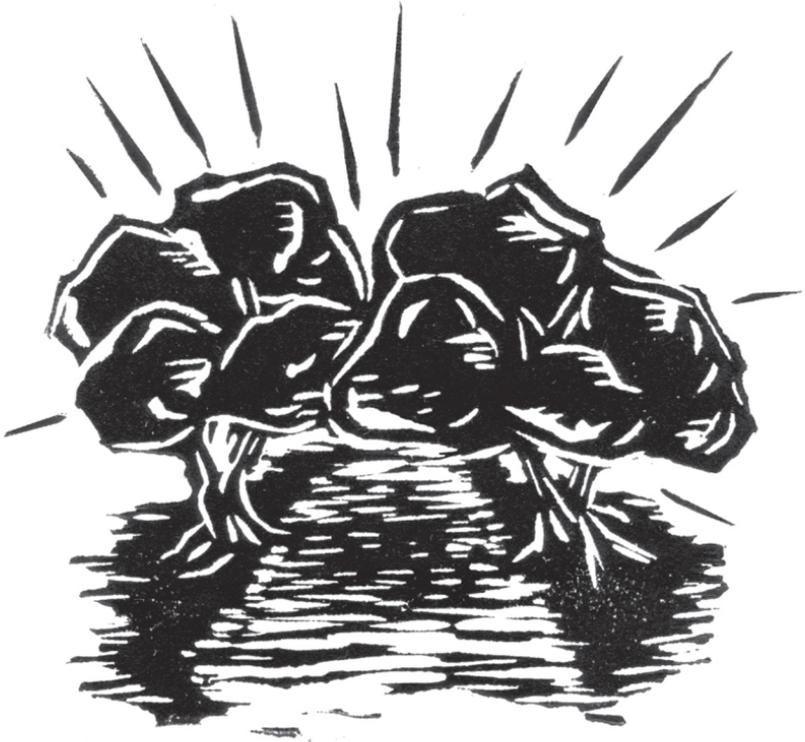


*Short Studies in*  
**BIBLICAL THEOLOGY**



# THE CITY OF GOD

AND THE GOAL OF CREATION

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T. DESMOND ALEXANDER

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# The City of God and the Goal of Creation

T. Desmond Alexander

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt,  
series editors

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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*For*

*Brian and Lesley McGlaughlin*

*Robert and Rosemary Wallace*



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## Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a

given theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We are launching this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

## Preface

This book is designed to provide a succinct overview of the biblical teaching on the concept of the city of God. The subject spans both Testaments and intersects with a significant number of other important topics, beginning with the garden of Eden in Genesis and coming to ultimate fulfillment in New Jerusalem. Some aspects of this topic are addressed more sparingly than others. If every possible avenue was explored fully, the present study would easily run into thousands of pages. Hopefully, a sense of balance has been achieved in selecting the content to be discussed. On occasion pointers are given in footnotes to topics and resources that could helpfully be explored further to flesh out what is said here.

I am grateful to Dane Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt for inviting me to contribute to this series, Short Studies in Biblical Theology, and for their helpful comments as editors. Their invitation has provided an excellent opportunity to write on this amazing subject. I am also indebted to Justin Young for constructive feedback on a first draft of the manuscript. For seeing this volume into print, special thanks go to the publishing team at Crossway. Throughout my academic life I have enjoyed the loving support of my wife, Anne. Her constant and

faithful love has been for me and many others a wonderful testimony to the grace of God.

It is my prayer that this short book will inspire each reader to embrace wholeheartedly the psalmist's desire:

One thing have I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD  
and to inquire in his temple. (Ps. 27:4)

Soli Deo Gloria

# Introduction

Cities inspire very different emotions in people. For some they are a magnet, offering every opportunity and pleasure that a civilized person might desire. For others, cities are places from which to escape, the peace and tranquility of rural life being a more attractive alternative. Like them or loathe them, cities have been a pervasive feature of human life for millennia. Given their ubiquitous nature, it is no surprise that cities figure prominently in the Bible. Their presence, however, is not merely incidental. At the very heart of God's plan for our world stands an extraordinary city.

Exiled to the island of Patmos in the first century AD, the apostle John experienced a series of visions. He later recorded these in the book of Revelation as a message of encouragement to the earliest followers of Jesus Christ. John's final vision involves a city, but it is no ordinary metropolis. Its dimensions alone set it apart. Each side of its length, breadth, and height measures some 1,380 miles or 2,220 kilometers, far exceeding in size any known city, ancient or modern. Its enormity is matched by its grandeur. It is constructed of gold, with enormous walls of jasper decorated with twelve kinds of precious stones (Rev. 21:18–20). John's brief description conveys something of the city's opulence. Its magnificence almost places it beyond imagining.

Adding an altogether different aspect to this unique city, John observes that its citizens enjoy an environment transformed by the radiant presence of God himself. In this paradise city, peace, security, and wholeness are the nutrients of human flourishing. Evil is banished entirely, as humanity shares this idyllic conurbation with the divine Creator. This is a city like no other city.

This picture of an astonishing, other-world city is laden, like John's other visions in Revelation, with symbolic imagery drawn from the rest of Scripture. The abundance of these allusions adds to the sense that this vision reveals God's ultimate goal for humanity. This New Jerusalem is a fitting climax to the entire biblical story. As we shall explore in the chapters that follow, God has graciously and patiently been working to create this spectacular city, where he will dwell in harmony with humanity.

### **New Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden**

New Jerusalem brings to completion what God intended when he first created the earth. Two acts of divine creation frame the Bible, and the links between them are far from superficial. The origins of New Jerusalem are to be found in the early chapters of Genesis. As we shall discover, the garden of Eden is located at the center of a green field site where God intends to construct a holy city upon the earth.

At first sight the garden of Eden does not appear to have much in common with New Jerusalem. Set side by side they seem to illustrate well a sharp contrast between rural and urban existence. Yet several features suggest that they are closely connected. First, and most unique, both locations are associated with the "tree of life." In Genesis the "tree of life" stands in the middle of the garden surrounded by many other plants (Gen. 2:16–17). While little is said about this tree, it clearly had the potential to give immortality. After Adam and Eve betray God and are expelled from Eden, God deliberately prevents

them from accessing this life-giving tree (Gen. 3:22–24). Revelation 22 presents a very different situation, for the leaves of the “tree of life” are freely available for the healing of the nations (v. 2). This life-changing tree is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, strongly suggesting that the two locations are closely linked.

Second, only in the biblical accounts concerning the garden of Eden and New Jerusalem do God and humans communicate directly with each other, face-to-face. Throughout the rest of Scripture attention is drawn to the alienation between God and people. The divine-human relationship was tragically broken when Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden of Eden. The situation described in New Jerusalem involves the restoration of this relationship. Only in the garden of Eden and New Jerusalem do God and humanity coexist in perfect harmony.

These links between the garden of Eden and New Jerusalem offer a basis for exploring further the idea that God’s plans for humanity in Genesis 1–2 are orientated toward the creation of a unique city. Two lines of investigation offer additional support for this idea. First, there is among biblical scholars a growing recognition that the Eden narrative contains features that link it with later Israelite sanctuaries, especially the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple. This is in keeping with the idea that God intends to dwell on the earth. Second, in Genesis 1 God instructs humans to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. This points toward the eventual creation of a worldwide community. While the early chapters of Genesis do not explain why people should fill the earth, the expectation is created that God and humanity will subsequently live together on earth in harmony. But, as we shall see, a tragic event catastrophically undermines progress toward this end.

Before expanding on these two related topics, an important observation needs to be made briefly regarding the interpretation of

Genesis 1–3. These chapters exhibit a concise narrative style and are limited in what they communicate. With minimum detail, the opening chapters of Genesis set the scene for all that follows. Consequently, these chapters contain examples of proleptic ambiguity; ideas are introduced briefly, with the expectation that these will be developed more fully in the subsequent narrative. The ongoing story clarifies what may initially be ambivalent or vague in Genesis 1–3. For this reason, it is important to read and understand the opening chapters of Genesis in light of what follows them. Unfortunately, too often scholars attempt to explain the subtleties of Genesis 1–3 without giving sufficient consideration to the remainder of Genesis.

Recent research on the opening chapters of Genesis has drawn attention to various ways in which the garden of Eden resembles later Israelite sanctuaries.<sup>1</sup> The entrances to Eden and later sanctuaries are located to the east and guarded by cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:18–22; 26:31; 36:35; 1 Kings 6:23–29; 2 Chron. 3:14). When God commands the man “to work it [the garden] and keep it” (Gen. 2:15), he uses the verbs *ʾabad*, “to serve, till,” and *šāmar*, “to keep, observe, guard.” Elsewhere in the Pentateuch these verbs are used in combination to describe the duties of the Levites in the sanctuary (cf. Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6).<sup>2</sup> Adam’s role in the garden has Levitical connotations; he is to be a guardian of sacred space and not merely a gardener.

Other features of the Eden narrative may also be linked to later sanctuaries, although these connections are more tentative. On their own they do not carry much weight, but cumulatively they offer a consistent picture. The Jerusalem temple is decorated with arboreal features. The tabernacle menorah (or lampstand) resembles in shape

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1. Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19–25.

2. Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964), 1:122–23.

a tree, possibly representing the “tree of life” (Gen. 2:9; 3:22; cf. Ex. 25:31–35).<sup>3</sup> The mention of gold and onyx in Genesis 2:11–12 may be linked to the fact that gold, in particular, was used extensively to decorate Israelite sanctuaries and priestly garments (e.g., Ex. 25:7, 11, 17, 31). Although the gold and onyx lie outside the garden of Eden, mention of their location indicates that there is a known source for these materials. The LORD God walks in the garden of Eden as he later does in the tabernacle (Gen. 3:8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:14; 2 Sam. 7:6–7). The concept of a river flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10) finds a parallel in Ezekiel 47:1–12, where a river flows from a future, idealized Jerusalem temple, bringing life to the Dead Sea. The garden of Eden occupies an elevated location, a feature that recalls how other sanctuaries associate God’s presence with an elevated location.

These parallels between the garden of Eden and later Israelite sanctuaries are hardly coincidental. Two possible interpretations may explain this. Either Eden is a protosanctuary, and other sanctuaries are modeled upon it,<sup>4</sup> or each later sanctuary is a restored garden of Eden.<sup>5</sup> If this latter option is adopted, the question arises, why replicate the garden of Eden? The most likely answer is that Eden recalls a time when humanity enjoyed an especially close relationship with God in an idyllic environment. Later sanctuaries replicate something of this experience as people come to the place where God dwells on earth. As a divine residence, the sanctuary enables God to live in close proximity to people. The text of Genesis does not state unambiguously that God dwells in Eden, but the impression is given

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3. Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult*, vol. 2, ASOR Dissertation Series (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 169–72.

4. E.g., G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 66–80.

5. Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. D. M. Gurtner and B. L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3–29.

that Eden is a place where potentially God and humanity will live together. In the beginning the garden of Eden has only two human residents and is clearly not a city. But as the human population increases through time, Eden has the potential to become a great metropolis.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the garden of Eden and later sanctuaries may be approached from another direction. The Israelite tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem temple, was considered to be a microcosm or model of the earth. In this capacity it provided a visual illustration, anticipating God's glorious presence filling the whole world. This expectation comes to fulfillment in New Jerusalem. As Revelation 21 reveals, New Jerusalem has no temple building, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22). Viewed from the perspective of God's presence filling the whole earth, the garden of Eden represents the first stage toward the creation of New Jerusalem.

### **From Garden to City**

The garden of Eden narrative anticipates God and humanity dwelling together in harmony. In light of this, the earliest readers of Genesis would easily have expected Eden to become a temple-city. Familiarity with ancient Near Eastern temples would have supported this idea, for ancient temples were constructed at the heart of cities, the human population serving the needs of the god who was in their midst.

The expectation that Eden should become a temple-city fits well with God's instruction that humans should "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). While the intention of this instruction is obvious, no explicit explanation is given as to why this should happen. The theme itself recurs throughout Genesis, being repeated

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6. Cf. William J. Dumbrell, "Genesis 2:1-17: A Foreshadowing of the New Creation," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 53-65.

twice to Noah after the flood (Gen. 9:1, 7) and echoed in the divine promise of numerous descendants given to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:6; 22:17; 26:4; 32:12; 35:11; 48:4; cf. Gen. 28:3; 47:27). In Genesis 1–2 the impression is conveyed that the boundaries of the garden will expand outward as the human population increases. This emphasis upon filling the earth points toward a large population, appropriate for a city.

God's future plans for Adam and Eve are closely tied to their status as his vice-regents. The final part of Genesis 1 emphasizes God's instructions that humans should exercise authority over all other creatures: the birds of the sky; the fish of the sea; every creature that moves along the ground. The importance of this instruction is underlined by its repetition in Genesis 1:26–28.

Humanity's God-given authority to rule over other creatures takes on special significance in light of what happens in Genesis 3. At the heart of the Serpent's encounter with Adam and Eve is a challenge to their status as God's vice-regents. Instructed by God to rule over all other creatures, they succumb to the Serpent's innuendos and accept what it has to say as trustworthy. Consequently, Adam and Eve willfully betray God, disregarding his instructions and dismissing his warnings as irrelevant.

At first sight Adam and Eve's failure to obey God may not appear especially heinous, but their actions have devastating consequences for humanity and the world. The impact of their actions is far reaching. They immediately become conscious of their nakedness and look to avoid God's presence. Their disobedience results in various punishments that splinter the harmony and unity of the Edenic environment. No longer may the human couple serve as God's vice-regents. By obeying a creature rather than the Creator, they have themselves become like the other creatures, a point driven home when they are clothed in animal skins (Gen. 3:21; cf. Rom. 1:18–32).

Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden creates a major obstacle for the fulfillment of God's plan that he should dwell on earth with people who love and trust him. Something of this becomes evident in the episodes that immediately follow Genesis 3. As we shall observe in more detail in the next chapter, with their God-given capacity both to rule over others and to construct cities, humans separated from God fill the earth with violence and aspire to create a city that will enable them to access heaven itself.

Yet while the events recorded in Genesis 4–11 give a bleak picture of humanity's behavior and aspirations, God remains committed to his original creation plan. Amid the chaos that flows from Adam and Eve's betrayal, he graciously offers hope that someday humans will enjoy his intimate presence in an expanded garden of Eden. To this we shall return later.

## The Godless City

With remarkable conciseness the opening chapters of Genesis introduce a story that looks forward to the creation of an exceptional city where God and humanity will live in harmony. Specific references to the city are muted, but the garden of Eden narrative sets the scene for what is to follow. Unexpectedly, however, the garden is invaded by a wily predator that deceives the human couple into disobeying their Creator. By submitting to the seductive prompting of the mysterious Serpent, Adam and Eve fail to fulfill their duty as God's vice-regents. Their authority to rule over the earth, delegated to them by God, passes to the Serpent (cf. Eph. 2:2). Consequently, they become subservient to it.

In view of God's aspirations for humanity, it is noteworthy that one of the activities associated with Cain is the building of a city. Genesis 4:17 states briefly: "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch." The Hebrew text does not say explicitly that Cain "built a city." Rather, it implies that he was building a city (cf. NIV). City building was in his DNA, a fact that is

no surprise when we consider God's design for humanity. However, it is noteworthy that Cain names the city after his son, Enoch. By doing so he glorifies his own offspring rather than the One who has equipped him to be a city builder. Cain's actions anticipate the creation of further cities, but, as we shall see, this does not necessarily bode well for humanity.

References to city building do not figure prominently in Genesis 5–10. Rather, attention is given to how people fill the earth with violence (Gen. 6:13), resulting in God's punishing them by sending a flood. When Noah and his family emerge from the safety of the ark, God reaffirms to them the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1; cf. 9:7). This marks a new beginning for the earth, but, unfortunately, people continue to live in opposition to God.

### **Babel, the City of Pride**

If God's intention in making the earth is the creation of a city, Genesis 11 introduces a short account that is highly ironic.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will

do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Gen. 11:1-9)

This brief episode describes how humans set about building a city with a tower that will reach up to the heavens. They do this intentionally so that they will not be dispersed throughout the whole earth. This reverses the divine plan, for God is interested in making the whole earth his residence by filling it with holy people. In marked contrast, the people of Babel attempt to access heaven and avoid populating the earth. Babel epitomizes the antithesis of what God desires.

Although the Genesis 11 report of the building of Babel is exceptionally brief, nine verses in all, this city casts a long shadow over the whole of the Bible. It does so for a number of reasons. At the outset, Babel has to be viewed as the prototypical Godless city. In Babel we see people uniting as one to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reaches up to heaven itself. Their ambition is clearly motivated by pride in their ability to achieve great things. While in Genesis 3 Adam and Eve aspired to become like God, the inhabitants of Babel now seek to establish themselves as supreme not only on earth but in heaven as well. With incredible arrogance they attempt to build a tower that will enable them to take control of heaven itself. The building of Babel typifies two different characteristics of humanity: (a) the capacity of people to achieve great things; (b) the arrogance of those who have turned away from God.

What a wealth of human meanings converge in the single image of Babel! It is an ambivalent image, evoking powerful feelings of a wide range. On one side we can see the human longings for community, achievement, civilization, culture, technology, safety, security, permanence and fame. But countering these aspirations we sense the moral judgment against idolatry, pride, self-reliance, the urge of material power and the human illusion of infinite achievement.<sup>1</sup>

While in one sense the construction of Babel is a natural consequence of people using divinely given abilities, they do so without regard for the One who gifted them. Their aspirations are to replace God, not only on earth, but in heaven as well. Constructed by people for people alone, Babel is a mockery of what God intended when he created humans and commanded them to fill the earth. As we shall see, the phenomenon of Babel is not restricted to Genesis 11. Babel typifies every proud human enterprise that seeks to exalt the creature over the Creator.

### **Babel/Babylon**

The use of “Babel” as the city’s name in Genesis 11 is an anomaly. For centuries this city has been designated “Babel” in English. This name is derived from the Hebrew title for the city, *babel*. However, *babel*, which occurs over two hundred times in the Hebrew Bible, is almost always translated into English as “Babylon.” Remarkably, in the whole of the Old Testament there are generally only two exceptions to this rule. These are Genesis 10:10 and 11:9, and even here a few English translations replace Babel in Genesis 10:10 with Babylon (e.g., NIV; JPS). Babel should be called Babylon.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Anonymous, “Babel, Tower of,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit, and T. Longman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 67.

2. As in HCSB.

When we name the city “Babylon,” a highly significant pattern begins to emerge. Babel is not only the antithesis of the holy city that God desires to build upon the earth, but it is also its great rival and opponent. This is an especially significant theme, appearing in both Testaments. More shall be said about this later.

### **Babel/Babylon: The Kingdom of Nimrod**

Babel/Babylon takes on added significance when we observe that the city is also associated with aggressive human leadership or kingship. This link may not appear very obvious, for Genesis 11:1–9 contains no reference to any king. However, Babel/Babylon is first mentioned in Genesis 10:8–12 in association with the powerful hunter Nimrod:

Cush fathered Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD. Therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

Within Genesis 10 this passage stands apart. Verses 8–10 focus on Nimrod, about whom a few selected details are recorded. In most English versions, Nimrod is taken to be the subject of verse 11. However, it is more likely that verse 11 refers to the activity of Asshur, who founds cities in northern Mesopotamia.<sup>3</sup>

Nimrod is designated a powerful or mighty man, a hunter in the sight of the Lord. This description ought to be viewed negatively. While the Hebrew text may legitimately be translated in this context

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3. Cf. KJV; NJB; NJPS. If the Hebrew name *’aššûr* denotes a person, and not a place, then Asshur is responsible for building a number of important cities, including Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen.

“in the sight of the Lord,” it may also imply “against the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> This latter sense seems more appropriate in the context of all that is said in Genesis 1–11. Nimrod’s aggression as a person runs totally counter to what God intended when at creation he commissioned people to rule the earth on his behalf. His forceful nature recalls the violence of previous generations, who provoked God to anger.

Through the use of force, Nimrod founded an extensive kingdom that includes Babel/Babylon. He is also a role model for Asshur. Undoubtedly, this tradition of kingdom building through aggression lived on in these cities. Later in history, the inhabitants of both Babylon and Nineveh descended in destructive power on the kingdoms of Israel and Judah; the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, and, at a different time, the Babylonians decimated the southern kingdom of Judah.

God intended humanity to rule over the earth in peace, but Nimrod uses power to establish a kingdom that is a distortion of the kingdom that God wants to create on the earth. By linking Nimrod to Babel/Babylon, the author of Genesis introduces the idea of two contrasting cities and kingdoms. Due to the rebellion of Adam and Eve, God’s desire to establish his kingdom on the earth through the construction of a city is thwarted. Instead of ruling as his vice-regents, humans oppose God and establish alternative kingdoms.

## **Conclusion**

When we grasp the true intention of the human city builders of Babel/Babylon, it is clear that their project is not as innocent as it may seem at first. On the contrary, what we have here is an account in which all the God-given abilities of humans are deliberately focused on creating a society that has no need of God. Confident in

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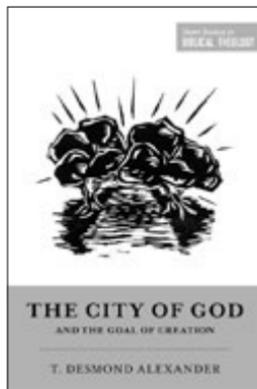
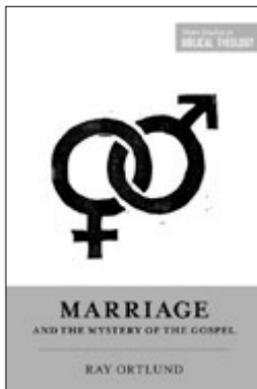
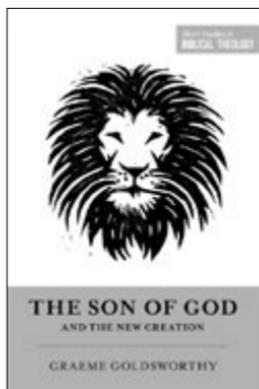
4. Cf. Mary Katherine Hom, “‘ . . . A Mighty Hunter before YHWH’: Genesis 10:9 and the Moral-Theological Evaluation of Nimrod,” *VT* 60 (2010): 63–68.

their own capacity to meet every challenge, the inhabitants of Babel/Babylon view the Creator as irrelevant. In light of God's initial creation project, the account of Genesis 11:1–9 is a stark reminder of how perverted human nature has become.

To hinder human aspiration to work together in opposition against the One who created them, God prevents people from understanding each other by introducing multiple languages. This leads to the creation of different ethnic groups and nations, who struggled to comprehend one another. Nevertheless, although God intervenes to halt the Babel/Babylon project by scattering the city's inhabitants throughout the earth, the human ambition to construct alternative, godless cities remains. Babel typifies every social enterprise that seeks to exalt the creature over the Creator. From Genesis to Revelation, Babel/Babylon features prominently as the symbol of humanity's attempt to govern themselves without reference to and in defiance of God.

In chapter 1 we explored the possibility that Genesis 1–2 introduces a story that anticipates the creation of an extraordinary city where God will dwell in harmony with humanity. Against this background, it is noteworthy that the last episode in the primeval era (Genesis 1–11) concerns the construction of a city. This metropolis, however, is the antithesis of what God desires. In the light of this, the rest of Genesis starts a process that will result in the creation of an alternative city where God will dwell on earth in harmony with people. In due course, God's actions will center on the city of Jerusalem, which will occupy center stage for much of the Old Testament and into the New Testament. But we have not heard the last of Babylon.

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