).

After comparing the Genesis and the Mesopotamian accounts (1999: 135-41, 163-73), Baumgart notes the conversion process Yahweh is going through between 6:5-8 and 8:20-22.

Hat für JHWH das Leben nun einen derartigen Wert, dass jede irgendwie naheliegende Desavouierung des Lebens nicht mehr zum Zuge kommt, dann geht man gleichzeitig davon aus, dass bei JHWH diese Wertung nicht nur einer Überlegung entstammt und ohne Emphase geboren wurde. Die Wertung ist erwachsen aus einer Begegnung JHWHs mit dem Tod der eigenen Geschöpfe und fusst somit *auf einer tiefen, einprägsamen Erfahrung JHWHs bei der Flut*. Die Flut selbst wird in der Erzählung über sie zu einer Begebenheit JHWHs. Die Erfahrung zeichnet man mit dem Kompositionszusammenhang nach und aktualisiert sie beim Erzählen für sich selbst, um sich ihrer zu vergewissern. (173; his italics)

On balance, the result is (493-94),

Die Überträger der mesopotamischen Theologie verstanden ihren einen Gott JHWH so, dass er Rollen und Funktionen der Götter und Göttinnen sowie deren Miteinander übernehmen konnte und dass er das an Theologie in sich vereinigen konnte, was unter Zuhilfenahme menschlicher Züge und kollektiver Erfahrungen herausgearbeitet worden war.

Genesis thus portrays Yahweh as a amalgamation of Mami, Enlil and Enki, with Mami and Enki’s compassion and commitment to humankind prevailing.<sup>157</sup>

It was first Mallowan (1964: 65), followed by Holloway (1991; 1998), who suggested that, in the Mesopotamian flood story, the ark is modeled on a ziggurat. Following them and others (Blenkinsopp 1976: 64-65; Zenger 1983: 174-75; Pola 1995: 367) and drawing on previous studies (Jacob 1934: 187) as well as establishing links between Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 24-40, Baumgart first states the tabernacle is related to creation (1999: 504-06). He goes on to claim that the tabernacle in Exodus is modeled on the ark as well as the Jerusalem Temple (506-26, 531-52). Like the tabernacle, the ark is the vehicle of salvation (553).

Divine conversion is the basis for life of the re-created world. Frymer-Kensky (1977: 148) sees the flood stories in Gilgamesh and Genesis as “so far removed from each other in focus and intent that one cannot compare the ideas in the two versions of the flood without setting up spurious dichotomies.” I hope to have proved the opposite. Obviously, the Genesis flood story is not a slavish adaptation of its Mesopotamian counterparts, it is a story with significantly new emphases –

<sup>156</sup> For more Mesopotamian parallels with 3:20 and 4:1, see Kramer 1981: 144; Uehlinger 1990: 32.

<sup>157</sup> Note that one of the cult cities of Enki was Babylon (Ebeling 1938: 378).



it is a new story. Its thrust and main theme is the judgment and end of the old and the re-creation of a new world. 8:1 marks the end of the old and the start of the new.

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark... The structure as well as motifs make the starting-all-over theme emphatic. The wind sent by God to dry up the water in 8:1 is evocative of God's *ruah* in 1:2 moving magnificently above the water. "The *ruah* in both i 2 and viii 1 represents the presence and creative power of God transforming a watery waste into a habitable world" (Moberly 2000: 352).

PH did not just incorporate the flood story but, by adopting and somewhat modifying the motif of God's conversion, presented a coherent storyline as well as a deity who, much reminiscent of his Mesopotamian colleagues and having gone through a change in his character and attitude toward humankind, tallies with Israel's experience.

At the end of the day, the difference is that of the theodicies of polytheism and monotheism. Polytheism attributes opposing forces and motives to different gods. Atrahasis solves the question of theodicy by a disagreement within the divine council. Enlil, the god in charge of destinies and, in particular, of destruction (see Nötscher 1938: 383-85), is against, whereas Enki, the benevolent creator of humans, is for humankind. Monotheism cannot resort to such a solution. Thus, in Genesis, it is a tension within God himself, resolved in God's conversion (see Batto 2013: 226-28). It is God who first decides to wipe out humankind (6:6-7) just as, in ch. 8, it is God being sorry for their destruction (similarly Loewenstamm 1980: 108).

But does not all this make the world an unsafe place, at the mercy of a volatile deity? This question will be dealt with in the next section.

### 2.3.3 God's Covenant, 8:20–9:19

The full implications of Yahweh's judgment and "conversion" can, however, be properly seen in the context of the whole flood story. On disembarking, Noah builds an altar to the Lord, and takes of every clean animal and every clean bird to offer burnt offerings.<sup>158</sup> Both the narrator (6:6) and Yahweh (6:7) claimed that Yahweh "regretted" to have created humankind. Whereas, however, before the flood, Yahweh was convinced "that *every* inclination of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil all the time*" (6:5; cf. 6:11-12), after the flood, this is qualified. 8:21 is not a universal statement like that in 6:5 but a tempered view on the evil capacity of human heart (cf. Sarna 1989: 59).<sup>159</sup>

Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humankind, even though the creation of humankind's heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done." (8:21; AT)<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> 8:20 is the first and last time one builds an altar to offer a sacrifice in PH (cf. the different terminology in 4:3-5).

<sup>159</sup> Importantly, neither 8:21 nor 6:5 contains statements about human "inclination/imagination," as the NIV and the RSV would have it, but about human "creation." That is what God judges evil. Out of nine occurrences, in eight instances at least (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Deut 31:21; Isa 29:16; Ps 103:14; Hab 2:18; 1 Chron 28:9; 29:18), the word's plain meaning is "creation" (*yēšer*, a derivative of the verb *yāšar*; see Gen 2:8; cf. Carr 1996: 64). In its context, Isa 26:3 seems to speak of a (solid) creation, i.e. a strong city: "A solid creation—you will keep it in peace, for it felt safe in you." An important parallel to Gen 6:5 and 8:21 is 1 Chron 29:18 (cf. 1 Chron 28:9), where the phrase concerned is used, "keep this forever so that your people's heart's creation [i.e., the Temple] might be realized, *lāyēšer maḥšābōt lābab 'ammākā*" (AT). Smith (2019: 76-77) similarly takes *yēšer* to mean "formation" the root of which "denotes what the human person 'forms' or 'designs'" (76). He emphasizes the linguistic connection between 8:21 and 2:7 and seeing here a pun. Goldingay (2003: 164) has also noticed the discrepancy between God's perception and Genesis'/OT's description of things.

<sup>160</sup> Note that the term "only" is missing and "all the time" is replaced by "from childhood." Rendtorff (1961) has argued that *qālal* means not so much "to curse but "to describe something as cursed." Petersen (1976), however, has challenged Rendtorff's interpretation claiming the evidence does not support this. Turner (1990: 40-41) suggests that God's curse in 3:17-19 has rendered human work, including the subjugation of the earth, impossible, reflected in the omission from 9:1 of the command "subdue the earth" in 1:28. See Goldingay's similar discussion (2003: 176-77).

The sacrifice causes God to realize, which is God's second recognition, that human evil cannot be wiped out by force (cf. Petersen 1976: 444-45). A clean slate is no viable option. Humankind has not changed; they are still capable of doing evil and good (see 3:22). Both God's words in 8:21 and the background of 6:1-6 as well as humankind's creating culture in ch. 4 seem to suggest that, with the flood, God went too far (cf. Clines 2012). This may be the main reason why God, uniquely, establishes a covenant with creation that is binding only on him (cf. Van Wijk-Bos 2005: 85). This is also the reason for God's decision never again to curse the ground. The flood effectively cancels or at least moderates God's curse on the ground (3:17), "thereby fulfilling the prediction in 5:29 that Noah would bring us 'relief... from the suffering of our hands from the grounds that Yhwh cursed'" (Galambush 2018: 45-46).

We see both similarity and dissimilarity between PH and the Mesopotamian accounts. PH is similar to what we find in Atrahasis where Nintu and some of the gods not only disagree with the general destruction but weep over creation destroyed (III.4). At the same time, the protagonist's fate certainly reveals a huge difference between divine commitments. Whether because of a compromise in the divine council or by merit of the hero, Utnapishtim/Ziusudra is transferred to the land of immortality. Noah is not transferred nor does Yahweh's commitment in Genesis concern one person only but the whole of humankind, indeed, all of creation, fauna included. God sets "Noah's family on the path of fulfilling the creation project in the world" (Goldingay 2003: 179).

God makes certain his commitment,

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease. (8:22)

Through this rhythmic change of opposites, Yahweh demonstrates his commitment to diversity and integration while Enlil was more intent on the decline into chaos without difference and form (Müller 1985: 307).<sup>161</sup>

Again, humankind is commanded to multiply and fill the earth (9:1; cf. 1:28). The command, however, "to subdue the earth and have dominion over the animals" (1:28) has, with the curse in 3:17-19 still in force, not just been omitted (Turner 1990: 40-41) but taken on a cruel aspect, underlined by the fact that it is seen from the viewpoint of the animals. They will go "in fear and dread" of humankind, no longer under his responsible dominion (cf. also 2:19-20). Violence has become part and parcel of the natural order: every living creature is delivered into the power of humankind (9:2). It is, however, not to be unrestrained violence (Clines 1972-73: 138).

Then, God utters the first prohibition in the post-flood world,

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (9:6)

Jack Miles observes that this sentence would rather fit at the end of the first bloodshed in ch. 4 than at the conclusion of the flood story. It is placed after the biggest homicide – by God. Bloodshed is prohibited to humankind for only God is creator and destroyer of life (1995: 45). God seems to have learned the lesson and wants no more killing. At the same time, we should not forget what caused God to annihilate creation: it was *ḥāmās*, "violence" (6:11, 13). Through this solemn warning (9:6), God is intent on forestalling further violence and bloodshed (cf. Fretheim 2005: 84). The prohibition, seen in the light of Noah's righteousness, has more universal import.

The flood-narrative is therefore framed by the postulate of *tsedaqah* and the prohibition of murder by appeal to humanity's god-likeness. In this Old Testament version of the well-established ANE topic of flood-survival by an individual, a foundation is laid for human interrelationships, rooted in the essential nature of humanity. (McConville 2006: 42)

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<sup>161</sup> It may also be a polemic against the fertility cults of Mesopotamia. E.g., summer, in The Disputation between Summer and Winter (lines 69 and 90), is called the "heroic son of Enlil" and winter his "proud son." By this claim of continuity in the created order, 8:22 "denies the basic dynamics of the fertility cult by making it clear that man's actions, for good or ill, can have no effect on the pattern of the seasons" (Fisher 1970: 401).

What, then, has changed? Neither humankind, nor the natural world – only God. The flood and its wide-scale destruction impacted God to the effect that he has committed himself to the world. To drive this home, God makes a covenant with the world. As opposed to the gods in Atrahasis, Yahweh commits herself to the world of his own will, not as a compromise with the divine council.

Yahweh's commitment to the world is underscored by the sign of the war instrument, the "bow" placed in the sky. It is used to express peace, which, as some rabbis note, is even more emphatic as it is turned upward so that the arrows are shot toward the sky and not the earth (Turner 1993: 119; Galambush 2018: 47).<sup>162</sup> BCS may serve as a parallel (see Batto 1987a: 195-96). After Marduk's victory, Anu raises Marduk's bow and addresses the assembly of gods,

He kissed the bow. "May she go far!"  
He gave to the bow her names saying,  
"May Long and Far be the first, and Victorious the second;  
Her third name shall be Bowstar, for she shall shine in the sky."  
He fixed her position among the gods her companions. (Tablet VI)

In Genesis, the general rule is that God designs and man executes. On making the decision to destroy the world, God purposefully prepares Noah for the flood and life afterwards. That is the reason of the detailed instructions for the construction of the ark. As, at creation, God ordered and structured the world, God now orders and structures the means of survival at length. Indeed, she does not only advise Noah but commands, and God's command is duly obeyed. Thus, it is not just divine competence in the Genesis story but divine providence and it is sufficient (see Loewenstamm 1980: 108). This is reflected in the structure of the story (see Anderson 1978). Even a *šōhar*, whatever it means, is ordered by God and furnished by Noah (6:16). If it is some sort of light, as, among others, Alter (1996: 29) suggests, it may be a hint at SFS where Utu the sun god sends his light into the interior of the ark (line 208). God also gives detailed orders of the clean and unclean animals to be brought into the ark – life is to resume after the flood. Briefly, God is in control of the events, shown also by God's closing the ark's door, which the gods in Atrahasis leave to Atrahasis.

The Genesis flood is more than a plan designed and executed in good order, however. As a number of scholars have pointed out, it is a story from uncreation to re-creation (see Anderson 1978; Carr 1998a). In Genesis 1 and 2, the creation of humankind was the climax of God's action. Here, the purpose of creation is undone (Clines 1972-73: 137). In ch. 7, "the destruction takes place in much the same order as creation" (Blenkinsopp 1971: 46-47). "The mitigation of the punishment of the Flood means that the 'uncreation' which God has worked with the Flood is not final; creation has not been permanently undone" (Clines 1972-73: 138). Noah is the new Adam who starts all over.<sup>163</sup> This re-creation motif as part of God's purpose in the destruction, one cannot find in the Mesopotamian myths (contra Simoons-Vermeer 1974). Yahweh's curse (3:17-19) is replaced by the Creator's blessing adumbrating God's relationship to the world. Blessing is not canceled but will determine the world's fate (Rendtorff 1963: 21).

Finally, we have to attend to the questions, How does the flood story contribute to the theme of PH? and, What about the startlingly ambiguous portrayal of God in the flood narrative and in PH? To answer them, we will need to go back to ch. 3. I am calling to assistance Walter Moberly's treatment of the story. Yahweh's words in 2:16-17 are his first personal address to the first couple, issuing a command and followed by a warning. If the serpent was right, as many take it, and God's warning proves an empty threat (the couple became like God and did not die), how reliable is God, Moberly asks (2009: 78-79).

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<sup>162</sup> Turner's reference (1993: 122) to Eze 1:26-28, where *rāqiya'* and *qešet* are both applied makes it only clear that *qešet* means both the weapon, and "rainbow," the basis for the word's usage. He fails to make clear why that particular image is chosen by Yahweh as the symbol of the covenant.

<sup>163</sup> This is supported by Larsson's chronological analysis of the creation and flood stories (1977). He concludes (492), "The seemingly meaningless and contradictory dates in the Flood story link the Creation and the 'new' Creation together. At the Creation man got his unique position. At the 'new' Creation this position was confirmed and strengthened."

As opposed to ch. 1, chs. 2–3 depict a god less majestic, less transcendent, and more prone to morally questionable actions.<sup>164</sup> The refusal of Cain’s offering (4:5) and the sweeping assessment of humankind’s heart (6:5, 12) leading to the flood add to this picture. During the flood, however, as we have seen, God goes through a crucial change committing himself to creation. This “conversion” results in God blessing humankind and making a covenant with creation never again to destroy it. It is here that God’s reliability, based on his covenanted commitment to creation, is firmly established. This is underlined by the bow motif borrowed from BCS and placed not after the creation narrative but after the flood story in 9:12-16 (see Batto 1992: 87-88).<sup>165</sup> Needless to say, the flood story and God’s renewed commitment to creation were meant as an encouragement to the exilic community after the flood-like experience of the losses of Davidic kingship, Jerusalem, and Temple.

Whereas, after the flood in SKL, permanence and security are granted to the world by lowering kingship once again, in Genesis, it is God’s blessing and covenant that do the job and curtail the curse (9:1-17). The note on Noah’s sons (9:18-19) serves as the transition to the next section.

## **2.4 The Multiplication of Humankind: A New Beginning, 9:20–10:32**

The section after the flood provides the essential transition from PH to the patriarchal history by telling the story of a new beginning and focusing on the multiplication of humankind, a concern with the entirety of the human race. The flood hero is being portrayed differently from his Mesopotamian counterparts as well as genealogies are used differently than in Mesopotamia.

### **2.4.1 Noah’s Stupor, 9:20-29**

After the flood, Utnapishtim is transferred to Dilmun or the land between the rivers,<sup>166</sup> the land of no labor (see Gilgamesh 11.2-7) where eternal life is allotted to him by the gods. In Genesis, Noah continues to labor. As opposed to the Mesopotamian view, cultivating the ground in Genesis is not considered bad. Despite God’s curse, labor yields its fruits to humankind. Here, it is Noah who “plants;” in ch. 2, it was God (Gros Louis 1982: 48). In Gilgamesh, culture was salvaged by the craftsmen in the ark (XI.83-85). Noah, created in the image of God, fulfills his father’s yearning (5:29) by the invention of viticulture. But it is not just the fruit of the vine that grants “relief out of the ground” but human work capable of creating culture. Thus, I suggest that, in Lowery’s words (2013: 233; his italics), “the author was trying to communicate the magnitude of destruction brought about by the flood as God’s judgment toward humankind. Destruction was so complete that *even culture itself* was destroyed.” After the flood, however, as before, humankind invents culture.

8:21 seems to suggest that the old era of a cursed ground has come to an end with the flood’s devastation. This also makes sense of Noah’s being the first farmer (9:20), i.e. after the flood. God has cleaned the slate. His “efforts to reduce the effects of previous judgment and curse gave Noah the opportunity to provide the relief” Lamech was yearning for (5:29) (Spina 1992: 330-31; cf. Rendtorff 1961; differently Crüsemann 1981: 24).

The episode of Noah’s stupor is notoriously difficult. Interpreters stumble over it for the obvious reason that there is no obvious reason for the curse or the sin committed by Ham.<sup>167</sup> What the story states, risking an overstatement, is laconic. When Noah drank some of the wine he made,

<sup>164</sup> Diachronically, of course, it is a difference between P and J. Diachronic study can shed light on the chronological development and refinement of theodicy.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Römer 2014: 58, “The Flood story emphasizes the fragility of this creation and God’s steady commitment to fight evil.”

<sup>166</sup> Dalley (2000: 43) regards Dilmun and “the mouth of the rivers” as one and the same locale.

<sup>167</sup> The weakness of Steinmetz’s argument is her rash equation of Ham’s sin with sexual violence on his father: “Just as ‘seeing’ nakedness is more than seeing, ‘uncovering’ is more than uncovering” (1994: 199; see also the critique by Embry 2011). More sophisticated is Nissinen (1998: 52-53) who argues that sexual abuse of men in ANE was meant to humiliate them. Thus, “Ham aspired to dominance among post-flood humanity and attempted to show his superiority by disgracing his father sexually” (53). For a novel redaction-critical approach, see Frankel 2021.



he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. (9:21-22)

What is clear is that the sin is related to Noah's nakedness; what it consisted of is not made evident – the scene, to use Auerbach's famous phrase (1953: 3-23), is fraught with background, made tangible by varying and conflicting interpretations.

The parallel structures and corresponding features of the Adam and the Noah stories have been noticed (Smith 1977: 310-11; Cohn 1983: 4-6; Steinmetz: 1994; Carr 1996: 235-40; 1998a: 328-34; Embry 2011: 423-27). Sasson's chart, modified by me above, makes the similarity of the two sections clear. Tomasino (1992) has also studied the parallels between the garden story and that of Noah's drunkenness. He points out that the phrase "man of the ground" (9:20), a *hapax*, refers us back to ch. 2 where Adam is portrayed as a man of the ground. The most important parallels are that both God and Noah "plant" gardens (2:8 and 9:20) and the protagonists' nakedness is covered by others, God and Shem-Japhet respectively (3:21 and 9:23).

The overall similarity of the larger sections is also visible in that

both sections begin with a primeval ancestor (Adam, Noah) and then move through the following sequence of scenes: from scenes regarding the first generation (Adam and Eve in Gen 2:4b–3:24, Noah in 6:5–8:22), to scenes regarding the children (Cain and Abel in 4:1–16, Noah's sons in 9:18–27), to genealogical information (Gen. 4:17–26; 5:29; 10), to a final shorter story concerning the human community as a whole (Gen. 6:1–4; 11:1–9). (Carr 1996: 236)

The same holds for

the story describing events following the flood, Gen 9,20–27, [which] links in striking ways with both of the larger stories describing events following creation, both the Garden of Eden story (Gen 2,5–3,24) and the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4,1–16). The story of Noah and his sons and the garden of Eden story are parallel in their common focus on an initial progenitor who is defined by his relation to the אדמה (2,5.7–8.15; 9,20), initiates agriculture (2,7)/viticulture (9,20), and then experiences problems from the products of his garden (fruit in Gen 2,17; 3,2–6 and wine in 9,20–21). More specifically, both stories feature the seeing of nakedness (3,7; 9,22), and final giving of a divine (3,14–19) or human (9,25–27) pronouncement of judgment. These parallels continue in correlations between Gen 9,20–27 and Gen 4,1–16. Both Gen 4,1–16 and 9,20–26 begin with an explicit description of the sons as the first children of Adam and Noah respectively (4,1–2; 9,18); both have a focus on farming the "ground" (האדמה) shortly afterward (4,3; 9,20); both describe division between brothers and a misdeed by one of them (4,4–8; 9,21–23); both narrate God/Noah's recognition of what happened (4,9–10; 9,24); and both conclude with a curse on one of the brothers (4,11–12; 9,25–26). Thus, the story of Noah and his sons in Gen 9,20–27 encapsulates in a small compass many of the themes and dynamics of its multiple pre-flood correlates. At the same time, this story reflects a certain divine withdrawal after the covenant of restraint established in Gen 8,20–9,17 of the present text. Now Noah, rather than God, plants the garden, pronounces judgment on a (grand)son, and expels him, this time from his tent. (Carr 1998a: 331-32)

Thus, there are verbal and thematic correspondences with Adam's and Noah's progenies subsequently listed – Noah is a second Adam. "The parallel structures thus underscore the roles of Adam and Noah as uniquely first men commanded to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (1:28; 9:1)" (Cohn 1983: 5).<sup>168</sup> Seen in this light, and, in particular, in the light of the Eden story, the episode is opening up.<sup>169</sup>

I have drawn on Bernard Batto's interpretation of the nakedness motif in chs. 2–3 (1992: 53-56). As opposed to the conventional interpretation, he does not link it to shame in general but to the concept found, among others, in Gilgamesh where being unclothed is a characteristic of animals. Being clothed, humankind was thought of as superior to animals in Mesopotamia. The first couple, Batto argues, achieved human status by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In

<sup>168</sup> The new beginning is stressed by the strange use of "began," *wayyāḥel*.

<sup>169</sup> Various interpretations have been put forward as gap-fillers as to what Ham's sin consisted of. But the text does not imply any sin apart from seeing Noah's nakedness (cf. Ross 1980: 229-30).



that very moment, they realized they were naked, i.e. look like animals although they were not any longer. By making them garments, God too acknowledges this.

I suggest that, in order to see Ham's sin and the reason of the curse by Noah, we are referred back to the garden of Eden. More precisely, it is Ham who, on seeing his father naked, refers him back to ancient times when humankind was still like animals. In ch. 3, humankind achieved their status above animals and below gods by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so acquiring the capability of doing either. By seeing Noah drunk and not appreciating his cultural achievement, Ham implicitly denies his father human status. His is thus not just an act of voyeurism<sup>170</sup> or disrespect but one of not acknowledging what humankind in general and Noah as a second Adam in particular has come to be, represent, and achieve, so relegating him to being an animal. As opposed to their brother, Shem and Japhet recognize that Noah is more than an animal. Therefore, they cover him, as God clothed the first couple, so making manifest his/their non-animal status. Tasting the first fruit led to human status (3:6-7, 22), that of the second to its denial (9:21-22).

God punished the transgression of serpent by cursing it. Now, it is Noah who utters the curse on Ham. "Ham's role in this episode is analogous to that of the serpent in Eden," Tomasino (1992: 130) claims. It is analogous but Ham and the serpent are assigned opposite roles. While the serpent was instrumental in humans' becoming human, Ham repudiates this achievement. By planting a vineyard, Noah has just demonstrated he is more than an animal. Ham's action signals an ill-boding new start. The harshness of the curse can be understood from this perspective: Ham is to become servant of servants (9:25-27) because he denied his father human status (1:28; cf. 9:2-3). In addition to bringing poetic justice, Noah's curse is thus a subversion of PH's values in that it, similarly to the fate of the woman (3:16), makes a human being subject to another. By starting humankind's post-flood story in this way, the narrator expresses his view of the irreversible course of events: humankind has indeed become distinct from the animal world, knowing good and bad.

#### **2.4.2 The Genealogy of Noah's Sons, 10:1-32**

Political history is not in view in chs. 1–9, it opens up in ch. 10 only. In chs. 10–11, we see nations and tribes (Baumgart 1999: 13-14). The narrator's attention is still on the whole of humanity, hence the segmented genealogy of ch. 10. Such a universal interest in the common ancestry of humankind is virtually unknown in ANE (see Levin 2001: 34). Mesopotamian genealogies may be concerned with the common ancestor of the tribe or ethnic group but never with that of the whole human race.

Levin (2001: 34) has noticed that the genealogy in Genesis 10–11

defines the place of the people of Israel in almost "evolutionary" terms: progressing from the nations of mankind through the descendants of Shem to the sons of Abraham, from which were chosen the children of Israel. At each stage along the way, the most important member of the lineage, the one who carries on the line, is listed last. Of the three sons of Noah, Shem is the eldest (Gen. 6.10; 9.18). His descendants, however, are listed last in the "table of nations" (Gen. 10.21-31). The same is true for Arpachshad, grandfather of Eber (eponym of the "Hebrews"—Gen. 11.10-14) and so on. The children of Israel, listed at the near end of the book, are the focal point of the whole scheme...

This might be explained by the narrator's concern to avoid any sign of superiority characteristic of Mesopotamian genealogies. The narrative's universal outlook is underlined by the fact that Israel is not mentioned in the genealogies (Waltke 2001: 161) and the genealogy of Noah's sons lists 70 names, a number of totality (Walton 2009: 55). It is the human race en bloc that is in the purview of the narrator. This is the reason he lists the common ancestry of different nations (see Malamat 1968: 164). The genealogy in ch. 10 demonstrates the fulfillment of God's command and blessing (9:1; cf. 1:28) (Clines 1976: 494). At the same time, Israel's story is being introduced.

The structure of the two chapters can be outlined in two different ways. Ch. 10 contains the genealogy of Noah's sons, while ch. 11 that of Shem between the story of Babylon and Terah's

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<sup>170</sup> That is how Embry interprets the story (2011). He notes that, "in Noah's account, viewing nakedness is a matter of revisiting the features of the Fall" (426) but does not make the connection I do. Blenkinsopp (1995: 11) has also noticed similarities between chs. 2 and 9.

genealogy introducing Abraham's story. The foci of the genealogies are getting sharper: smaller and smaller ethnic units are listed. This, however, holds true for the genealogies only and not for the narratives, these being Nimrod's and Babylon's stories. Here, a reverse process is taking place. Nimrod's story remembers one of the descendants of Ham, while the tower of Babylon is constructed by the entire human populace. It is not just one nation doing this – each group represented in the genealogies of ch. 10 is involved in building the city and its tower.

**Ch. 10** Genealogy of Noah's sons ('*ēlleh tōlādôt*) + Nimrod narrative

**Ch. 11** Babylon narrative + Genealogy of Shem ('*ēlleh tōlādôt*; 11:10)

As for the second outline, Nimrod's story interrupts Ham's genealogy – his narrative becomes the structural centerpiece of ch. 10, just as the Babylon story does by interrupting Shem's genealogy.<sup>171</sup>

**A** Japheth, 10:1-5

**B** Ham, 10:6-7

**C** Nimrod, founder of Babylon, 10:8-12

**B'** Ham, 10:13-20

**A'** Shem, 10:21-32

**C'** The founding of Babylon, 11:1-9

**A''** Shem, 11:10-26

Japheth is eliminated from the story, and Abram-Abraham will take the scene in ch. 12. Ham's offspring founds Babylon as well as disrupts Shem's genealogy so causing trouble. The two centerpieces of this structure are the narratives C and C' wedged between genealogies, making them the climaxes. Babylon's climaxing role is in sharp contrast to what Shem's genealogy points at. While we hear of Babylon no more, Shem's offspring is going to have a story – a quite significant one at that.

A further element shared by both chapters is Shem's genealogies (10:21-31 and 11:10-26). Whereas the genealogy in 10:21-26 lists all the descendants of Shem's every son, i.e. it is reminiscent of WSL, 11:10-26 lists only the descendants of Arphaxad to Abram, thus resembling MKL, with one important qualification: Shem's genealogy is no king list. 11:26 lists the three sons of Terah thus providing a transition to Terah's genealogy, a WSL list again (11:27-32, starting with the phrase '*ēlleh tōlādôt*). At the same time, this introduces the Abraham story commencing in ch. 12. In other words, Shem's first genealogy is more universal, the second more specific, tracing merely one bloodline. The first is significant for the whole of humanity, as ch. 10 is concerned with the origin and spread of humanity, while the second in ch. 11 is with Abraham (cf. Baumgart 1999: 21).<sup>172</sup>

Between 10:8-12 and 11:1-9, another two connections can be observed: similarities in wording (cf. Hom 2010: 67-68) and style. First, both narratives report the *beginning* of something.<sup>173</sup> Nimrod is said "to begin, *hēḥēl*, to become a mighty warrior on the earth" (10:8; AT). Regarding the Babylon story, Yahweh grows concerned,

If as one people speaking the same language they have begun, *haḥillām*, to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. (11:6)

Second, in both narratives we find an aetiology, introduced by "that is why" ('*al-kēn*).

[*T*]hat is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." (10:9)

That is why it was called Babylon—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (11:9; AT)

<sup>171</sup> I do not find the chiasm by Bailey (1994: 274) compelling. 10:1, comprising the first half of the chiasm (A-B-C), is disproportionate when compared to 10:2-31 (A'-B'-C').

<sup>172</sup> 12:3, by its application of *mišpāhā*, is clearly related to ch. 10 where the same is a keyword (Baumgart 1999: 23).

<sup>173</sup> Genesis is keen on telling beginnings. A third passage is 4:26.

Both are followed by a saying related to Nimrod and the naming of his city respectively. And uniquely, as the topographic designation occurs only in 10:10 and 11:2, both take place “in the land of Shinar.”<sup>174</sup>

Though the syntax of 10:11 makes it difficult to determine the subject of the sentence, 10:8-12 seems to suggest that it was Nimrod who founded Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. And it was he who founded Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Kalah, Resen. These were royal cities. Nimrod “is the first warrior (10,8) – quite possibly, then, one of the nephilim – and the beginning of his kingdom, which includes Babel, is located in ‘the land of Shinar’ (v. 10), the very location of the tower (11,2)” (Kawashima 2004: 494). However, he is not called a “king,” as that is as good as a taboo term in PH. Nimrod (not to mention Canaan) and, through him, Babylon and Akkad could not, of course, originate with Ham as they were centers of Semitic people. The narrator appears more concerned with empire than with putting his audience straight about ethnology.<sup>175</sup> The Shem section “looks like a travesty of a geographical distribution” (Simons 1994: 237). Genealogies were used for propaganda. For Mesopotamian kings, they served imperial political agenda. The Hebrew narrator is turning the tables on Babylon in an apparently innocuous way by dissociating Babylon, and other imperial centers, from the Shemite family and associating it with cursed Ham. By this move, Babylon’s wrong done to Noah-Israel in 9:22 gets a further facet (see 6). Even Assyria has its limited place in Shem’s line but not Babylon – Babylon is being disowned.<sup>176</sup> This is buttressed by the recognition that the genealogy maps the different ethnic groups in their perceived proximity to Israel and each other (see Levin 2001: 22).

Nimrod attempts to establish centers of power with Babylon as the prime city among them, thereby hijacking the universal plan and trying to make it into a national Mesopotamian story (cf. Blenkinsopp 2015: 19).<sup>177</sup> Shem’s genealogy, by both concluding PH and starting that of Abram (Steinberg 1989: 48), demonstrates, however, that it is not a king list that emerges out of this but a list of commoners – a Mesopotamian-turned-West Semitic list.

As for the four cities founded by Nimrod, Babylon was the capital city of Babylonia. Erech (Uruk) was the dominant Sumerian city around 2700 ruled by Gilgamesh. Akkad was the capital of Sargon the Great who extended his empire from Elam in the North of the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century. We know nothing of Calneh. Along with Nimrod’s depiction as a mighty hunter, “the twice-occurring motif of four cities (vv. 10-12a) suggests imperialist notions along the lines of the ‘four corners of the earth’” (Hom 2010: 68).<sup>178</sup>

10:11 refers to Asshur known also as a descendant of Shem (10:22) and the eponym of the Assyrian capital city. Setting up their headquarters now here and now there, Assyrian kings made Nineveh and Calah (or Nimrud, named after the big hunter) their capital cities. Nineveh surpassed Asshur or

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<sup>174</sup> Chs. 10–11 might be viewed as what Cyrus Gordon (1992: 47; cf. Blenkinsopp 1995: 11; 2002: 58) calls the “Buildup and Climax,” i.e. first reporting the whole with big brush strokes, then some aspects in detail (cf. Gen 1–2). Nimrod’s story thus has an introductory function to 11:1–9. Blenkinsopp (2011: 168–69) too reads it in connection to the Babylon story.

<sup>175</sup> Identity “moves between two poles of ethnic fission and ethnic fusion,” McEntire and Park observe (2021: 34). They add of Israelite ethnicity, which I think holds also of a broader Semitic identity regarding Akkad and Babylon, “This strategy was especially important in times of close contact, competition, and conflict with other groups. The contraction of the lineage served as a justification for tightening ethnic formations in response to current social and political circumstances.” They claim later on that it is not modern genetics that underpins “nations” in Gen 10 (35).

<sup>176</sup> Sasson (1980: 212, n. 3) seems to suggest that there are three different Cushes in ch. 10. I do not think, however, that the author or compiler was trying to solve “the problem of homonymous Cush” by different listings of his/their offspring, ingenious though Sasson’s solution sounds.

<sup>177</sup> Blenkinsopp (2002: 55; cf. Schüle 2006: 401) relates the origin of the *gibbōrīm* (6:1–4) to the first of them, “Nimrud, founder of the first great empire in Mesopotamia, the prototype of Babylon (Gen 10:8–11) and therefore of the Neo-Babylonian empire.” He also associates Nimrod with Cain by virtue of their being city builders (58–59).

<sup>178</sup> “The overall effect indicates a response on the part of the text to Assyrian ideology—whereas a Babylonian or Assyrian monarch typically presumed to be king of the world, ‘before YHWH’ makes clear that YHWH is actually king of the world,” Hom concludes (2010: 68). While I wholeheartedly agree with the first part of her assertion I fail to see how the phrase makes clear what she claims it does.

Calah in significance. The exact location of Rehoboth Ir (“town square”)<sup>179</sup> and Resen, along with Calneh<sup>180</sup> in 10:10, is unknown. Apparently, these cities, founded by Nimrod and Asshur, are significant because they are associated with conquest and oppression. This might be hinted at by the reference to Nimrod who

grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.” (10:8-9)

This sounds positive of Nimrod. Having founded these cities, however, Nimrod has become the mythic prototype of empire founders. This might be buttressed by the association of hunting and conquest (see Walton 2009: 57). If this is a critique, it is expressed in a low-key way. At the same time, Nimrod is Ham’s descendant which, after his deed in ch. 9, raises the question: Can anyone good come from Ham?

Several ambiguities of the two verses have been noticed by Levin (2002: 351-52): “began to be mighty” makes hardly any sense in the context; *gibbōr* could mean “giant,” “hero,” “mighty man,” “champion,” “man of power” or “potentate;” *bā’āreš* can be rendered as “on earth” or “in the land;” the subject of *yāšā’*, “go out,” could be Nimrod as well as Asshur; the “great city” can be either Resen or Nineveh. Finally, Nimrod’s origin as stemming from Cush, the eponymous father of Ethiopia (354), raises the question, what on earth is a Cushite doing in Mesopotamia?<sup>181</sup> Levin sees in Nimrod no “total counterpart of any one historical character. He is rather the composite Hebrew equivalent of the Sargonid dynasty: the first, mighty king to rule after the flood” (366). Ingenious though this proposal sounds it is too conjectural.<sup>182</sup> Levin is to be commended for parting company with the search expedition, futile as it has been, for a historical equivalent of Nimrod (e.g., Speiser 1958; Gispén 1974). With such ambiguities, Nimrod does not represent the Sargonid dynasty, I think, but rather Mesopotamian kingship. The narrative uses soft polemic to critique kingship.

As often observed, the chapter does not mention Israel. Unlike Babylon, Israel cannot boast of an origin in primordial times. Indeed, it has no territory of its own in chs. 10–11, Abraham will have to live in Canaan with no land of his own (Baumgart 1999: 24-25). Yet, Israel will have a particular place in world history by election (cf. Schüle 2006: 378). Hanson (1977: 196, n. 4), followed by Hallo (1980: 17), claims that beginning an ethnic history in primeval times was widespread. The more striking is that Israel “renders account of the past to itself” by providing extensive lists of nations and minimizing its own primordial role.<sup>183</sup> By the end of ch. 10, humankind has spread over the face of the earth, thus recreating it after the flood (cf. 8:17; 9:1) (Galambush 2018: 50).

As for the transition note, there is none. Instead, several notes hint at a major motif of ch. 11 which is the scattering by Yahweh of the people (see 11:4, 8-9) who, as opposed to the nations and tribes of ch. 10, do not want to spread. Their refusal to do so triggers both the people’s building project and Yahweh’s intervention. As mentioned earlier, the references to the spread in ch. 10 are spread out as are the descendants of Noah. Three verbs are used to denote the spread: *pārad* (10:5, 32), *pūs* (10:18), and *pālag* (10:25). This all happened “after the flood,” as underlined twice (10:1, 32) by the time adjuncts enveloping the chapter. The other references to the spread are also accompanied with time references: “in his time the earth was divided” (10:25); more gratuitously: “Later the Canaanite clans scattered” (10:18). It is emphatic that these spreads happened after the flood, so fulfilling the Creator’s order (1:28; 9:1).

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. Wiseman’s suggestion (1955: 20-21) who thinks that Rehoboth Ir stands for Asshur since in Sumerian *ash* means “square” and *ur* “city.”

<sup>180</sup> Although Albright’s emendation (1944) of Calneh to *kullānā*, “all of them,” referring to Mesopotamian cities, has been widely accepted, it destroys the reference to four cities.

<sup>181</sup> Speiser 1958: 32 has argued for “Cush” being a reference to “Kassite.” But, in the OT, it normally denotes the Upper Nile valley (cf. Stordalen 2000: 280).

<sup>182</sup> This is visible in the number of “may,” “might,” and “could” wordings (Levin 2002: 364-65). He also surmises (364) that ancient Hebrews “probably had their own version of the ‘bringing down’ of kingship after the Flood.” If they did it was omitted from Genesis.

<sup>183</sup> I am referring to Huizinga’s (1936: 9) famous definition of history as “the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past.”



In ch. 11, the verb *pûš* (11:4, 8-9) is used. Here, the people's resistance to their spread (11:4) is introduced by the time reference, "When people set out from the East" (11:2; AT). The third use of the verb, stating the *fait accompli*, is introduced by a place adjunct, "From there the Lord scattered them" (11:9). These all concern the spread of humankind. However, Nimrod moves in the opposite direction. This is, once again, highlighted by a sort of time reference, "He began as a mighty warrior in the country" (10:8; AT).<sup>184</sup> While other people spread around founding countries, Nimrod founds kingdoms the prime example of which is Babylon. This city is the scene of the next story.

## 2.5 *Things Gone Awry: Babylon and Shem, 11:1-26*

Ch. 11, consisting of a story about the empire's capital and a genealogy of Shem, is the last section rounding off PH and providing a transition to the Abraham story. How does the chapter do this double duty? The story in 11:1-9 along with the genealogy following it is probably PH's shrewdest and sharpest criticism of Babylon.

### 2.5.1 Challenging Imperial Royal Politics: The City of Babylon, 11:1-9<sup>185</sup>

Winston Churchill once famously remarked that Russia was a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. The same can be claimed of the story of Babylon (11:1-9). The story itself is no mean riddle. It is not at all clear why it is wrapped in genealogies, nor what its role in and contribution to PH/Genesis are. Churchill's statement is relevant to our discussion of the Babylon story not just because of the story's enigmatic features and puzzling subject matter defying interpretation but also because it concerns an empire. In what follows, I will study this riddle along with its wrapping in the hope that, by the end of this enterprise, we will see how both wrapping and the wrapped thing contribute to a concerted attack on the empire.

The story of the city of Babylon is conventionally interpreted in terms of human arrogance followed by divine judgment: by building a "sky scraper" humankind aspires to reach heaven and challenges God (e.g., Wenham 1987: 239-41, 244-45; Hamilton 1990: 356; Lim 2002: 185; McKeown 2008: 71).<sup>186</sup> This interpretation has recently been contested by a number of scholars (e.g., van Wolde 1996: 168-69; Croatto 1998; Míguez 2002; Hiebert 2007; Măcelaru 2012), most of them reading the story synchronically and in terms of a horizontal, rather than vertical, sin, a sin committed against creation and/or humankind. Indeed, Croatto and Míguez see an attempt at building an empire.<sup>187</sup> Sympathetic as I am to this approach, what has troubled me is the lack of any reference to "empire" or creation. The author could have easily mentioned that the people in 11:3 began their endeavor under the leadership of some king, or after the construction of the city and tower, they decided to elect one – but nothing of this sort. The lack of reference, however, is telling. The silence, along with more loquacious features of the story, if correctly interpreted, may work as a password that opens the gate to the tower of Babylon.

The introduction to the story, 11:1-2, describes the initial situation that is bound to change by the end of the narrative. It is introduced by *wayāhî* that regularly links what follows to the preceding (e.g., 4:2-3; 12:10; 13:7; 14:1; 15:17; 17:1; 21:20, 22; 23:1; 25:20; 26:1). The conventional rendering would rather call for a nominal clause. Hence, it seems more appropriate to render 11:1, "And the whole earth became one tongue and one language." What the Babylon story connects to cannot be Shem's table just before it, since that is a genealogy, but must be the Nimrod story. The implication is that, through Nimrod's efforts to found empires, people became a political unity (more anon), a process which inevitably leads to empires. To be sure, "In contrast to the many differences among peoples set forth in chapter 10, chapter 11 begins by imagining the opposite—

<sup>184</sup> Following a translation of *bā'āreš* suggested by Levin 2002: 351-52.

<sup>185</sup> Since the original audience did not make the distinction between Babel and Babylon, I will consistently refer to Babylon. In this chapter, I will use my former papers (Czövek 2013; 2014).

<sup>186</sup> Jubilees is the first attested interpretation in this vein; see Simon 2012: 12.

<sup>187</sup> Harland (1998) provides a helpful summary of different approaches.



uniformity of speech” (O’Connor 2018: 174).

The initial circumstances of the plot consist of a common language<sup>188</sup> and “the whole world,” i.e. humanity en bloc (cf. 11:5).<sup>189</sup> As for the “one language,” Uehlinger states (1990: 438) that “From the perspective of rulers, it is as normal that the subjects do ‘one mouth’ and ‘one speech’ respectively, i.e. are united – unless this unity is directed against the rulers.” In an inscription in Dur-Sharrukin, Sargon II claims,

By order of Ashur, my lord, and the power of my sceptre, I deported the people of the four parts of the world, speaking a foreign and incomprehensible language, dwellers of mountains and plains, all subjects of the light of the gods and lord of everything. I turned them into a sole language and put them there. I assigned them some Assyrians as scribes and overseers, who were able to teach them the fear of god and king. (Fuchs 1993: 296)

In this text, the “one mouth” of the deported “appears as a correction of the ideologically disturbing fact of being multilingual” (Uehlinger 1990: 509); foreign languages were seen as barbaric, incomprehensible, and as such violating harmony, world order (509-12).<sup>190</sup> “One language and a common speech” thus connotes political unity (344-513).<sup>191</sup> The protagonists of our story act as a group politically united. The focus of the plot shifts from “the whole world” to “East” to “a plain in Shinar” (11:1-2). The verb “move,” *nāsa*’, usually denotes the breaking up of tents and setting out of nomadic people (e.g., 12:9; 13:11; 20:1; 33:17; so also Ross 1981: 773) – stock breeding nomads go to settle, *yāšab*, in the city. The plot is set into motion by their plan,

Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly. [...] 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. (11:3-4)

As opposed to the Mesopotamian view, present in BCS (Tablet VI), here, Babylon is built on human initiative, not by gods.

Hurowitz has studied ANE building accounts and observed six permanent components (1992). Giorgetti (2014) has applied Hurowitz’s observations to the Babylon story by seeing it as a “mock building account” made up of a similar scenario (11:1-2 are the setting for the narrative). The application of Hurowitz’s model by Giorgetti may seem a bit strained, particularly the correspondence of # 4-6 (but see 2014: 15; n. 53). Still, by positing a specific setting, it provides a compelling anti-empire interpretation.

Hurowitz 1992: 64	Giorgetti 2014: 5
1) Circumstances of the project and decision to build	1) Circumstances of the project and decision to build, 11:3-4
2) Preparations: gathering workers and material	2) Preparations for building, 11:3-4
3) Description of the building	3) Details of the construction, 11:3-4

<sup>188</sup> Uehlinger (1990: 576) notices both the tension between the “many languages” (10:5, 20, 31) and “one lip” (11:1, 6-7, 9) and the common theme, i.e. the state of the great variety of people (ch. 10) as a result of God’s intervention (11:1-9). Schüle (2006: 391-92) takes the first phrase to mean “understanding each other” while the second “the same words” which is the lexicon, the vocabulary of the speakers. Similarly to my approach, Schüle (and Uehlinger) sees the transgression of humankind on a horizontal level. Still, he thinks humankind’s plan threatens God (392) whereas I think God’s creation and humanity are threatened forcing God to intervene.

<sup>189</sup> Importantly, Nebuchadnezzar II boasted of employing every nation in his empire to build Etemenanki (Jensen 1928: 385) with the workforce probably consisting of Jews as well (Van Seters 1992: 183). Giorgetti (2014: 7) considers “the whole world” equivalent to the Akkadian phrases *šar kullat kibrāt arba’i*, “king of all the four regions (of the earth)” and *šar kiššati*, “king of the universe.”

<sup>190</sup> Batto (1991: 49-50), however, has challenged the view that foreign languages were seen as barbaric.

<sup>191</sup> „Significantly, the language of ‘one mouth’ (*pū ištēn*) is often found in the annalistic accounts ending in a building account or associated with the populating of a city. The language of ‘one mouth’ represents the subjugation of the various peoples to the authority of these kings, who saw themselves as kings of ‘all the world’” (Giorgetti 2014: 6).

4) Dedication rites and festivities	4) “Dedication” festivities and participation of deity, 11:5
5) Blessing and/or prayer of the king	5) Divine decrees and curses for the builders, 11:6-7
6) Blessings and curses for future generations	6) Curses for the project and future generations of kings, 11:8-9

Using brick and tar (11:3) is often mentioned in Mesopotamian construction inscriptions (Giorgetti 2014: 9). Making a name was linked to building projects in Mesopotamia too.<sup>192</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, naming a city is a widely attested custom of reigning kings. Building the city and naming it also seem closely linked (Uehlinger 1990: 386-96).<sup>193</sup> Indeed, the builders’ intention is twofold, “so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (11:4). Giorgetti observes (2014: 10), “Completely lacking from the account is the divine revelation and consent for the project, which is an essential part of the Mesopotamian accounts. [...] In particular, the construction of and boasting about an entirely new city is viewed as an act of *hubris*.” The city’s building lacks divine participation and approval.

Much of the discussion has focused on whether the building of the city and, particularly, tower connotes a good or evil endeavor. The discussion seems futile. For 1<sup>st</sup> millennium Mesopotamians, including people living in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia, “a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens” was an idiomatic reference to a city with its citadel, characteristic of Mesopotamian royal cities and connoting imperial interests (Uehlinger 1990: 201-53). “At that time my lord Marduk told me in regard to E-temen-anki, the ziqqurat of Babylon, which before my day was (already) very weak and badly buckled, to ground its bottom on the breast of the netherworld, to make its top vie with the heavens”, Nabopolassar claims in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century (George 2005-06: 83). Even if the story originates in some particular historico-political event and is thus intended as “a politically relevant parable” its particularity is transposed to a level of “paradigmatic reflection on the problem of world empire” (Uehlinger 1990: 535).

Clearly, then, the story about building a city with its tower/citadel is about political unity and power: the linguistic evidence points in this direction. By building the city and the tower, the people strive for power, their endeavor is an empire. Uehlinger claims that, semantically, *migdāl* does not stand for “ziggyrat” and can only be interpreted in this way if the text cannot be made sense of with conventional means of semantics. His stance is understandable as his concern lies with the original meaning and setting of the story, which he considers an anti-Sargonide tale. “The language of ‘raising the head’ high into the sky/heavens is utilized by various Mesopotamian kings and refers to all different kinds of structures [...] in addition to ziggyrats,” Giorgetti adds (2014: 14). Since, however, in its present form the tale is undoubtedly Babylonian in its outlook, I will interpret it accordingly. The “ziggyrat” seems to enrich our understanding of the story – it opens up a new vista with its “coded” message. Indeed, “a tower that reaches to the heavens” (11:4) is reminiscent of the

<sup>192</sup> O’Connor (2018: 176) notes that making a name „is to acquire the honor, respect, and status needed to gain resources and community connections for the sake of the survival and well-being of one’s family or tribal group. In the case of nations and peoples, to make a name is to acquire honor and influence among other peoples and nations. Such influence aids in keeping relationships smooth and secure, always needed for safety and prosperity.” Strong suggests (2008) that name making was related to royal victory stelae. Giorgetti (2014: 19; n. 74) correctly objects that the story “does not specifically reflect the victory stelae or their images.”

<sup>193</sup> Witte (1998: 321) claims, ignoring Uehlinger’s linguistic-historical evidence, that making a name refers to the praxis of Alexander the Great to found cities and name them after himself. Rolf Rendtorff (1993: 49) observes in another context: “I am always amazed by the sureness, not to say boldness, of some scholars, who feel able to date with precision all kinds of texts within this period, even within specific decades. It is even more amazing when certain historical events are mentioned in texts that, according to their interpreters, were written much later.” I wonder whether ignoring the explicit reference to Babylon in the story is among those that amazes Rendtorff.

language in connection with ziggurats. After all, 6<sup>th</sup> century Jews living in Babylonia may not have been acquainted with the precise referent “city and tower” but may have taken it literally.

Ziggurats were not erected for people to reach heaven but for gods to descend on earth (contra LaCoque 2009: 36). “The ziggurat was the architectural focus of the temple complex, which in turn functioned as the central organ in the economic, political, and cultural spheres of early communities in Mesopotamia” (Walton 1995: 165). Building the city and its ziggurat (see, e.g., SFS) was a divine or a divinely authorized human enterprise in Mesopotamia, “the responsibility of gods and rulers” (Miller 1985: 239). As we saw above, kingship and capital cities were intimately interrelated, just as they are, by implication, in our story. By building the city and the tower, the people want to achieve fame in the Mesopotamian way.<sup>194</sup> That is what one frequently finds in Mesopotamian hymns and myths related to building projects. What is needed for unity is leadership. And if it is leadership, it can only be the one – kingship.

Building the city and the ziggurat<sup>195</sup> is the beginning of their plan, the crown of which is – a kingdom. As soon as they are done, people familiar with Mesopotamian myths and royal ideology would expect kingship to be lowered from heaven. It is not kingship, however, that descends from heaven nor is it Marduk, but Yahweh, whose coming down prevents kingship’s descent. The ziggurat constructed to aid the gods in their travel to earth to be worshiped (cf. Walton 2009: 62-63, 65) becomes the staircase – for Yahweh to come down!

On descending, Yahweh finds that it is one nation with one language – a homogeneous culture that does not allow for diversity (11:6-7).<sup>196</sup> Giorgetti sees in Yahweh’s descent (11:5) the festive procession culminating in the divinity’s entering the city temple or, alternatively, the “divine invitee on his way to see the dedication festivities for a building within the city such as a royal palace.” In 11:6-7, Yahweh relates to the heavenly council what he has seen so that the council can decree a cursing instead of a blessing (2014: 14-17). Thus Yahweh suggests to confuse, *nābēlāh*, their language. The verb is very reminiscent of *nēbālāh*, “folly” (also noticed by Wenham 2015: 95).

Yahweh did not descend to authorize state religion, some royal city or dynasty, because Yahweh is interested in the welfare of the whole of humankind and not just in that of some privileged cities, nations, classes or individuals. That is the reason we, though accustomed to their absence by now, do not find a king list or stories about kings, which could be expected, at the end of the Babylon story. Instead, the genealogy of Shem is told, followed by the Abraham story. Moreover, “to place the name” was a standard formula for building projects in Mesopotamia (Giorgetti 2014: 17). The people wanted to make a name, *šēm*, for themselves, but it is Yahweh who will make a name to a descendant of Shem, another commoner:

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. (12:2; also noticed by Jenkins 1978: 46; Sailhamer 1992: 133; Hess 1993: 118; Baumgart 1999: 27)<sup>197</sup>

Jacob Wright (2011) argues that name making, often related to martial valor, was, in their best interest, encouraged by ancient states, whereas the OT books, edited after the collapse of Judahite statehood, emphasized procreation. The people’s attempt at making a name at Babylon may be linked to warfare. This should not surprise us – Babylon’s might was based on military power.

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<sup>194</sup> My approach here is similar to that of Holloway to the ark. He states, “the question left begging by the literal reading is the semantics of the text and the cultural milieu in which it was composed” (1998: 618).

<sup>195</sup> With a square base of 91 meters on each side (see George 2005-06) and a 91 meter height, the Etemenanki belonged to the biggest ziggurats (cf. Baumgart 1999: 515-17). “The verticality of the ziggurat was its dominant visual feature” (Van de Mierop 2003: 264-65). No wonder that it impressed people of various ethnic and social background. It can be expected that the ziggurat did not leave Babylonian Jews untouched (Baumgart 1999: 557).

<sup>196</sup> Thus, it is not just “linguistic and anthropological diversification” that the multiplication of humankind inevitably brings about (so Swiggers 1999: 186).

<sup>197</sup> By focusing on the words *šēm* and *šām*, the pun is sometimes missed by commentators (e.g., Kikawada 1974: 25; Fokkelman 1991: 16-18) or dismissed by others on account of terminological difference (e.g., Gertz 2009a: 31).

Yahweh, however, outlines the alternative for Abraham and his descendants: instead of conquests they will be a great nation by procreation and by leaving the empire.

But back to the story. Walton correctly states that Yahweh is not opposed to architecture or urbanization as such. He goes on to claim that nothing “was wrong with towers or with cities” (1995: 169). Generally speaking, that is true. Regarding Mesopotamia and in the light of the previous discussion, this seems to miss one crucial point of the story and the general picture – “cities with towers” were intrinsically related to imperial efforts.<sup>198</sup> Yahweh’s judgment “represents a reversal of the imperialistic project (dominion of ‘the four quarters of the earth’) and an ‘overthrowing’ of the royal prerogative” (Giorgetti 2014: 19).

The subtle use of the WSL pattern as well as the shrewd manipulation of the MKL pattern may reflect, once again, a critique of the arrogant superiority of city and kingship to tribal societies. As opposed to MKL, the genealogies in Genesis 10–11 list nations descended from Noah. They do not mention kings: their focus is universal. The next chapter relates how Babylon and Abram-Abraham came to be.<sup>199</sup>

Uehlinger (1990: 570) sees in the fame motif a back-reference to 6:4: the builders want to achieve the status of glory possessed by the heroes killed by the flood. There are several links between Gen 6:1–4 and 11:1–9 in addition to this. 6:1–4 is about actions of “the daughters of humankind/sons of God” while 11:1–9 is about actions of the “sons of humankind” (11:5). Both relate events about some beginnings (6:1; 11:6) that apparently concern the whole of humankind (6:1; 11:1–2, 5, 8–9) (cf. Sasson 1980). Moreover,

Thematic correlations appear again in the third major stage of each storyline: stories regarding the human community descending from the initial human progenitors, Gen 11,1–9 and 6,1–4. Both stories occur after genealogical sections, which, despite their differences, imply that a much larger human community has developed from the first human family (Gen 4,17–5,32; 10,1–32). Both of these stories describe a threat to the boundary between this human community and the divine realm. In the pre-flood story divine beings break this boundary. They take human daughters “for themselves” (6,2), who bear “for them” the “sons of the name” (Gen 6,4). Similar motifs recur in the Tower of Babel story, where the humans attempt to build a tower to heaven in order to make a “name” “for themselves” (11,4). In each story God responds to this threat with a speech proclaiming the unacceptability of the crossing of the divine-human boundary (6,3a; 11,6), and then creates safeguards to protect it, whether temporal (Gen 6,3b) or spatial (11,7–8). Neither story has the elements of judgment that characterized stories earlier in the sequence (cf. Genesis 2–4 and 6–9), yet both describe God as acting to prevent the blurring of the line that separates humanity from God. Finally both stories end with a note linking the story to legendary items familiar to the audience, the “giants”/“men of the name” in 6,4 and the city of Babel in 11,9. (Carr 1998a: 332–33)

The above interpretation may shed some light on the Nimrod episode (cf. Kooij 1996: 38). I have claimed that the Babylon story is the elaboration of 10:10 that refers to Babylon, Uruk, Akkad, and Calneh as the “prime” or “head cities” of Nimrod’s kingdom. As opposed, however, to the relative unanimity of the Mesopotamian tradition of five antediluvian cities (see Hallo 1970: 63), Gen 10:10 and 10:11–12 come short of this tradition. Indeed, 10:11 manages to do this by making Asshur into a person, a historical curiosity – and a theological *tour de force*. Note also that these cities were founded by one postdiluvian man without any divine involvement.

On account of his being a hero, *gibbôr*, Nimrod is linked to the heroes of old in 6:4. Reading his short story, we learn what one of them achieved. Nimrod founded capital cities of empires and began to behave as a hero. What a hero was like to people living in 6<sup>th</sup> century Babylonia, we could imagine by thinking of, for instance, Gilgamesh who performed heroic deeds but who, at the same time, was dreaded for his tyrannical rule. Genesis 10 is just as ambiguous toward Nimrod. The beneficiaries definitely held such a king and conqueror in high esteem just as those subjected to his rule moaned about him. In other words, I am suggesting that, along with several references in

<sup>198</sup> Whereas Walton sees “the act of religious hubris, making God in the image of man,” (1995: 169), i.e. religion, as the point of criticism, I see the imperial tendency of Mesopotamian city states, i.e. politics.

<sup>199</sup> Ch. 10 is the background to 11:1–9, just as the genealogies in chs. 10–11 are the background to Abraham.



Genesis 1–11 to mythical figures and events in Mesopotamian mythology, this one too is a *double entendre* playing on their equivocal assessment. Certainly, Nimrod became famous (10:9), just as the people in 11:4 (cf. 6:4) aspired to become. But the fame of these royal cities and empires he built was achieved with the blood of subjects. Once again and importantly and ironically, no kingship descended on any of those cities.

Nimrod “began to be a mighty hero on the earth” (10:8; AT)<sup>200</sup> that materialized in founding capital cities (10:10–12) which, again, was only the beginning of what they were doing (11:6). The narrator could have stated, Nimrod was a big bully but this would have raised eyebrows, to say the least. To avoid this, he said, Nimrod was a great hunter. This again is a sarcastic pun applying “hunter” as a metonymy. Mesopotamian kings prided themselves on their hunting feats. But in countries subdued by them they were not remembered by those hunts but by their brutal conquests (cf. Goldingay 2003: 187–88). And the narrator does not stop there but does his best to be as adulatory as possible. To disperse all suspicion, he adds, “before Yahweh,” which has as good as no semantic content, unless *lipnê* has the meaning “against,” as possibly in 6:11 (so Clark 1971: 184).

The protagonists wanted more geographical and linguistic unity, i.e. homogeneity, meant to be achieved by political unity, as opposed to Yahweh, whose main concern was heterogeneity, not one language but many, not one culture but a variety and in various places.<sup>201</sup> To this end, Yahweh confuses human language and scatters humankind all over the face of the earth (cf. deClaissé-Walford 2006: 413–14). Thus, the sin is horizontal, directed not against God but rather against creation, nations, languages, and ethnic groups. This focus on God’s creation accords well with PH’s stress. Filling the earth is God’s purpose from the very beginning. If humankind is intent on sticking together, Yahweh feels compelled to intervene and resort to “force.”<sup>202</sup>

BCS is normally studied with reference to Genesis’ creation account. Some motifs, as well as the sequence of events on Tablet VI, however, when compared with the Babylon story, may aid our interpretation of 11:1–9. Even though humankind has been created to relieve the gods from labor, in the epic, it is the gods who volunteer to build Esagila for Marduk. This, of course, was essential for the claim of Marduk’s supremacy and Babylon’s primacy the epic is putting forward. This also serves as the gods’ resting place.

Now, O Lord, that you have set us free,  
What are our favours from you?  
We would like to make a shrine with its own name.  
We would like our night’s resting place to be in your private quarters, and to rest there.  
Let us found a shrine, a sanctuary there.  
Whenever we arrive, let us rest within it.

Unsurprisingly, the plan meets Marduk’s hearty approval,

Create Babylon, whose construction you requested!  
Let its mud bricks be moulded, and build high the shrine!

The gods set out to do the job, they make bricks and raise the head of Esagila plus their own shrines. With the work accomplished, Marduk proclaims,

Indeed, Bab-ili (is) your home too!  
Sing for joy there, dwell in happiness!

<sup>200</sup> *gibbôr šayid* may be a pun on *gibbôr ḥayil*.

<sup>201</sup> Contra Hiebert 2007 who sees the story directed against cultural homogeneity only, whose supporting pillar has always been imperial politics.

<sup>202</sup> Brueggemann (1972a) studies P and finds the blessing in 1:28 as its quintessential formulation, recurring at certain points in Genesis and Exodus. The five terms of blessing are “be fruitful” as opposed to no more barrenness; “multiply” as opposed to no more lack of heirs; “fill the earth” as opposed to no more being crowded out; “subdue” as opposed to no more subservience; “have dominion” as opposed to no more being dominated (401). For the exilic community poised to reenter the land, it was definitely encouraging.



Babylon, the capital of the kingdom has been established. Everything is in place: Babylon and Esagila, city and shrine erected,<sup>203</sup> tutelary god ritually inaugurated – what else is needed? Only one thing needs to be done: kingship lowered. Even if it is not explicitly referred to (cf. Uehlinger 1990: 504) the obvious purpose of both the epic and the New Year festival was to buttress Babylon's kingship and claim to political supremacy.

In the Genesis story, we see the same focus of the builders on city and its ziggurat. No deity is mentioned but, in these endeavors, they are clearly implied. Nor is kingship mentioned but this is what would obviously follow and what is assumed all along as the very purpose of the whole undertaking. And that is what makes Yahweh concerned – this is just the beginning of what they intend, and nothing will be impossible for them (11:6). So, Yahweh puts an end to the endeavor.

On archaeological and historical grounds, Kraeling (1920: 276; cf. von Soden 1971: 263) correctly claims that the cessation of the building can apply only to the tower, not the residential sections of the city. Still, 11:8 refers to the halt of the building of the “city.”<sup>204</sup> This is important. Ziggurat stands for religion whereas city for kingship; they metonymically denote the endeavor. Yahweh's concern is not merely religion but politics – they go hand in hand. It is kingship that Yahweh's descent forestalls; the city is stymied from being finished and kingship from being established. “Creator God and world empire do not correspond to each other” (Schüle 2006: 383). Humankind's sin, in short, is not a failure to execute God's command to fill the earth (so Turner 1990: 31-32) but a misinterpretation of the command to subdue the earth in that, by their imperialistic endeavor, they would have ended up subduing each other in total denial of the Creator's original plan.

The name of the city where Yahweh confused, *bālal*, languages is Babylon. Giorgetti sees Yahweh as carrying out the curses on the people for failure of invoking divine help in the building of the city by scattering them from their center of power (2014: 18). Yahweh's scattering “represents a reversal of the imperialistic project (dominion of ‘the four quarters of the earth’) and an ‘overthrowing’ of the royal prerogative” (19).

The failure of the building of the tower and city is to be understood as a sarcastic and hopeful critique by the oppressed exiles of the oppressor who “gathered” the conquered nations of the empire thus attempting to build a strong and permanent Babylonia. The necessary concomitant of “gathering” was the destruction of the culture of those exiled. Homogeneity and heterogeneity are in antagonistic relation.

Indeed, Mesopotamian city ideology, present also here, linked the city's preeminence with creation. This superiority is based on and is evident in three areas: military force, divine favor, and cultural achievements (Vanstiphout 2003: 8). BCS was related to and fostered Babylonian nationalism (see Foster 2005: 436). Mesopotamian city states vied with each other all the time trying to assert themselves – at the cost of others (see SKL). Thus, it is not just an “ambitious urban project of the Babylonians” (so Kikawada 1974: 29) but an ambitious imperial project – the beginning of kingship and empire.

The similarities between the Babylon and Exodus stories have been recognized. One can find motifs in common with both stories: brickwork, explicit or implicit references to primeval times, and kingship.<sup>205</sup> In support of the anti-empire interpretation of the Babylon story, Schüle discusses Gen 11:1-9 in relation to Exodus. In Exod 1:10, 14, as in Gen 11:3, the words *hābā*, *lābēnīm*, *ḥōmer* are used. Because of the similarity of terminology between Babylon's and Egypt's construction materials and project, Schüle sees here the monumental architecture epitomized. “Brick” and “tar” in Exod 1:14 symbolize forced labor, indeed, slavery. The correspondence climaxes in the notion of empire: If people start to gather in one place this has the taste of self-enslavement, as opposed to the free unfolding of human life intended in creation. Further intertextual correspondences are

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<sup>203</sup> George (2005-06: 87) argues that the reference in BCS VI.63 is to the Etemenanki.

<sup>204</sup> But see the Samaritan and LXX texts adding “and the tower.”

<sup>205</sup> For more “echoes” of Gen 11:1-9 in Exodus 1–2, see Kikawada and Quinn 1985: 112-17. See also Gerhard's thesis (2006) that the Moses figure is a critique of Neo-Babylonian kingship.

identified by him between the Genesis and the Exodus stories. The Egyptians' speech in Exod 1:10 is couched in a syntax and words reminiscent of Gen 11:3-4. Most importantly, in both cases we see people acting in the interest of holding the empire together. Finally, the action of the Egyptians in Exod 3:8, parallel to that in Gen 11:7, makes God intervene. The agreement in terminology (*yārad*) and theme is impressive once again. God leaves his heavenly abode and takes the earthly scene of human activities. To sum up, Egypt the evil empire is modeled on motifs known from the Babylon story (2006: 406-10; cf. Keiter 2013).

By scattering humankind, Yahweh wishes to achieve what Yahweh planned in the beginning – a diverse world. Scattering is not an end in itself but a means to create a heterogeneous culture and society. The narrator sees humankind's strength in being "scattered," i.e. not gathered in exile (cf. Kooij 1996: 38; LaCocque 2009: 31).<sup>206</sup> Atrahasis offers birth control as the solution to overcrowding. PH offers dispersion, filling the earth (see 1:28; 9:1) (see Kikawada and Quinn 1985: 51) to this as well as to exile. Babylon promotes a homogenous empire, PH a heterogeneous creation. Civilizations and cultures can only exist by retaining their inherent diversity which is totally at loggerheads with the intention and function of Mesopotamian empires based on and aiming at homogeneity.

Universal religion is often an OT perspective (e.g., Isa 2:1-5; 19:19-25) – not here though. The reason is simple. In the empire, the common religion cannot be but the one, that of the state. Babylonian state religion would not tolerate any alternative. The story's critique is the more poignant as the name "Babylon" means "the gate of gods." "You Babylonians may boast that you live in the gate of God, but we could as well say that yours is the place where God confused the languages of men and whence they were scattered over the earth" (Hallo 1995: 770). In the Genesis narrative, Babylon is not a city that descending from heaven is destined for world rule but one the language and imperialistic plans of which Yahweh confuses.

Speiser (1956: 322-23) notes that in Akkadian construction records the verb *balālu*, a cognate of Hebrew *bālal*, is used with reference to "sprinkling" with a compound of fragrant oils and essences before laying the foundation. This pun "could have served to undermine all of the Tower of Babel." Speiser goes on to suggest another potential world play. The name *bab-ili*

was bound to be associated on many occasions with the common verb *babālum* (preple *bābilum*) "to carry". In fact, we have direct evidence of such punning in a bilingual poem in praise of the city, where *Bābilu* is spoken of as *bibil libbišu* "his wish fulfillment". A rival of Babylon, say in some Kassite center or in the entourage of Tukulti-Ninurta I, could have seized on the same wordplay for less friendly purposes. He could have gone on from *babālum* to its cognate *šutābulum*, which includes among its connotations that of "to drive out". Then, mindful of the idiom *šutābulum šaptā* "to move the lips", he might even have hit on the paranomasia of "to scatter speech."

Seen in the light of Mesopotamian world view, even if it is soft, the polemic against the city as the gate to heaven is audible (contra Uehlinger 1990: 549). Indeed, without such a polemic, the story would not be complete, as recognized by most interpreters. "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the author has composed a satire directed at human pretensions in the political sphere exemplified by the Neo-Babylonian empire in both its civic (the city) and religious aspects (the tower or ziggurat)" (Blenkinsopp 2002: 58). Babylon's demise has of course theological relevance. "The connection between god and city was thought to have been so close that the decline of a city was usually blamed on its abandonment by the patron deity" (Van de Mieroop 1999: 47).

As well-known, the main ziggurat of Babylon, restored by Nebuchadnezzar II, was called Etemenanki meaning "House which is the Foundation of Heaven and Earth." The name of the most significant temple, next to Etemenanki, was Esagila, "The House of Raised Head." Both of them were dedicated to Babylon's chief deity, Marduk. The story of the building of the tower might be taken as a critique of the temple allegedly linking heaven and earth.

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<sup>206</sup> I wonder whether this is a reference to the Cyrus edict when the exiled nations of Babylon were "scattered" to their homelands "all over the earth."

Finally, another Genesis story springs to mind, apparently relevant to our discussion. In Genesis 28, headed for Paddan Aram, Jacob goes to sleep on his last night before leaving Canaan.

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway, *sullām*, resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (28:12)

The word *sullām*, considered a cognate with Akkadian *simmltu* (Millard 1966: 86), may refer not so much to an ordinary stairway but rather to that of a Mesopotamian ziggurat (cf. Walton 1995: 161, n. 20; 2009: 62; 146, n. 264).<sup>207</sup> For Babylonian religion, cities with temples and priests were not merely important – they were essential institutions and instruments in religion. If it is a ziggurat to which the narrative alludes, the story of Jacob’s vision is polemical (cf. Matthews and Benjamin 1993: 125): God is not accessible or revealed in Babylonian ziggurats.<sup>208</sup> Indeed, God may be accessible in a distant, seemingly God-forsaken province without temples, cities, and kings. This polemic gets an even sharper wording in Jacob’s realization:

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. (28:16-19)

Indeed, as opposed to a number of Mesopotamian stories in which gods approve/order the construction of temples Jacob is told nothing of this – sanctuaries are, after all, not all-important in religion.

Again, there is no king, no city, no temple, no priest in this story – a commoner meets Yahweh. Israel’s god is not defeated. Mediation of blessing does not depend on buildings and institutions (Hieke 2003: 257).

### 2.5.2 Shem’s Genealogy, 11:10-26

Both the Nimrod and Babylon stories are implicitly or explicitly linked to Ham. When, however, no kingship materializes, i.e. kingship does not deliver, the focus shifts to Shem’s descendants, to one line and individual in particular.

In Shem’s genealogy, 10 generations lead up to Abraham just as there are 10 generations from Adam to Noah in ch. 5. And as the tenth generation in ch. 5 ends with a father begetting three sons, the same happens to the tenth member of Shem’s genealogy: Terah too begets three sons (Alter 1996: 48). The linear genealogy in ch. 5 demonstrated the realization of God’s blessing (1:28) and, by leading up to Noah, prepared the story of destruction and re-creation. Similarly, Shem’s linear genealogy in ch. 11 serves to highlight the fulfillment of God’s blessing (Smith 1977: 312; Turner 1990: 32) and the need of and, by leading up to Abram, preparation for a new beginning.

The genealogy demonstrates much similarity to the genealogy in ch. 5 which follows the formula: “And N lived x years and fathered O. And N lived, after fathering O, y years, and fathered sons and daughters. And the total years of N was z, and he died.” The genealogy in ch. 10 is in turn patterned: “And N lived x years and fathered O. And N turned, after fathering O, y years, and fathered sons and daughters.” The genealogy in ch. 11 differs by omitting the references to N’s total years and his death. Moreover, “The shortening of lives suggests a literary movement from the mythic world of primeval history (chs. 1–11) toward a reality where humans might live less than a century, rather than nine centuries as in the case with Methuselah (5:25) and others in Adam’s genealogy” (O’Connor 2018: 181). It is true that Israel is not mentioned in the genealogies. By the remarkable similarity, however, Shem’s line appears the direct continuation of that of Seth which provides Israel with a genealogy reaching back to primeval times.

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<sup>207</sup> Uehlinger (1990: 233-34), by not understanding how *sullām* here could con/denote a ziggurat, fails to see this import of the story.

<sup>208</sup> Houtman (1977: 350-51) also notices the link between Gen 11 and 28 but does not relate *sullām* to a ziggurat.

The material of Genesis 1–11 does not fit together in a random way. As a whole, it has momentum that drives toward the emigration of Abram and his family from Mesopotamia to Canaan on instruction from God. The means used to structure the movement of the text in this direction is the insertion of genealogies. (Van Wijk-Bos 2005: 95)

We have seen how Babylon's story is the climax of PH's criticism of the empire. Shem's genealogy is an organic part of the old world, as it provides an exit from the empire judged by God and come to an end. With Abram's birth (11:26), a new story has been introduced.

### 3 Prospects: A New Genealogy and Beyond

Though not part of my study, a look at how the narrative unfolds may be helpful.

#### 3.1 Terah's Genealogy, 11:27-32

With Terah's genealogy (11:27-32), a new narrative begins, that of Abraham.

However, it is most significant that there is no clear-cut break at the end of the Babel story. Clearly the Abraham material begins a new section of the Pentateuch, but the precise beginning of the Abraham material—and therewith the conclusion of the pre-Abrahamic material—cannot be determined. (Clines 1976: 503)

In chs. 10–11, tribes and nations spread throughout the earth. Baumgart (1999: 25-26) has observed that it is against this background that Terah and Abraham leave their original place. By moving westward, the journey of Terah, and, later, Abram, reenacts the journey started by the whole earth in 11:2. And like the people, on arriving at Shinar, “settled there” (11:2), so do Terah and family in Haran (11:32; Awabdy 2010: 18-19; differently LaCoque 2009: 33). In this vein, Awabdy (2010: 22) claims, “Following this analysis, it would not be beyond the narrative trajectory to read Terah–Abram's westward migration–settlement–migration–entrance (11.31–12.9) as an intentional plot contrast to the *כל-הארץ* westward migration–settlement–scattering (11.1-9).”

The shaping of the contiguous *tôladôt* material does not obfuscate this connection. Instead, the reordered birth order (10.1-31; 11.27-30) and Shem's vertical genealogy (11.10-26) deliberately funnels readers from the Tower of Babel scene to Terah, then smoothly transitions (11.26-27) into the account of Terah's descendants [sic] (11.27–25.11). The placement of 11.1-9, disrupting the author's Terah–Abram destination, is also literarily artful. The effect is that readers of the Tower of Babel scene are preconditioned for and oriented toward the Terah–Abram narrative (11.27–25.11) which likewise includes an exchange, yet one very different, between Noah's progeny and Yahweh. (Awabdy 2010: 28)

Terah's *toledot* is a remarkable genealogy. It is obvious at first glance that it is not really a genealogy, given that Terah's offspring were listed in 11:26. Therefore, nearly all the genealogical information is immaterial. That, however, does not hold for the non-genealogical references. That is to say, for a genealogy, the section is rather eventful. We learn Abram's and Nahor's wives' names (11:29), that Abram's wife was barren (11:30) and that Lot was part of the travel company to Haran (11:31) – all essential for the subsequent narrative and enclosed by the two *wayyiqqah* references (11:29-31). As for Terah's third son, references to Haran envelope the section. While Terah's son Haran dies in Ur of the Chaldeans, Terah and family arrive at Haran (11:28 and 31).

Terah set out to Canaan (11:31), like Abram will do in the next chapter. Since the reason is not told, the reader wonders why they only got to Haran. I suggest that, Ur of the Chaldeans being at the Eastern end and Haran at the Western end of the Babylonian empire, these locales, two Sin centers, serve as metonymic or meristic references as if to exhort exilic Jewry, Terah tried to leave the empire but did not succeed – follow in Abraham's footsteps.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Is this a hint at the composition date of this section under Nabunaid who favored the Sin cult (cf. Hendel 2012: 61-63)? For a different interpretation, see Blenkinsopp 2015: 31.



### 3.2 Abraham's Story: Genesis 12:1 and Beyond

Moving on, the Abraham story is set against the backdrop of PH. For instance, we see conspicuous differences from 11:1-9 (Baumgart 1999: 27):

1. the people want to make a name for themselves so that they are not spread out while Yahweh makes a name for Abraham who will be the father of nations;<sup>210</sup>
2. the people in Babylon are opposed by Yahweh while Abraham has him on his side;
3. the people's endeavor fails while Abraham's move from Haran to Canaan is the blessed beginning of promises.

And, as opposed to the tribes and nations that own their land by inheritance (in a natural way) in ch. 10, Abraham is called to have his own land by God (Uehlinger 1990: 578).

But it is not only the Babylon story and the nations' list in ch. 10 against which that of Abraham is to be read. Commenting on the genealogies in chs. 5 and 11, Bailey (1994: 279) observes that "as a climax, it is the tenth descendant in both passages who marks a significant change in the development of the narrative (Noah in chapter 5, and Abraham in 11)."<sup>211</sup> Like his forefather, Abraham is the vehicle of Yahweh's saving commitment to creation. Indeed, Abraham's blessing (12:1-3) reverses the curse of the serpent in ch. 3 and "heralds the triumph of the seed of the woman over the seed of the serpent. The blessing is not only for Israel, but for all the families of the earth" (Hamilton 2007: 273-74).

As early as 1969, Terrence Fretheim noticed the crucial narratological function of Gen 12:1-3. He considered it a key passage providing a cornerstone for the entire structure of J by speaking of "all the families of the earth" (12:3) and so linking the genealogies with Abraham's story; by listing promises to Abraham in five verbs the subject of which is God (12:2-3); and by specifying "all the families of the earth" (12:3) as the target group of the blessings of the promises. The concerns of the narrative are Israel as a great nation and Israel's relationship to the rest of humankind. In short, Israel exists to be a blessing for the nations (13-17).<sup>212</sup> Again, Abraham's call prepares just that.

In Abraham's story, *toledot* formulae multiply just as his offspring do (25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). Notice this sequence: *toledot* of heaven and earth (2:4) > *toledot* of Adam (5:1) > *toledot* of Noah (6:9) > *toledot* of Noah's sons (10:1, 32) > *toledot* of Shem (11:10) > *toledot* of Terah (11:27) > story of Abraham (12:1ff) > *toledot* of Ishmael (25:12, 19) – *toledot* of Isaac (25:19) – *toledot* of Esau (36:1/9) – *toledot* of Jacob (37:2). The first 6 *toledot* narrow down the story, the next 6 extend it "horizontally." The latter six have no common offspring but a common ancestor (Ziemer 2005: 367). In other words, as opposed to MKL, the Genesis *toledot* are not primarily backward but forward looking. "The king lists consistently suggest a backward movement in time, while the biblical genealogies move forward in time. This would suggest a different purpose for the two forms of literature" (Hess 1989: 253). This is a radical departure from the genealogy genre but, at the same time, this is what one should expect from an alternative vision: instead of looking into the past, looking forward. The use of WSL and the adoption of a modified form of MKL are also in the service of this alternative vision in Genesis 1–11 pointing ahead to the Abraham story. Indeed, this is the function of the *toledot*: to assist the new beginning by Abraham (cf. Awabdy 2010: 12-13). Note also that Terah's *toledot* (11:27), introducing the Abraham story, is the sixth, i.e. central one in Genesis (Kessler-Deurloo 2004: 6), marking the transition from primeval to patriarchal history.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Baumgart speaks of "one nation" only but Abraham becomes the father of several. Warning (2000) has offered a brief study to point out linguistic links between PH and the Abraham story.

<sup>211</sup> On more similarities between Noah and Abraham, see Carr 1998a: 334-36. On the Abrahamic promise rooted in PH and fulfilled in Genesis, see Wright 1991: 21-23.

<sup>212</sup> Fretheim makes his observations with a 10<sup>th</sup> century J in mind. However, his interpretation holds also for a 6<sup>th</sup> century context.

<sup>213</sup> Note Carr's helpful and cautious observations regarding both synchronic and diachronic aspects of the *toledot* (1998).



Genealogies are more universal in character in Genesis than in Mesopotamia: the universe as well as the whole of humankind and its different clans and tribes have their genealogies – the good, the bad, and the indifferent. Abraham’s story bursts the *toledot* scheme because its theological import points beyond an isolated stage between creation and exodus (Ziemer 2005: 369). Conspicuously, Abraham is without a *toledot* – Israel’s forefather has none, it is a totally different story. “Why and for what purpose was Abraham chosen to become a great and mighty nation, and to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth?” Heschel asks. “Not because he knew how to build pyramids, altars, and temples, but ‘in order that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice’ (Gen. 18:18-19)” (1962: 210).

Speiser (1957: 208; my italics) claims that Israel’s “purpose was not so much to tell the story of a nation or of nations, as to give the history of a society embarked on a particular quest, the quest for an enduring way of life, a way of life that had *universal* validity.”<sup>214</sup> It is noteworthy in this context that military aspects in the patriarchal narrative are suppressed. Abraham and the patriarchs are depicted as royal figures nonetheless (see Muffs 1982; Matthews and Benjamin 1993: 205-10).<sup>215</sup>

Seen in this way, PH provides a foundation for Clines’ threefold theme:

- progeny: Adam’s/Noah’s/Shem’s/Terah’s/Abraham’s offspring are multiplied;
- land: though first cursed (3:17), after the flood, the curse is lifted (8:21), so preparing for Israel’s gift;
- covenant: foreshadowed by the Noahite covenant, the Abrahamic covenant to be added later.

It is significant that the first programmatic announcement of Pentateuch’s theme is, as one should expect, right after PH and at the beginning of the patriarchal narrative, in 12:1-3. This theme, touched upon in PH, is elaborated on by subsequent sections of the Pentateuch.

It is also fascinating to see in what way the Moses story is the sequel to its antecedent. In a nutshell, the Sargon legend is generally considered a Neo-Assyrian work designed to establish the legitimacy of Sargon II. The Moses story may originally have been a subversive alternative to that legend. The circumstances surrounding their births make the similarities apparent. Both challenge and then destroy royal authority (cf. Carr 2011: 313-14). Whereas Sargon goes on to found a new empire with a new capital city, however, Moses founds a nation without kingship and city. And the shrine is built in the wilderness and not in a city.

## 4 Conclusion

### 4.1 General

Two general remarks seem in order. First, “The authors of ancient cosmologies were essentially compilers. Their originality was expressed in new combinations of old themes, and in new twists to old ideas. Sheer invention was not part of their craft,” Lambert gives expression to the scholarly consensus (1965: 297). This holds true of PH with the qualification that its combinations of old themes amount to ingenious invention. Moreover, PH is the introduction to not only Genesis but the Pentateuch by introducing themes and motifs that are revisited in later parts of the Pentateuch (see Carr 1998a). The decisive themes and motifs are, I have argued, city, kingship, and shrine. In PH, city is replaced by land, kings by commoners and their offspring, and shrine by righteousness.

These themes and motifs had already been around in Mesopotamia. Israel used them to tell a new story and, by doing so, replace the Mesopotamian narrative.

<sup>214</sup> Van Seters (1992: 1) asserts right at the outset of his study that “the beginning of a national tradition by an account of the primeval origins of peoples and nations, as we have it in Genesis, is rather exceptional in Near Eastern historiography.”

<sup>215</sup> Alexander (1993: 267) too claims that “there are strong grounds for believing that the main line of descent in Genesis is viewed as a royal lineage.”

Ancient Israel knew that it was a relative latecomer in the ancient Near East, and that Mesopotamian civilization was far older and more glorious. But in the Hebrew Bible this knowledge does not seem to have provoked self-doubt or anxiety. Rather, Israel defined its cultural identity in contrast to the older Near Eastern cultures as a new beginning, a supersession. Like the biblical narrative motif of the younger son elevated to primacy – most famously Jacob, Joseph, and David – Israel presented itself as a younger culture that God chose for preeminence. (Hendel 2005: 24)

Second, there was a time in OT scholarship when creation and anything related to it were seen as a late and secondary development in Israel's faith. Consequently, Genesis in general and PH in particular were not considered to be sources for OT theology (see von Rad 1966; cf. Barr 1999: 473). In the last 50 years or so, this has definitely changed. Both creation and PH have gained a new lease of life. This study is a result of this reevaluation.

We have seen that the narratives and genealogies in PH are more universal in character than those in Mesopotamia. PH's creation is not told to promote a city and its stories have an egalitarian outlook – the universe and the whole of humankind, along with its different clans and tribes, have their genealogies.

In what follows, I will make concluding observations with not only PH but the subsequent narrative in mind.

## **4.2 City**

Founding of cities appears rather marginal in the plot of PH.<sup>216</sup> We read of the first city construction by Cain (4:17). Then, there is the reference to Nimrod's imperial endeavor to found capital cities (10:10-12). And finally, there is the Babylon story of a failed construction project (11:1-9). All in all, cities have a rare and questionable appearance in PH.

There might have been parodies of the city theology of which we know one at least (see Sollberger 1967: 279). But the author of *The Rulers of Lagaš* could not break the mold of patriotism – the high view of kingship and city is not challenged. No wonder, then, that PH, intent on a fresh start, transfers the benefits of city to land. Whereas cities in Mesopotamia were proud centers of power and oppression, privilege and superiority, land was needed more by the masses and available more widely to them. Thus, PH divests the city of its privileges and transfers God's blessing of land to human beings. "This blessing is expressed by God's presence, by fertile progeny, by rich landholding and in dominion. Without fertile progeny, ownership of landholding and dominion are worth nothing, without land, finally, royal dominion is itself worth nothing" (Zierner 2005: 317).

## **4.3 Kingship**

By linking kingship to the beginnings, SKL's claim is that kingship is authoritative. By linking Abraham to Adam through the genealogies, Genesis' claim is similarly to go back to primordial times but, by reference to the defining story impacting both Israel and humankind, it is an egalitarian world. Moreover,

The biblical emphasis upon the figures as human beings, with the functions of begetting and eventually dying, suggests that no ancestral cult is to be found here. The absence of any reference to a common office or profession moves these genealogies away from functions involving royal cults or guilds. The movement from earlier to later in the biblical genealogies is one which separates the perceptions which the keepers and readers of these genealogies held of themselves. Is this because the king lists and genealogies of the Ancient Near East directed their readers to seek in the past for the ideal and for the sources of help? Did they find meaning in the present by repeating the past? If so, there is a contrast with the biblical genealogies which saw no ideal among their past members. To the contrary, the narrative notes and sections reveal failure as much or more than they reveal success. So the genealogies push the reader forward in history, recognizing that the past must be learned from, but that the challenges of the present require that former failures not be repeated. Finally, whatever else the Table of Nations in Gen 10 should emphasize, it is clear from its context in Gen 1–

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<sup>216</sup> In Israel, as opposed to Mesopotamia, there was only the occasional myth about founding cities (Halla 2010c: 567); cities were not attributed the high prestige of divine and mythic status as in Mesopotamia.

11 that it points to the common humanity of all peoples, who share in the failures and hopes of a common ancestry, and ultimately in a common creation in the image of God. (Hess 1989: 250)

In other words, it is not local heroes, kings or demigods that are the founders of culture and civilization or the bulwarks of society, as in SKL and MKL, but commoners and everyday people from all tribes, languages, and races.<sup>217</sup> Also, whereas, in Mesopotamia, the source of the law was the king, in the Pentateuch it is God directly (see Heger 2005). All in all, PH presents an egalitarian world.

In his 1968 essay, Brueggemann's conclusion, based on a remarkable similarity between the plots of PH and the reigns of David and Solomon, was that the Genesis account was secondary, its author in this way celebrated the Davidic monarchy. In the light of PH's general attitude to kingship, it is hard to believe that PH came to such an assessment. Kikawada and Quinn (1985: 110) rightly claim "that the author's view of the monarchy was far from flattering."<sup>218</sup>

Diffey (2011: 316) concludes his study of three royal promise texts in Genesis by claiming "that the concept of kingship is much more than a passing idea within the Genesis narrative. Instead it appears to be a central feature to the patriarchal promises." If my argument holds, kingship cannot be a central feature but rather a hidden torrent coming to the surface every now and then. In PH, it is only alluded to (e.g., 1:26), with further references in the patriarchal narrative becoming clearer.<sup>219</sup>

After referring to the Mesopotamian concept of the king being the image of the deity and the royal and divine cults' equation, Hallo (1988: 64) observes,

In Israel, by contrast, earthly kingship was regarded with suspicion, as an accommodation to alien polities and a perversion of the theocratic ideal. The king could not be worshipped like a god, and the deity could be described as a king only in incorporeal terms, not in terms of the usual physical trappings of kingship.

In his famous comparison of Homeric and biblical literature, Auerbach (1953: 21) astutely observes "that in the Homeric poems life is enacted only among the ruling class—others appear only in the role of servants to that class." I will quote at length Auerbach's conclusion who sees OT narratives as distinct from Homer in that

a different conception of the elevated style and of the sublime is to be found here. Homer, of course, is not afraid to let the realism of daily life enter into the sublime and tragic; our episode of the scar is an example, we see how the quietly depicted, domestic scene of the foot-washing is incorporated into the pathetic and sublime action of Odysseus' home-coming. From the rule of the separation of styles which was later almost universally accepted and which specified that the realistic depiction of daily life was incompatible with the sublime and had a place only in comedy or, carefully stylized, in idyl—from any such rule Homer is still far removed. And yet he is closer to it than is the Old Testament. For the great and sublime events in the Homeric poems take place far more exclusively and unmistakably among the members of a ruling class; and these are far more untouched in their heroic elevation than are the Old Testament figures, who can fall much lower in dignity (consider, for example, Adam, Noah, David, Job); and finally, domestic realism, the representation of daily life, remains in Homer in the peaceful realm of the idyllic, whereas, from the very first, in the Old Testament stories, the sublime, tragic, and problematic take shape precisely in the domestic and commonplace: scenes such as those between Cain and Abel, between Noah and his sons, between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, between Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau, and so on, are inconceivable in the Homeric style. The entirely different ways of developing conflicts are enough to account for this. In the Old Testament stories the peace of daily life in the house, in the fields, and among the flocks, is undermined by jealousy over election and the promise of a blessing, and complications arise which would be utterly incomprehensible to the Homeric heroes. The latter must have palpable and clearly

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<sup>217</sup> Kikawada and Quinn (1985: 128) state, "The author of Genesis 1–11 is willing—indeed, seems to be insisting—that we reject civilization and all its works rather than be implicated in the crimes that are necessary to its foundation and continuance." This judgment is one-sided. We have seen both the positive and negative sides of culture.

<sup>218</sup> Kikawada and Quinn (1985: 111) see monarchy and civilization as dangers to a sedentary way of life. Again, I think it is too simplistic a critique.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Alexander 2012: 134–45, who, however, assigns too much significance to the undercurrent of kingship in Genesis.

expressible reasons for their conflicts and enmities, and these work themselves out in free battles; whereas, with the former, the perpetually smoldering jealousy and the connection between the domestic and the spiritual, between the paternal blessing and the divine blessing, lead to daily life being permeated with the stuff of conflict, often with poison. The sublime influence of God here reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable. (22-23)

By and large, this description fits PH's world, void of rulers, as opposed to ANE literature.

Finally, Noah and Abraham are royal and priestly figures but commoners. It is thus the more startling that, despite growing up in Pharaoh's house, Moses is not a king but a prophet who, by leading the people, makes history. Indeed, "no genealogical line leads to Moses" (Schüle 2006: 55). Whereas, for ANE people, it was the king who embodied the desire for continuity (see Oppenheim 1964: 79), for Israel, it was humankind created in God's image. In this way, royal ideology is replaced by prophecy and law is given directly by God without the mediation of a king. This is the radical alternative of Israel's exilic vision of society and culture.

#### **4.4 Shrine**

The startling fact is that, defying Mesopotamian expectations, there is no reference to organized religion in PH (although there are religious activities; see 4:3-5, 28; 8:20). Importantly, religious order is not founded at/in creation.

With the narrative unfolding, Abraham, without organized cult, is recognized as God's blessed one by Melchizedek, the universal example of the righteous priest and king (Ziemer 2005: 162).<sup>220</sup> There is, of course, the shrine in Exodus but it is a rather late development in Israel's narrated history, not inherent in the created order. And even there, there are no unqualified divine benefits attributed to the shrine. Cross (1973: 298-99) draws attention to two passages (Lev 26:11-13; Exod 29:45ff) and emphasizes that it is the word *miškan/škn* applied here instead of *yšb* and derivatives – "to tabernacle" instead of "to dwell."

The Priestly source wholly eschewed the literal term *yšb*, "to dwell" of the divine presence or "nearness in his earthly shrine. Those who have translated *miškān* as "Dwelling," and imputed a doctrine of the concrete abode of Yahweh in his shrine to the Priestly school could not be further from understanding the Priestly, self-conscious, technical usage. (299)

Shrine here is not a privileged institution of king and deity. Indeed, in PH, God is not bound to any institution. It is therefore noteworthy that the only explicit reference to sacrifice is in 8:20 – there is no shrine, no cult, and no sacrifice before the flood.<sup>221</sup> The garden and land replace the city, a covenant-based egalitarian religion replaces the temple-based hierocracy, progeny replaces ancestor worship as do commoners kings – a good world without kings, cities, and temples.

#### **4.5A Universal Vision and Politics**

The above discussion has, I hope, made clear that PH differs from its ANE counterparts not just in minor details but in its underlying socio-political agenda and values. These are at loggerheads with those sustaining Babylon and so thoroughgoing and subversive that a very discrete vision of politics and society, culture, and religion is imagined. In what follows, I will outline this vision.

In Mesopotamia, creation is the foundation for organizing society and religion. In PH, creation plays a similar role with important differences. Carr is correct in his claim (1996: 132),

Instead of having the cult and other aspects of human culture established at creation or in a time span extending from Creation to Flood, the Priestly writing describes the cult and other human potentialities as being established over a stretch of cosmic history extending up through Moses. Moreover, these potentialities are not the simple outgrowth of the original creative impulse, but instead are outgrowths of God's indestructible, covenantal responses to human history.

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<sup>220</sup> Note that Melchizedek takes the scene as a king – without a genealogy.

<sup>221</sup> Note the terminology of 4:3-4 where Cain and Abel are not said to offer sacrifices.

Whereas, throughout the ANE world, institutionalized religion played a crucial role for society and politics, PH's narrative without organized religion offers quite a different outlook. For organized religion, righteousness becomes the standard by which individuals, nations, and events are measured. Indeed, it is an underlying agenda, and, without this ethical aspect, PH cannot really be understood. The foundation of this aspect was already laid with the image of God concept at creation. Not just the king, but all humankind bears the Creator's image; PH's world is egalitarian and not hierarchical as ANE kingdoms were. What is also emphatic is righteousness. In ch. 4, Cain is reproached for killing his brother. Noah is saved for his righteousness while humankind has become violent. Yahweh, the god of Israel, the creator god is no tribal-national deity supporting the cause of his nation only but concerned with the welfare of the whole creation.

In his treatment of Neo-Assyrian political propaganda, Holloway claims (2002: 81) that "empires must maintain the fiction of invincibility at their peril." Indeed, it is the empire's vested interest to maintain this fiction. But history teaches us that it cannot be done for good. Even the most powerful and brutal empire terminates when Yahweh descends.

For Gordon McConville (2006: 30), "the Old Testament's political theology can be viewed as a critical dialogue with the dominant powers in ancient Israel's world." If anywhere, in PH, we witness this dialogue. With PH as its introduction, Genesis "establishes a relationship between Israel and creation, and between Israel and other nations" (30). PH, however, has a different view of what constitutes a good world, thus challenging Mesopotamia. "The argument with Mesopotamian politics is at the same time an argument with its religion, each political vision being founded ultimately on a concept of God and creation" (172). This concept has universal values and is not restricted to primeval times but effects politics and society, present and future. Though the trajectory of this agenda will lead to spectacular divine deliverances, the exodus is but one manifestation of Yahweh's commitment to righteousness. McConville claims (168): "The story of Israel leads out of tyranny and into freedom, in a vision that is universal." This holds good as much for Israel in Exodus as for humanity in PH. In PH, Israel's universal vision of the world is sketched.

We have seen that, in Mesopotamia, creation served political ends; after creation, political institutions, first and foremost kingship and religion, were established. In PH, the world's story, and, within it, that of Israel, begins with the creation of humankind. At this point, there is no shrine, no city, no king – no representatives of ethno-national interests. Indeed, in PH, shrine and king are never mentioned and city plays only a marginal role. Creation is not narrated to vindicate political institutions (cf. McConville 2006: 170). A world founded on creation and originated by a benevolent creator who faces no opposition has of course universal relevance.

Second, in the exile, Judah came to see where her own nationalistic theology of holy city, sacrosanct temple, and chosen dynasty leads. She also came to see at her own expense of what devastation and oppression Mesopotamian royal ideology is capable. No wonder that exclusivist ethnic claims are countered in PH by universalism. That is one reason genealogies are included in PH. Though interrupting the narrative flow, they advocate universalistic values. PH leads to the genealogy of Israel's ancestor but without nationalistic zeal. In this vein, McConville asserts

that Genesis–Kings is not merely oblique evidence of an ancient dispute over primordial or universal conceptions of nationhood, but rather that it constitutes an argument for the latter. Israel, in its laws and in its self-understanding according to its own literature, testifies to what it might mean to be a people that lives in obedience to norms of justice-righteousness that transcend its own life and become universal. (2006: 170)

If I have argued cogently, PH is to be seen as the preface to, indeed, grounding document of this epic argument. This in turn affects how to relate to the world outlined in PH.

Regarding McConville's concept of justice, third, I have argued that God's concern is with ethics in general and an egalitarian society, driven by a politics of diversity, in particular. In this way, ethics and universalism are closely related. Despite the *šdq* root's rare occurrence (cf. McConville 2006: 42), justice figures prominently in PH. It does so, however, in a somewhat oblique way, with the root hardly applied. The creation narratives' references to the divine image concept democratize the



concept attributing high significance to each individual. This entails a view of an egalitarian society. McConville claims (2006: 170-71) that “the effect of beginning with creation is that justice-righteousness is located prior to history, in the character of God, thence inscribed on the creation.” Ethics and, more specifically, human life are also accorded priority in that violence and homicide are not tolerated. Explicitly or implicitly, they are crimes committed against God’s image, hence God himself (see 4:10-11, 23-24; 6:5-13; 9:6) (cf. McConville 2006: 42). PH’s world is not hierarchic and unaware of privileged classes.

PH’s political criticism and vision are at their shrewdest as well as sharpest when they reach their climax in 11:1-9 where the narrator launches its most sustained attack on Babylon. Indirectly, here, city, shrine, and kingship are all assaulted. The building of the city and its ziggurat is abandoned and kingship fails to descend from heaven.

As has become clear by now, PH is not just politically relevant but is by definition a political treatise. By pitting Yahweh and Yahwistic values against Marduk and his values, it envisions an alternative world with a different society and politics from that of Babylon. PH’s Yahwism is critical and liberative of the oppressive and exploitative politics of Babylon.

In addition to its political import, PH can also be read as a parable of Israel’s trauma.

#### ***4.6 The Primeval History As a Parable: Israel’s Trauma***

Robert Polzin (1989: 44) has read the early stories in Samuel as “a kind of parabolic introduction to the Deuteronomic history of kingship.” Barbara Green (2003) has followed him by reading the Saul narrative as a parable of the monarchy. Thus, I suggest that PH is Israel’s parable about and attempt at coming to terms with the loss of country, temple, and kingship, brought about by the Babylonian empire. Society, culture, and religion were destroyed in an instant. Israel was forced to re-evaluate the basis of her existence which it did in the exile.<sup>222</sup> I have argued that PH is to be read as Israel’s counter-narrative offering an alternative to the Babylonian empire’s royal-imperial ideology. So, let us read PH’s sections as episodes of this parable.

The land God gave to Israel was good, indeed, very good – just like the world God created. “Called into existence by its God in the no-man’s-land of the wilderness” (Blenkinsopp 2011: 8), God put Israel in this “garden” (see LaCocque 2006: 64-66) so that Israel could rule over and subdue it (see 1:28). Yahweh also made a covenant with her people the terms of which were clear. Israel, however, did not obey Yahweh’s command and was thus misled, into exile, by serpent-Babylon. Hence, Israel’s labor and the ground-country were cursed alike, and Israel expelled from the “garden” (see Wright 2003: 92).<sup>223</sup> Regarding Babylon’s role in “leading Israel astray,” it first takes the scene as the serpent. For this, it is duly punished by God. As a matter of fact, of the three culprits, serpent-Babylon alone is cursed (3:14).

In ch. 4, Babylon is cast in the role of Cain who slays his brother.<sup>224</sup> Curiously, Israel did not disown Babylon by saying Cain never belonged to the family. Indeed, it is Cain who does not treat Abel as his brother (van Wolde 1991: 33-35).<sup>225</sup> But in this way, Babylon’s sin is the more outrageous. This is implied by her curse. “You are more cursed than the ground” (4:11; AT), i.e. Israel’s land. I argued above that this curse surpasses that of Adam (see 3:17), “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” Concerning Israel and Babylon, the respective curses take on new meanings. In ch. 3, it was because of Adam-Israel’s disobedience that God cursed the ground. In ch. 4, it is because of Cain-Babylon’s sin (see

<sup>222</sup> For a similar interpretation of the Yahwist, see Van Seters 1992: 128-29; of Gen 2–3, see Smith 2019: 45-48.

<sup>223</sup> Only after becoming like God and being expelled from Eden, humankind’s creative capacities and activities begin to unfold. Israel’s exilic theological-literary activity seems similar to that.

<sup>224</sup> This interpretation is strengthened by God’s partial treatment of the brothers, a crux for interpreters: “elect” (cf. Goldingay 2003: 150) Abel-Israel is preferred for no particular reason (cf. Dt 7:7-8). By denying that he is his brother’s keeper, Cain “acknowledges that no proper difference in status exists between himself and his brother to warrant killing him, as a shepherd might a sheep” (Carmichael 1992: 57). Note that “shepherd” was used of ANE kings.

<sup>225</sup> Abel is seven times referred to as Cain’s brother (Simon 2020: 52).

also 4:7) that God curses – this time not the ground but the offender himself. Those perpetrating fratricide-genocide are more cursed than the ground. While the ground is cursed to produce “unfruit,” Cain-Babylon is cursed to unsettled life, an anathema to Babylonian society (see Fox 1989: 37).<sup>226</sup>

Conspicuously, the fratricide is set in a story frame of offering. Whereas Abel’s offering is accepted, Cain’s is rejected (4:4-5). Importantly, Cain is not judged because of his improper offering but for his improper behavior toward his brother – ethics seems more relevant than cult.

To add insult to injury, it is not just that Babylon murders her younger brother but it even boasts of it (4:23-24). In this reading, the bragging of Lamech, or, through a metathesis, Melech, “King,”<sup>227</sup> may imply Babylon’s inherent and incurable inclination to violence. Right after the reference to Lamech’s violence, Adam’s grandson Enosh is mentioned as the representative of a generation of Yahwistic worship. With Abel-Israel slain, a new Israel is born in the exile to call on Yahweh’s name.

The most dramatic depiction of Israel’s national disaster is of course the flood story. The flood destroyed everything of old Israel, it is true, and the effect is pictured in vivid terms. Only a remnant survived. Still, it is not so much backward but rather forward looking by an emphasis on the re-creation motif. The new start is hinted at already in the statement of Lamech, or, again, King (a hoped-for Davidic offspring?), this time from another, Israelite genealogy,

He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed. (5:29)

Despite Yahweh’s punishment of Israel and the abrupt end of Judahite kingship, there is hope for a better future in the person of Noah, the new Israel. The devastation was due to Israel’s violence, i.e. social injustice and wickedness. It was executed by Babylon, was severe, indeed, out of proportion (see Dobbs-Allsopp 1997: 36). This also explains why the flood story uniquely stresses the clean animals brought into the ark (7:2-3, 8) as well as the covenant with Noah (6:18). The narrator is intent on dispersing the doubts of exilic Israel: Yahweh has not terminated the covenant but is ready to start over.<sup>228</sup> To make his commitment to Israel unmistakable, Yahweh makes a unilateral covenant with his creation-Israel (9:8-17). In the after-flood scene, Noah-Israel is once again seen as humiliated and denied human status by Ham-Babylon who is subsequently cursed just as the serpent was in ch. 3.<sup>229</sup> PH ends in Babylon (11:1-9) as Israel’s story did (Blenkinsopp 2011: 8).

Genesis 1–11 also suggests that Israel not only learned her lesson but abandoned her nationalistic theology that partly led to the national disaster, and adopted a more universalistic approach to religion and worship. The author could have easily written a story with real or fictional Israelite kings and heroes as a counter-narrative to the Babylonian metanarrative. Of course, it would have amounted to casting out demons with the help of Belial. PH drew up the outlines of a world where worship of the true God is not a matter of ethnicity or social rank.

After the loss of Abel, Eve bears another son, Seth, reminiscent of Shem, the ancestor of Israel, who fathers Enosh, “man/humankind.” In his time,

men began to call on the name of the LORD. (4:26)

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<sup>226</sup> Notice, however, that it is Cain-Babylon who becomes the cultural inventor in 4:17-24, an acknowledgement of Babylon’s socio-cultural achievement. Fox’s interesting study about the younger brother motif (1993) could be applied to Babylon.

<sup>227</sup> Radday (1990: 78) has suggested that Lamech is a palindrome for *melek*, thus non-king. Note that there is no *lmk* root in Hebrew. If this metathesis is implied this is the only reference to kingship in chs. 1–9. For a synchronic attempt at making sense of the two Lamechs of the two genealogies, see Hess 1991: 24.

<sup>228</sup> Studying the Eridu Genesis, Jacobsen (1981: 527) argues that the flood served as a metaphor for surviving a socio-political catastrophe and starting all over again.

<sup>229</sup> That is why Nimrod, founder of Babylon (10:10) is Ham’s offspring.

With the flood over and despite the fact that hardly anything has changed, God renews the covenant with Israel,<sup>230</sup>

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. (8:21; see 9:9-17)

The covenant, however, is universal, embracing all living creatures and all nations, stressed by God. Babylon's violence is obliquely referred to at the end of the flood story. The reference to bloodshed takes on new content in this reading, as Yahweh seems to have the moral significance in mind,

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (9:6)

Genocide and bloodshed through subjugation of one people by another is strictly prohibited.

In 11:1-9, Babylon is the place where people from all over the world converge – as in exile. (Israel is included, so the story that began with the expulsion from the garden reaches its climax in Babylon.) They are supposed to build a homogeneous empire only to make Yahweh descend and confuse the language of the empire, thus dissolving it.

#### ***4.7 The Theme of the Primeval History***

I have now reached the stage where I can put forward my view of what PH is all about. Clines has suggested that it is through trial and error that theme can be ascertained (1976: 486; 1978: 23). This seems unsatisfactory to me. I have argued that the absence of kingship, city, and shrine, constituting themes in Mesopotamia as they were, make PH an anti-Babylonian writing. In my view, PH's theme is an alternative vision to that of Mesopotamia, of humankind created in God's image, capable of doing good and bad, with no kingship, city, and shrine. If Clines' proposal of the Pentateuch's theme as the partial fulfillment of the promise of land, progeny, and covenant holds, my thesis definitely holds it up. However, I did not come to this conclusion by trial and error but by studying PH and relevant Mesopotamian texts.

"P did not intend to write an alternative primeval history in relation to the Mesopotamian ones. He definitely wanted to provide his own version, not simply to fill in an already existing tradition. In this respect, P functions as a counter story," Kvanvig (2011: 258) claims.<sup>231</sup> His statement of P, however, holds of PH in general, in my view. PH wanted to provide its own version of the beginnings of the world and humankind, culture and civilization, society and politics as well as the new start after the flood. PH sketched how the new start went awry with Babylon. PH functions as a counter story to that of Babylon and sets the scene to the new beginning by Abram – without city, king, and shrine. PH's view is that human life, whether society, politics, or culture, is possible without these institutions.

I have claimed that each major unit of Genesis 1–11, including the flood story that may look ill-fitting (contra Fritz 1982: 611), is necessary to contribute to PH's theme. What Clines (1976: 504; his italics) generally states holds in this case too: I have done a good job if this study convinces the reader that PH "is a literary work, and not a rag-bag or a scissors-and-paste job." I have suggested that PH could be seen as the introduction to Genesis/Pentateuch by inaugurating their themes. But how exactly PH does this requires further research.

#### ***4.8 Relevance and Implications***

If I have argued cogently and presented a compelling case for reading PH against a Neo-Babylonian background, further study seems necessary on subsequent units of the Pentateuch as well as the

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<sup>230</sup> Note that whereas, by the proclamation of Marduk's power, BCS was employed as a "magic formula" to guard against evil spirits during and after the restoration of the temple in Babylon (Heidel 1951: 65), the Genesis account, by the proclamation of God's might, declares God's power visible in the created order.

<sup>231</sup> Both Kvanvig and I posit a Babylonian origin to PH; both of us concern ourselves with the socio-political and theological import of the narrative. The main difference between Kvanvig and me is that he studies P and non-P separately whereas I do the final text. After all, no source but only the final text has been canonical.

whole of Pentateuch from the perspective of kingship-city-shrine, be it synchronic, diachronic, or comparative.

PH is often read as a means of Christian apologetics. This is the wrong perspective. By drawing on ANE myths, Gilgamesh, Atrahasis, and BCS among and foremost of them, Genesis defeats myth on its own turf by countering myth by myth. This seems the only feasible way. Reading Genesis on its own terms makes an interpretation that takes myth into account mandatory.

This study is particularly relevant in my estimation to people and communities living in a similar context to that of exilic Israel: Christians who live in a predominantly non-Christian and/or hostile society. I hope the way PH addresses issues of culture, society, religion, and politics, as I have tried to discuss them, can be helpful to them.

Even in secular post-Christendom, the Bible is a favorite read and Genesis is one of the best-known books of the Bible. As ever, Christianity is anxious about a fast changing society and culture and seeks the right ways to face new challenges. PH's strategy can equip God's alternative community with some important tools to present an alternative vision of society, politics, and culture. Clearly, this alternative community is to demonstrate before the eyes of the world the Creator's love to his creation as well as the righteousness needed for a responsible socio-political (and ecological) engagement. In this endeavor, the concept of righteousness as studied by McConville comes to our help. He asks:

Can there be a recipe for mature political life, nurturing the creation intention to bless humanity, the dignity of humanity as such, and the divine will to righteousness in the world? In what way can *Israel* fulfil the divine intention that righteousness should be realized concretely on earth? Must it not succumb to dangers of nationalism and power itself? (2006: 171; his italics)

And in what way can righteousness be realized on earth? McConville's response is (174):

The Old Testament's story from creation to politics differs from the ANE precisely in this respect, that its interpretation of origins is at the service neither of the idea of one nation's intrinsic right to predominate, nor of a given political *status quo*. There was a positive side to the story in that it illustrated Yahweh's readiness to allow his rule to find correspondences in a variety of actual political forms. However, it ends in an absence of institutions, and only eschatological pointers.

In other words, there is no kingship lowered from heaven, no shrine or city founded at creation. These institutions are no absolutes but subjects to God's sovereign authority and righteousness. (On the other hand, God adapts to ever-new political formations.)

The theme of the city does not, of course, disappear from the biblical tradition. With the monarchy the cities, and one particular city especially, rise to prominence, but the Primeval History of Genesis does not project this back to the beginning. For Israel, in some sense the city was as viable and as ambiguous as kingship, as capable of fulfilling the destiny of God for the human community (Isa 1:26; Zech 8:3-5) as kingship was (e.g., Isa 11:1-9), and as capable of subverting that divine intention as was kingship (Isa 1:21-23; Mic 3:9-12). (Miller 1985: 243)

God accommodated to new realities in Israel, to the Davidic monarchy, Jerusalem as the capital city, the Temple. However, the 586 disaster made the failure of these institutions as well as Yahweh's ultimate authority yet more manifest. The tension between socio-political institutions and God's will had various facets but the relativization of human institutions was stated right at the beginning: when God created humankind, he created them in his image male and female, equal he created them. PH is but a long elaboration of this principle. By this elaboration, PH issues a challenge and outlines an alternative to the empire.