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ISSUES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY CONCERNING
THE TOWER OF BABEL

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
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May 2019

APPROVAL SHEET

ISSUES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY CONCERNING
THE TOWER OF BABEL

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To Herlina,

whose support and encouragement have made me a better man and

a better servant of the Lord

and to

Abe and Tabita,

who, in their own and unique ways, have helped me to grow in my understanding on how

to live as a Christian and a disciple of Jesus Christ

For the glory of God!

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>

PREFACE

A few words of thanks are due to numerous individuals who helped make this project possible. First, to my faculty advisor, Dr. Peter Gentry, and other faculty members who taught me in my study here, I would like to say thank you for challenging me to consider more deeply the contemporary issues related to the evangelical theological method.

Second, I would like to say thank you also to all my relatives and friends who supported me in this tough path with your prayer, insight, and financial help. I could not refer to each of you one by one because so many supported me to finish this part of my life. You all are the evidence of how great is our God and how faithful He is in His caring. I praise God for you all!

Third, I would also like to say thank you to Frits Games, elders, and activists in Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Louisville for their support at the beginning of my study in SBTS and to Gary Ricucci and the Sovereign Grace Church at Louisville team ministry for their help in the second part of my study in SBTS. You all are God's blessings for my walk in faith. Thank you, and God bless you all.

Finally, to my wife, Herlina, and children, Abe and Tabita, who have the most significant part of God's work in my faith and obedient who join and help me through this process. Without you, I would not have walked this far.

Alex Mirza Nawidjaja Hukom

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There are many conflicts on issues in biblical historicity, particularly regarding the Old Testament narratives. Scholars, both Christian and non-Christian alike, debate many topics and parts of the Old Testament. The problem becomes more complicated with the increasing number of archaeological discoveries and other extra-biblical sources. In the past few centuries many things happened, the Dead Sea Scrolls have been discovered, better knowledge of peoples of the Old Testament, and discovery of interest have grown rapidly. However, these progress and findings do not automatically make scholars agree to one another on biblical historicity issues. These discoveries support the historicity and historiography of the Old Testament and strengthen Christians' faith in the Bible as God's revelation. However, they do not lead to consensus among scholars concerning the historicity of the biblical passage.

One narrative that is highly debated is the account of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9). While scholars have long debated the historical validity of the account, along with the subsequent radical shift to varying languages of ethnic people-groups, little to no attention has been paid to the accompanying event of the massive dispersion of people that transpired after God's confusion of their languages.

This thesis will first look at the broad definition of history and historiography. Then it will try to elaborate some issues of historiography in the Old Testament. After that, it will discuss the issue of the historiography of the Tower of Babel. And, lastly, it will give some conclusive remarks from the discussion.

Thesis

In this thesis, I argue that the Old Testament narrative is historically accurate and is supported by many reasonable arguments. Having said that, based on the later-discussed supporting arguments and information, I suggest that the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1–9 deserves to be treated as a historical event. As Kenneth A. Kitchen argues, “It is logical to suggest that the framework and basic content of Gen. 11 goes back to the patriarchal period, and came as a tradition with the patriarchs westward from Mesopotamia.”¹ So, he concludes, “Gen. 1–11 is the Hebrew answer on how to present ‘prehistory/protohistory’ before the time of their first fully ‘historical’ people, the patriarchs Abraham to Jacob. . . . The Hebrew genealogies became telescoped through time, keeping a representative number, with possible man/clan figures spread along the now invisible intervals of the longer lines.”²

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum accept the argument of Kitchen. They write that “we have the history of Babel (Gen 11), where we see a complete confidence and naïve optimism about human achievement and effort. . . . This philosophy comes under divine judgment in Genesis 11 and results in the nations being lost and scattered over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:9 and chapter 10).”³

Background

My interest in the historiography of the Old Testament arose when I was in T. J. Betts’s class on the Old Testament Background Studies in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, in the summer of 2016. He shared and

¹ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 426.

² Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 447.

³ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 244.

showed that there is much information on the historicity of the Old Testament narratives that makes them credible, or, at least, supports the possibility of the historicity of the narratives.

Moreover, in that class, Betts showed some archaeological discoveries in the last centuries that support the Old Testament records. One example was an article from Charles F. Aling, professor of History at Northwestern College in Minneapolis, on the discovery of confusion in the ancient Sumerian language.⁴ Based on this article, Betts shared that archaeologists suggest the area where the ancient Sumerian language was confused to several languages existed in the same era. On the contrary, philologists argue that these locations where people spoke different languages were by no means from the same era. Then he argued that what could not be agreed upon by the archaeologists and philologists can be explained by the Bible with the narrative of the Tower of Babel. In the time of the Tower of Babel, God intervened with the people, made them speak in different languages, and dispersed them throughout the world.

This article increased my interest in studies about the historicity of the Tower of Babel. From that discovery, the question and discussion on the correct place and time of the Tower of Babel arose in me. Does the narrative of the Tower of Babel have more supporting arguments, besides what Betts shared in the class? Are there more reasonable arguments to support the belief that the narrative of the Tower of Babel where God confused the language of the people and scattered Noah's descendants after the flood has an alternative explanation in history?

Then, I presented this topic as my Th.M. thesis to Peter J. Gentry, as my faculty advisor. He agreed on this topic and introduced me to Douglas Petrovich, who

⁴ Charles F. Aling, "Cultural Change and the Confusion of Language in Ancient Sumer," *Bible and Spade* (Winter 2004), accessed July 11, 2017, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/09/21/Cultural-Change-and-the-Confusion-of-Language-in-Ancient-Sumer.aspx#Article>.

wrote two unpublished articles that relate to the issue of the historicity of the Tower of Babel. In one of his articles Petrovich referred to David Rohl's theorem on the alternative place of the Tower of Babel. Interestingly, Rohl, an Egyptologist, is not a Christian and presented his theorem based on his love of history.

From that background, this thesis has started.

Methodology

From the understanding that the Old Testament narrative is historically accurate, this thesis will describe aspects of (1) the meaning of historiography and history in general; (2) the historiography of the Old Testament in particular with some criticism of it; (3) biblical arguments on the historicity of the Tower of Babel; and (4) the historiographical argument of the Tower of Babel.

The methodology of this thesis is as follows: chapter 1 presents the background of this topic and the outline of how the argument will be presented.

Chapter 2 explains the historiography of the Old Testament and the relation of it to the history. This chapter starts with the meaning and definition of history and historiography and the field of study of both of them. Then, it discusses the importance and some problems in the area of the historiography of the Old Testament and how the answer was given.

Chapter 3 discusses debates on the narrative of the Tower of Babel. This chapter starts with the problem of the placement of this narrative in the context of Genesis, its location, people, and some theories of its historicity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the discussion on the argument of the historiography of the Tower of Babel. This chapter starts its discussion with the *toledot* formula as the basis of understanding the narratives in Genesis and, in particular, the Tower of Babel. Other ancient sources are discussed in the next section of this chapter. In this part, this thesis

presents Josephus's report and the epic of Sumerian story of Enmerkar, king of Sumerian Uruk. Then, at the end of this chapter, the thesis discusses the historiography of the narrative of the Tower of Babel from the archaeological discoveries in the last centuries. Lastly, this thesis presents some conclusions from this discussion on the topic.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF
THE OLD TESTAMENT

This chapter will discuss two things. First, I will present some theories on history and historiography and how events are reported from different sources of history. After that, in the second part, I will discuss the importance of historiography in the Old Testament, some problems related to it, and answers to those problems to support the historiography of the Old Testament.

**The Meaning of Historiography and History:
Their Definition and Field of Study**

This part will discuss the relation of historiography to history and sources of historiography for the Old Testament.

**Historiography: Its Definition and
Relation to History**

Stuart D. Beeson, from the Religions and Theology faculty of the University of Manchester, says, history “refers to the congeries of ‘facts’ of the past,” while “Historiography is the structured narration, principally in written form . . . of past events in and for the author’s present. It is a story, told with an audience in mind, aiming to communicate to that audience some truth, message or attitude.”¹ So, in Beeson's view, historiography is “the result of the interplay of historical facts and the literary imagination, the establishment of fictitious relationships between events in order to

¹ Stuart D. Beeson, “Historiography: Ancient and Modern Fact and Fiction,” in *Ancient and Modern Scriptural Historiography = L'historiographie Biblique, Ancienne et Moderne*, ed. George J. Brooke and Thomas Römer (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 3–4.

render them understandable in the present.” In his opinion, all historiography is “ideological, and further, of ideological fiction.”²

On the other hand, Eugene H. Merrill says that history,

popularly and succinctly defined, is a record of the past, but such a reductionist understanding is both inadequate and misleading. First, history properly is the past, no matter how it is recollected and understood. Second, any account of the past is unique to the particular historian, one shaped by the contours of his or her own experience, competency, research, and presuppositions. Third, history and historiography must be clearly distinguished, the one having to do with events of the past per se and the other with the interpretation of those events as preserved in either unwritten (artifactual) or written (inscriptional) sources.³

Edwin M. Yamauchi defines history as “the study of what people have done and said and thought in the past.”⁴ He also states, “History involves primarily the interpretation of textual accounts supplemented by contemporary inscriptions and other materials recovered by archaeology.”⁵ He adds that “biblical historiography has some elements in common with other ancient historiographies (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hittite, and early Greek) in that it includes the intervention of supernatural powers in human affairs.”⁶

Daniel I. Block agrees with Yamauchi. Block argues that even though there are similarities with the other views around, the biblical view of the world has its uniqueness compared to other views of Israel’s neighbors.⁷ In Block’s opinion, there are three distinctions between Israel’s perception of the world and other views around. First, of all

² Beeson, “Historiography,” 5.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 20–21.

⁴ Edwin Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James Karl Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 3.

⁵ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 3.

⁶ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 3.

⁷ Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 149–53; cf. Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 3–4.

the peoples in the Ancient Near East, the Hebrews alone developed the concept of a monotheistic God. This means that only the historiography of the Bible communicates that the Creator of the universe is God alone, and not many gods, who preserves and works throughout the history of the earth.⁸ Block declares, “He [God of Israel] would share his glory with none. In fact, the Hebrews alone of all of the peoples of the ancient Near East developed a doctrine of monotheism.”⁹

Second, this God was not the projection of anthropomorphic features that one sees reflected in pagan gods. Other people made their gods “upon as nothing but the figments of human imagination portrayed in carvings of wood and stone or molten images of gold and silver,”¹⁰ while the Hebrews believe that this God reveals himself to his chosen people (the Hebrews). So, they believe that the initiative was from their God and not from them as human beings.¹¹

Third, based on those differences, the Hebrews believe that this God is unique and has power all over the earth. Block states, “All the nations of the earth belong to him. Their fates and fortunes are in his hands alone.”¹² Yamauchi adds, “No other people claimed a divinely ordained history and revealed covenant, which enabled the Jews to sustain hope in an ultimate restoration in the face of periodic chastisement for their unfaithfulness.”¹³

On the kinds of history, William G. Dever cites, “There are many kinds of history, and thus many differing but appropriate methods, aims, and materials for history-

⁸ Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 149–50.

⁹ Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 150.

¹⁰ Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 150.

¹¹ Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 150.

¹² Block, *The Gods of the Nations*, 150.

¹³ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 4.

writing.”¹⁴ He notes, there are three words for history in German: (1) *Geschichte* (the academic discipline of history-writing); (2) *Historie* (less formal narrative history); and (3) *Storie* (which may contain many mythical and folkloric elements but aims at a connected account of the past).¹⁵ Then he adds further details that there are eight types of history:

(1) political history, the history of great public figures and institutions; (2) intellectual history, the history of formative ideas; (3) socio-economic history, the history of social and economic structures; (4) technological history, the history of things and their use; (5) art history, the history of aesthetics; (6) ideological history, the history of how certain concepts, specifically ethnic and religious, have shaped culture; (7) natural history, the history of the environment and the natural world (such as Pliny’s *Historia naturalis*); and (8) culture history or total history.¹⁶

From this point, he shares his fear that “even most professional biblical scholars . . . have scarcely given serious, critical thought to historiography—the aims and methods of history-writing—even though they must presume themselves to be historians.”¹⁷

Philip R. Davies explains that history is used to mean three things: “The past, a story about the past, and the study of the past.”¹⁸ However, he adds, quite often in modern discussion of history, “It is not clear which sense is meant, and sometimes the three are confused.”¹⁹ That is why, for Steven L. McKenzie, historiography “is judged by how accurately and objectively it recounts past events.”²⁰

¹⁴ William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 5.

¹⁵ Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, 5.

¹⁶ Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, 5.

¹⁷ Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?*, 6.

¹⁸ Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History-Ancient and Modern* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 9.

¹⁹ Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel*, 9.

²⁰ S. L. McKenzie, “Historiography, Old Testament,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 418.

Sources to Historiography of the Old Testament

Daniel Little, in his article “Philosophy of History,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, stresses that a full historiographic ‘scan’ of a given historian might include questions like, “What methods of discovery does he/she use? What rhetorical and persuasive goals does he/she pursue? What models of explanation? What paradigm of presentation? What standards of style and rhetoric? What interpretive assumptions?”²¹ Also, he adds, historiography refers,

to the study of historians’ methods and practices. Any intellectual or creative practice is guided by a set of standards and heuristics about how to proceed, and “experts” evaluate the performances of practitioners based on their judgments of how well the practitioner meets the standards. So one task we always have in considering an expert activity is to attempt to identify these standards and criteria of good performance. This is true for theatre and literature, and it is true for writing history. Historiography is at least in part the effort to do this work for a particular body of historical writing.²²

To answer those questions, people need sources. Merrill lists the sources of historiography of the Old Testament as first, the Old Testament itself as the primary source. Second, the post-biblical Jewish and Christian literatures, such as the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and others. Third, the works of historians of the early Christian period, like Josephus and Philo. Fourth, thousands of clay tablets and papyrus and parchment. And fifth, others of nonliterary nature which contribute to a more complete grasp of ancient Israel’s life and times.²³ From this list, it can be said that sources of the historiography of the Old Testament is (1) biblical sources, that is the Old Testament itself; (2) extra-biblical sources, which can be divided into (A) the post-biblical Jewish and Christian literatures; (B) the works of

²¹ Daniel Little, “Philosophy of History,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2017), accessed July 10, 2017, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/history/>.

²² Little, “Philosophy of History.”

²³ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 30–31.

historians of the early Christian period; and (C) archeological discoveries, which covers thousands of clay tablets, papyrus and parchment; and others nonliterary sources of ancient life and times.

Despite the importance of these sources of information, there are some problems in the area of the historiography of the Old Testament.

Problems in the Area of the Historiography of the Old Testament

There are some problematic issues concerning the historiography of the Old Testament in general. Only five of them are discussed here.

Past Events in Present Redactions

The first issue relates to what the Bible says about historical events. Some scholars believe that biblical narratives were redacted after the events happened as witnessed by some writers and they purported to describe what actually took place. Yamauchi notes that some historians and theologians reject part of the Old Testament because of this belief on redaction process. He says, “Miller and Hayes to begin their reconstruction of Israel's history with the period of the Judges. . . . Soggin, Whitlam, and others to begin with David and Solomon, and Garbini to reject almost all of the Old Testament as reflecting developments from the Persian and Hellenistic eras.”²⁴ These scholars believe that those points of redaction affected the narrative that were written in the Bible.

Moreover, McKenzie states that, based on Van Seters’s observation, “history writing in ancient Greece was not primarily concerned with relating past events ‘as they

²⁴ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 25–26; cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 5–6.

really happened’.” For Van Seters, the primary objective of ancient history writing was to “render an account” of the past that explained the present.²⁵

However, for McKenzie, the Bible's historical literature is etiological in the sense that it seeks to “render an account” of the past—to explain circumstances or conditions in the historian's day. Whether the events reported in the Bible are past causes or explanations of what actually took place was not the ancient historian's primary concern. This does not mean that all of the traditions recorded as part of Israel's history writing are fictional.²⁶

Old Testament as a Collection of Books, Not a Single Book

Secondly, some scholars reject the historicity of the Old Testament as a whole. Mark Chavalas’s explanation on genealogies can be taken as an example:

Before nineteenth-century biblical criticism, genealogies were considered by biblical historians to be valuable in reconstructing history, and thus scholars took them at face value. The traditional view has been shattered by the existence of “apparent contradictions” in the genealogical records. They consider these records to be artificial creations, having little or no historical value.²⁷

That is why, in Chavalas’ view, even if these texts do have value, they are mainly explanations of the milieu in which they were created. He says, “The modern western researcher has a problem in dealing with the lineage systems reflected in these texts,”²⁸ and these modern western researchers doubt the historicity of the Old Testament.

For this issue, Merrill gives the following explanation,

²⁵ McKenzie, “Historiography, Old Testament,” 419.

²⁶ McKenzie, “Historiography, Old Testament,” 420.

²⁷ Mark Chavalas, “Genealogical History as ‘Charter’: A Study of Old Babylonian Period Historiography and the Old Testament,” in Millard, Hoffmeier, and Baker, *Faith, Tradition, and History*, 108.

²⁸ Chavalas, “Genealogical History as ‘Charter’,” 108.

We now turn from philosophical and methodological considerations of the Old Testament as a historical record to matters more formal and substantial. Contrary to most ancient historical texts, the Old Testament is dominated by narrative or story. Biography, a subcategory of narrative, is particularly prominent and, with narrative in general, provides a primary vehicle for the communication of Israel's story. Even so-called legal texts make their contribution to the overall account, as do the prophetic, poetic, and sapiential pieces of literature. Careful attention to genre distinctions is crucial in determining the relative worth of the various literary categories in historical reconstruction, but if used with discretion, they all contribute to a full-orbed understanding of Israel's past.

One reason for the plethora of genres employed in narrating Israel's history in the Old Testament is the fact that the Old Testament is fundamentally a theological oeuvre and only secondarily and almost incidentally historical. Thus its purpose dictates the mode and garb in which it presents itself. Failure to appreciate this point is to lay historical demands on the Bible that were never intended by its authors.

Finally, the Old Testament reveals structural clues that set it apart from historiography as commonly practiced.²⁹

People have to remember that the Hebrew Bible does not use the designation "historical books." As McKenzie reminds us, "Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy comprise the Torah, 'law' or 'instruction.' Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are classed as the Former Prophets. The rest of the books named above are in the Writings. None of these books refers to itself as history. Indeed, the word history is Greek in origin."³⁰ So, the definition as a literary genre and the extent to which its use for biblical material may be anachronistic are questions raised by modern scholarship.³¹

This does not mean that the historical record of the Old Testament cannot be trusted. It only means that we have to study and read the books of the Old Testament according to the rules of its genres.

²⁹ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 33–34.

³⁰ McKenzie, "Historiography, Old Testament," 418.

³¹ McKenzie, "Historiography, Old Testament," 418.

Divine Factor

Another issue with the historiography of the Old Testament is the Bible's character as a divine book. As Yamauchi states, "Critics reject the Hebrew Scriptures because biblical historiography invokes the intervention of Yahweh in working out his plans for his people."³² Kaiser says that this is one of the modern fallacies, "*History cannot include the unique, the miraculous, and the intervention of the divine.*"³³

Gösta W. Ahlström is an example of scholars who reject the historicity of the Old Testament because of its divine factor. When explaining the Exodus story, he says,

Since the biblical text is concerned primarily with divine actions, which are not verifiable, it is impossible to use the Exodus story as a source to reconstruct the history of the Late Bronze and Early Iron I periods. The text is concerned with mythology rather than with a detailed reporting of historical facts. As soon as someone "relates" a god's actions or words, mythology has been written.³⁴

That is why Ahlström groups this event as Mythological Historiography and says the Exodus story "is definitely not one of empirical history."³⁵

Millard states that communication between God and man is integral to the biblical writings, yet it is a feature beyond historical verification, and a twentieth-century writer is tempted to discount these records as fantasy or as the inventions of ancient authors, and in biblical studies they may be treated as a means of giving authority to particular opinions.³⁶ Furthermore, he adds,

How Moses, David, or Isaiah . . . were aware God spoke to them is an unanswerable question, yet they were certain and acted accordingly. The presence of a report of a divine communication does not invalidate the accompanying episodes in biblical or other ancient texts any more than it does in the story of Joan of Arc. Whether

³² Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 27.

³³ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 3.

³⁴ Gösta W. Ahlström, *Who Were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 46–47.

³⁵ Ahlström, *Who Were the Israelites?*, 55.

³⁶ A. R. Millard, "Story, History, and Theology," in Millard, Hoffmeier, and Baker, *Faith, Tradition, and History*, 42.

scholars today share the belief that these figures were in communication with supernatural power, or not, has no effect on the fact that these people possessed such beliefs or on the fact of their ensuing actions. Those actions and their results may be open to the historian's scrutiny.³⁷

Also, “Major events in the history of the world have resulted from the conviction of one person or another who believed he had heard heavenly voices giving instructions.”³⁸ That is why Merrill rightly questions, “Does its character as Scripture cancel out its value as a historical source, or conversely, does its attention to history lessen its authority as the Word of God?”³⁹

Moreover, God actions in the history of Israel show that He intervenes systematically to fulfill His plan. Kaiser states,

The actions of God in the story of Israel's history are not bolts out of the blue, but, instead, belong to a complex of interrelated acts, a veritable network of happening. Thus, to believe in God's intervention into the complex of events on this earth is not to affirm randomness or the esoteric, but it is to enjoy the principle of correlation a much wider base than a limited material conception would allow.⁴⁰

Also, Yamauchi adds that this is not unique only with the Old Testament. He says, “The Old Testament's *Weltanschauung* is true of all ancient sources, some more than others to be sure. Herodotus' belief in the Delphic Oracle does not disqualify him as an accurate source for Greek history. Persian historians view Darius' Behistun Inscription as the most informative Old Persian text.”⁴¹

The Role of Extra-Biblical Sources

Another issue is the role of extra-biblical sources in the Old Testament historiography. Kaiser states this as one of some modern scholars' fallacies: “History

³⁷ Millard, “Story, History, and Theology,” 43.

³⁸ Millard, “Story, History, and Theology,” 42.

³⁹ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 25.

⁴⁰ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 5.

⁴¹ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 27–28.

cannot include anything that does not have external documentation,” or in different words, “The rejection of everything in Scripture for which there is no external documentation or external corroboration.”⁴² One classic example is J. Wellhausen who, as Chavalas writes, held the opinion that “history, like philology, could be based on cut-and-dried proof. Philological history demanded absolute proof, which the historian failed to furnish.”⁴³

Yamauchi says that some scholars have written off the patriarchal and Exodus eras because they have no convincing corroborative archaeological evidence or extra-biblical confirmation.⁴⁴ Some critics seem to oppose the “unhistorical” biblical stories to the truly historical methods of Syro-Palestinian archaeology, thereby understanding the high degree of subjectivity that is involved in the interpretation of archaeological data.

To answer this issue, Yamauchi reminds us that people have to remember “The absence of archaeological evidence is not evidence of absence.”⁴⁵ He declares rightly that “the positive evidence of new archaeological surveys in various districts of Israel is of the greatest significance and must be considered in all future discussions. On the other hand, the alleged absence of Late Bronze sites as evidence against the biblical Conquest is of another character.”⁴⁶ Moreover, such an apparent lack of archaeological evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. First, numerous sites have not been excavated; second, in many cases, no definitive final reports of excavated sites have appeared; third, earlier reports have been questioned and later excavations have overturned some negative

⁴² Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 5.

⁴³ Mark W. Chavalas, “Recent Trends in the Study of Israelite Historiography,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 2 (June 1995): 162.

⁴⁴ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 26–27, 32–36.

⁴⁵ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 34.

⁴⁶ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 34.

conclusions. He gives some examples in earlier reports that were overturned by later excavations, such as Kathleen Kenyon's conclusion on her excavation for the Ophel area (1961–1967) which was corrected by Mir Ben-Dov, and the Danish excavator H. Kjaer's work in five areas at Shiloh (1926–1929) which was re-excavated by Finkelstein in 1981–1984.⁴⁷

Kaiser also reminds that,

such a reduction of usable historical data to those materials that are verifiable from existing artifacts or epigraphical remains could lead to premature foreclosing of the case. . . . Often the absence of evidence, such as the uncertainty of archeological periods on some tells, may not be a lack of evidence at all. It may only indicate the randomness of our knowledge of the past, or a telltale sign that our methodologies for recovering the past are still in need of development.⁴⁸

Kaiser also gives the example of the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites is being more frequently denied today because sites such as Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon do not provide any evidence of any Late Bronze materials. However, to take Gibeon for the moment, Late Bronze materials were found in its cemetery.⁴⁹ So Yamauchi gives the conclusion that “the archaeological evidence for the Conquest and the origins of the Israelite Settlement is at present mixed and inconclusive.”⁵⁰ Then, he adds, “The textual evidence must be primary even where the archaeological evidence is lacking.”⁵¹

The Role of Presupposition

The last issue to be noted here is the presupposition factor in analyzing the Old Testament records. Yamauchi states some differences which come from this presupposition issue. A minimalist such as Van Seters believed that there were no earlier

⁴⁷ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 34–35.

⁴⁸ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 6.

⁴⁹ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 6.

⁵⁰ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 17.

⁵¹ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 34.

sources before the Deuteronomist and the author invented all of his materials, while a maximalist such as William Hallo believed that biblical writers had earlier sources. Orthodox Christians take history very seriously, but modern biblical criticism had been characterized by anti-supernaturalism. Literary criticism as influenced by Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), Herman Gunkel (1862–1932), and Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) had sought the prehistory of the texts and concluded that, though one may recover *Heilsgeschichte*, the expression of Israel’s faith, her *Historie* can no longer be established.⁵²

Yamauchi explains that some scholars view Genesis and Exodus as “ ‘ideologically tendentious’ and therefore completely irrelevant to the modern scholars’ attempts to write a ‘scientific history’ of early Israel.”⁵³ Kaiser adds that the disagreement among scholars is not so much over the “facts” in the field; instead, it is over how one should interpret those facts, and with what sorts of presuppositions one may legitimately approach the study of Old Testament history.⁵⁴ Moreover, Bodine adds, “Most historians today are acutely aware that premodern history writing efforts—including those of the biblical text—were far from objective undertakings to record history as it really happened.”⁵⁵ This presupposition usually affects the objectivity of the interpretation of the data. That is why, not surprisingly, Duncan concludes, “There is no ‘objective’ historical truth.”⁵⁶

For this issue, McKenzie gives the right answer:

⁵² Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 5–6.

⁵³ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 28.

⁵⁴ Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 1.

⁵⁵ Joshua J. Bodine, “History, Historiography, Historicity, and the Hebrew Bible,” *Studia Antiqua* 10, no. 1 (2011), accessed July 10, 2017, <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studiaantiqua/vol10/iss1/7>.

⁵⁶ G. A. Duncan, “Historiographical Issues Related to the Writing of Contemporary History of Christianity,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (2007): 132.

There is some recognition that historians have their own biases, that no one is completely objective and that writing history involves interpretation. If pressed, most moderns probably will admit that it may be impossible to know for certain exactly what happened in the past. Nevertheless, telling exactly what happened remains the goal and the essential definition of the genre as it is generally envisioned. Thus there is a tendency to apply to history the same standards that apply to journalism. This same understanding is typically applied not only to modern history writing but also to ancient history writing, including that found in the Bible. Recent biblical scholarship has called into question the assumption that ancient historians, and the biblical writers, in particular, had the same definition of history and history writing as we do. The biblical writers may not have understood their task as merely relating what happened in the past.⁵⁷

Yamauchi adds, “The reconstruction of biblical history by modern scholars depends, to a large degree, on their presuppositions about the nature of the biblical texts, which are our primary sources, and to the relative value of supplementary sources such as extra-biblical texts, inscriptions, and material evidences.”⁵⁸ He adds, “Though presuppositions, such as a belief or disbelief in the supernatural, affect certain aspects of biblical history, it is possible, for the sake of dialogue, to set this fact aside and concentrate on scholars’ attitudes toward the textual accounts.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ McKenzie, “Historiography, Old Testament,” 418. On this matter, Bodine says, “There are theological concerns that seem to override attention to exactness in historical reporting.” Bodine, “History, Historiography, Historicity, and the Hebrew Bible.”

⁵⁸ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 5.

⁵⁹ Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” 5–6.

CHAPTER 3

SOME DEBATES ON THE NARRATIVE OF THE TOWER OF BABEL (GENESIS 11:1–9)

In the English Standard Version, the narrative of the Tower of Babel is translated as follows,

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.¹

This chapter will discuss some debates on the narrative of the Tower of Babel from Genesis 11:1–9.

Problem of the Placement and the Date of the Tower of Babel

The first debate I am discussing here is about the placement of the narrative of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis. The narrative is placed after the narrative of Noah (Gen 6–9) and the Table of Nations, which tells the story of Noah’s descendants (Gen 10), but before the narrative of the descendants of Shem, one of Noah’s son (Gen

¹ All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

11:10–32), which then focuses on the narrative of Abram or Abraham and his descendants, that is Israel (Gen 12 and so forth). The placement of this narrative brings up some debates on its historicity.

Kathleen M. O’Connor states, “The placement of this episode after genealogies of Noah’s three sons . . . is puzzling because diversity of language and lands already exists in chapter 10 (vv. 5, 20, 32).”² She suggests, “More logically, the Babel story (11:1–9) would come before the Table of Nations, for, located here, its explanation of the rise of multiple languages comes after the fact.”³

However, why did the author of this narrative put it in this part of Genesis? Source criticism scholars, as O’Connor comments, see this order “as a consequence of combining different literary sources in the book’s composition.”⁴ As Gerhard von Rad, a Form Criticism’s scholar says,

The Yahwist has made this narrative the capstone to his primeval history; therefore it has special significance in the context of the whole. . . . It too consists of older material which had first to be boldly hewn and recast; but even then it is incorporated into the Yahwistic primeval history, not in detail, but rather in its primary ideas. The beginning of ch. 11 does not quite agree with what one learned in the table of nations about the branching out of Noah’s house into many nations, because it presupposes once again the unity and linguistic uniformity of mankind. Yet one may not draw literary conclusions from such irregularities (as, for example, the presence of a secondary source to J); our narrator has freely welded single traditions into a primeval history, and in doing it, he paid much more attention to the inner theological orientation of the whole than to a precise harmonizing of the details.⁵

He, then, adds that the genealogy of Shem and Abraham comes from the Priestly version with a possible connecting line of the Table of Nations from the Yahwist version.

² Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Genesis 1–25A*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2018), 173.

³ O’Connor, *Genesis 1–25A*, 173.

⁴ O’Connor, *Genesis 1–25A*, 173.

⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 143–44.

The external genealogical link between primeval history (Shem) and the beginner of sacred history (Abraham) now exists only in the Priestly version (ch. 11.10–27). Presumably the Yahwist too had drawn a connecting line from the table of nations down to Terah and Abraham; it may have been very brief, and since materially it probably agreed somewhat with the names of the Priestly genealogy, the redactor gave preference to P's table of Semites, which was better developed with respect to form.⁶

In short, for von Rad, “There is no external connection with the preceding table of nations. . . . This beginning betrays an acute historical observation: nationalities tend to emerge from great migrations.”⁷ In his opinion, there is a very little connection between the narrative of the Tower of Babel with the preceding narrative of the Table of Nations, because “The story about the confusion of language goes far beyond the picture drawn in the table of nations.”⁸

However, there are also other scholars who appreciate source criticism but have different arguments. For example, Joel S. Baden, Professor of Hebrew Bible at Yale Divinity School, thinks Genesis 11:1–9 “is a single, unified literary unit. The two themes of city and tower are stylistically distinct because the author has, as a good literary artist can, linked the various themes of his narrative with specific vocabulary and structural features, such that if one chooses to separate the themes, one also separates the literary features,”⁹ and it “shows none of the hallmarks of a composite text: contradictions, doublets, or other narrative inconsistencies.”¹⁰

On the other hand, O'Connor has her own explanation for the purpose of that position. She argues that the reason for the positioning of this narrative by the writer of Genesis is because “The strong focus on language in chapter 11 has new purposes not

⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 150.

⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 144.

⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 147–48.

⁹ Joel S. Baden, “The Tower of Babel: A Case Study in the Competing Methods of Historical and Modern Literary Criticism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 217.

¹⁰ Baden, “The Tower of Babel,” 217.

found in chapter 10. This chapter narrows concerns from multiple markers of human diversity found in chapter 10—‘Lands, languages, families, and nations’—to the subject of speech itself.”¹¹ Moreover, she continues, there is a balanced literary composition, which divides the story into two parts determined by the actions of the characters, human and divine.¹² In the first part (11:1–4), humans take the lead, while in the second part (11:5–9), it was God who led. In these two parts, there are some similarities and repeated words or phrases, such as “*the whole world or whole earth*” (vv. 1, 4 and 8, 9), “*over the face of or over all*” (vv. 4, and vv. 8, 9), “*one language*” (v. 1) and “*same language*” (v. 6), “*and they said*” (vv. 3, 4) and “*and the Lord said*” (v. 6). Then, she continues, there are some contrasts between these two parts. At the beginning of the narrative, human beings spoke one language and the same words (v. 1), but at the end of the narrative (the second part), the Lord confused the language of all the earth (v. 9). In the first part, human beings planned to build for themselves a city and a tower (v. 4), but in the second part, God intervenes with the work and they left the building unfinished (v. 8). Then, in the first part, they build the city and the tower so that they will not be dispersed over the face of the whole earth (v. 4), but in the second part, God confused their language so that they may not understand one another’s speech and they will be dispersed over the face of the earth (v. 9).

John D. Currid has another opinion. Currid suggests that the writer arranged this narrative to tell the reader “why and how the nations were developed. Thus Genesis 11:1–9 is subservient to the main theme of the section which begins at chapter 10—the dispersion of people of the earth.” And “The theme of grace in the midst of judgement is

¹¹ O’Connor, *Genesis 1–25A*, 174.

¹² O’Connor, *Genesis 1–25A*, 174.

being highlighted by the chronology.”¹³ Furthermore, he gives several good reasons for this chronological explanation of its placement:

First, the Tower of Babel sequence is explanatory—it tells the reader why and how the nations were developed. Secondly, the structure of chapters 10–11 fits into a larger literary piece: here we see God making a multitude out of one people, but in the following chapters he chooses one (Abraham / eventually Israel) out of the multitude of nations. Finally, the theme of grace in the midst of judgement is being highlighted by the chronology.¹⁴

This means that the people in Genesis 11:1–9 are the same as the people in the narrative of the Table of Nations. This view is somewhat similar to what John H. Sailhamer holds. He says, “This is the same Babylon that figures prominently in the narrative additions to the Table of Nations (Gen 10:8–12). The people of the city of Babylon want to make a name (Shem) for themselves, but in Genesis 12:1–3, God promises Abram that he will give him a great name (Shem).”¹⁵ This is also what Gordon J. Wenham thinks on the reason why the placement of the narrative of the Tower of Babel is not in chronological order. In his opinion, the event happened “sometime before the dispersal of the nations and the development of different languages that the Table of Nations described in chapter 10.”¹⁶

Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum explain the context and theological meaning of this position of text in another way:

Just as the divine word in Genesis 1:3 brings into being and existence things that are not, so in Genesis 12:3 it is the divine word that brings into existence a new order out of the chaos resulting from the confusion and curse of Babel—the condition of the world just prior to Genesis 12. Note that Genesis 10 and 11 are not presented in

¹³ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1: *Genesis 1:1–25:18* (New York: Evangelical Press, 2003), 239.

¹⁴ Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, 238.

¹⁵ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 35.

¹⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis 1-11 as Protohistory,” in *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on The Bible's Earliest Chapters*, ed. Charles Halton and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 94.

chronological order. Genesis 10 constitutes a “Table of Nations,” showing the various families and peoples of the world lost and scattered over the face of the earth. Genesis 11 presents the narrative of the “Tower of Babel,” which explains how the nations were scattered throughout the world in this way.¹⁷

So, with the narrative of the Tower of Babel, the Bible shows that “the nations are lost and scattered over the face of the earth,”¹⁸ and “God made another new start, this time with Abraham. Abraham and his family, called Israel, is another Adam, who will be God’s true humanity.”¹⁹

Based on the debate on the placement there is another debate concerning this narrative, which is the date of the Tower of Babel. For Hermann Gunkel, one of the most remarkable Old Testament scholars in modern times, the Tower of Babel is a myth, like other myths in Genesis 1–11, so the narrative of the Tower of Babel did not have a historical basis.²⁰

Claire Amos has a different opinion. She sees that the two genealogies that precede and follow (Gen 10:1–32; 11:10–26) form an envelope around the story of the Tower of Babel. Through this form, “The whole section acts as a bridge between the primeval stories and the tales of the ancestors.”²¹ The first genealogy shows the people of the world as a whole before the Tower of Babel happened, while the second genealogy shares how the nation started from the particular line of Shem which descends to Abram. After that, in Genesis 12, the Bible shares how Israel as the nation began. So, in her opinion, the narrative of the Tower of Babel is a primeval story which cannot be decided as history or not.

¹⁷ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 225.

¹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 303.

¹⁹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 303.

²⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History*, trans. W. H. Carruth (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 17.

²¹ Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis*, Epworth Commentaries (Werrington, England: Epworth, 2004), 57.

Different from those opinions, the late Meredith G. Kline, a professor of Old Testament for fifty-five years in several seminaries, such as Westminster Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Reformed Theological Seminary, concludes that the date of the Tower of Babel event is, “well along in the millennia between Noah and Abraham. It is, then, not an account of the first differentiation of speech after the flood (cf. 10:5, 20, 31), but of a special local instance of such, effected supernaturally.”²² This is also the view of Douglas Petrovich, an expert in Ancient Near East (ANE) archaeology. He says, “If the chronology of biblical history is to be taken seriously, a tower—and conceivably a site, as well—that can be connected to the Bible’s tower of Babel must be sought sometime during the 3rd millennium BC, if not earlier.”²³

This issue on the date of the Tower of Babel will be discussed more in the next chapter.

Location of the Tower of Babel

On the issue of the site of the Tower of Babel, Genesis 11:2 shares that the people migrated from the east²⁴ and settled in a plain in the land of Shinar. However, where is Shinar?

According to Bodie Hodge, a researcher for *Answers in Genesis*, “Shinar literally means ‘between two rivers’.”²⁵ So, Hodge concludes that Shinar is between the

²² Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 48.

²³ Douglas Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel of Genesis 11 and Locating the Uncompleted Tower” (unpublished article given to me by Peter Gentry on June 3, 2017), 1. Bodie Hodge, a researcher for *Answers in Genesis* gives a range between 2242 B.C. to 2122 B.C. for the time of the Tower of Babel event. Bodie Hodge, *Tower of Babel: The Cultural History of Our Ancestors* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2016), 38-39.

²⁴ There are several possibilities of the meaning of **מִקְדֵּם** (*miq-qe-dem*). The ESV, KJV, RSV translate it into ‘from the east,’ while NIV translates it ‘eastward’ and gives explanation on the possibilities as ‘from the east’ or ‘in the east’. This thesis will not discuss these possibilities because the focus in this thesis is on the location of the event and all translations agree that Shinar, the plain land, is the place that the event of the Tower of Babel occurred.

²⁵ Hodge, *Tower of Babel*, 46.

Tigris and Euphrates Rivers because “They would naturally name the rivers near which they settled for pre-Flood rivers. Shinar was the region known as Babylonia or Chaldea in southern Mesopotamia.”²⁶ John D. Currid agrees with Hodge and says, “Shinar is a name for ancient Sumer and located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.”²⁷ Walter R. Bodine shares this opinion. In his argument, *Shinar* refers “to the area that includes the homeland of the Sumerians.”²⁸

James K. Hoffmeier concludes further, “There is no doubt that Shinar refers to an area of central Iraq as Gen 10:10 confirms. The heart of Nimrod’s kingdom, in fact, included Babel (Babylon), Erech (Uruk), Akkad (Agade), and Calneh (i.e. all of them) in Shinar.”²⁹

From this point, many biblical scholars, such as Kenneth A. Mathews, Paul H. Seely, W. Osborne, and John E. Hartley, connect Babel in Genesis 11 with the city known to ANE historical studies as Babylon, the capital city of Hammurabi during the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1595 BC) and of Nebuchadnezzar during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (ca. 638–539 BC). In Claus Westermann’s words, “*Shinar* is the whole land of Babylon in the Old Testament. . . . It corresponds to the southern part of modern Iraq.”³⁰

However, Petrovich does not agree with the conclusion that put *Shinar* as Babylon in the Old Testament, which is the southern part of modern Iraq. For him, not

²⁶ Hodge, *Tower of Babel*, 46.

²⁷ Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, 233, 239.

²⁸ Walter R. Bodine, “Sumerians,” in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 19n1.

²⁹ James K. Hoffmeier, “Genesis 1-11 as History and Theology,” in Halton and Gundry, *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, 56.

³⁰ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990), 517.

only it is out of line with the chronology of biblical history (which connected the Bible's Tower of Babel sometime during the third millennium BCE or earlier) but it also “involves archaeologically uncritical assumptions.”³¹ For him, “The goal of the present work is to identify the site of this Babel, and its tower, with as much certainty as possible.”³² Sailhamer agrees with Petrovich’s argument. He says, “Evangelicals approach the Tower of Babel narrative as if it were about a Sumerian ziggurat and accordingly explain the narrative in light of that context. In doing so, they seem unaware of the fact that such background material comes from a historical context of events that stem from hundreds, or even thousands, of years earlier than Moses.”³³

These two alternatives of location have their own arguments. This paper will discuss these views further in contrast with archaeological discoveries and look at their position on the historicity of the narrative of the Tower of Babel in the following chapter.

People of the Tower of Babel

Another debate on this narrative concerns the people of this event. Or in other words, who are exactly “the whole world” in Genesis 11:1?

In this matter, scholars who think that this narrative is a legend, such as Gunkel, argue that these people are only a reflection of Babylonians or some groups of people which we do not know. Gunkel argues that Nimrod in Genesis 10:9 was a legend from whom no historicity can be traced of who these people really are.³⁴ Gerhard von Rad shares a rather similar opinion with Gunkel. He says, “There is no external

³¹ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 1.

³² Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 1. Petrovich gives credit to David Rohl, a British Egyptologist, to start this argument. Rohl shares his view in Saxon-Israel True Isrealites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel—‘A Fact or Biblical Myth’ documentary film in HD,” YouTube Video, 00:49:02, published on February 1, 2017, accessed June 14, 2018, <https://youtu.be/kixskKa6WXY>.

³³ Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 71.

³⁴ Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, 90, 101.

connection [from Gen 11:1–9] with the preceding table of nations, which has already spoken of several nations and has even mentioned the historical Babylon (ch. 10:10).”³⁵ In his opinion, these people are large bands who “for some unknown reason find themselves on the move; suddenly they step out of the obscurity of their previous unhistorical existence into the light of history and climb to cultural power.”³⁶

On the contrary, Walter R. Bodine argues that based on the place *Shinar*, which occurs eight times in the Old Testament (Gen 10:10; 11:2; 14:1, 9; Josh 7:21; Isa 11:11; Dan 1:2; Zech 5:11), *Shinar* refers to the Sumerian term for “Sumer-Akkad” and “thus refers to the area that includes the homeland of the Sumerians.”³⁷ In Genesis 11:1–9, then, they are Noah's descendants after the flood and before God confused the language.

Based on the belief on the location of the event, some other scholars, such as John Phillips,³⁸ Meredith G. Kline,³⁹ and J. Rogerson⁴⁰ agreed with Bodine. They think that these people are Noah’s descendants who were led by Nimrod (10:9). They came down after the flood to find places to live and Nimrod led them. Nimrod started to build his kingdom with one of its central cities in Shinar (10:10).

Phillips said that Nimrod “is a shadowy but evidently a most powerful figure. . . . He seems to have been the prime mover behind the building of Babel. Nimrod took the sword of the magistrate, entrusted to Noah and his descendants, and converted it into the sword of the conqueror.”⁴¹ Moreover, Rogerson argues that Genesis 10:10 states that

³⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 144.

³⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 144.

³⁷ Bodine, “Sumerians,” 19n1.

³⁸ John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 104.

³⁹ Kline, *Genesis*, 48.

⁴⁰ Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 75.

⁴¹ Phillips, *Exploring Genesis*, 99.

“Nimrod ruled over Babylon (Babel) while 11.9 can be read to indicate that the destruction of the tower led to the founding of Babel.”⁴² That is why, in Rogerson’s view, “It is quite possible that the writer or editor of Genesis 1–11 saw 11.1–9 as a flashback to a time early in the spread of the nations over the earth, and that the scattering described in 11.9 was then part of the process of the spread of the nations.”⁴³

The Reason for God’s Intervention

Another debate on this narrative is the reason why God intervenes with the work of building the tower. Some interpreters, such as Theodore Hiebert, see Genesis 11 as a “simple” account of “the origin of the world’s cultures,”⁴⁴ while other interpreters feel that this is the story of the sins of human beings.

In the latter argument, there are also some different opinions. Some interpreters see this narrative not on sins of universal humanity, but of the ancient Babylonian Empire of the sixth century.⁴⁵ O’Connor mentions that some interpreters in this group, such as the late J. Severino Croatto, a biblical scholar from Argentina, see the Babylonian Empire at that period “with its concentration of power; its oppressive control; and its efforts, in the pattern of empires, to impose a uniform language, normative worldview, and culture. This uniformity imposed by Babylon is the problem that God sees and punishes by destroying the city and tower.”⁴⁶

⁴² Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 75.

⁴³ Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 75.

⁴⁴ Theodore Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 1 (2007): 53.

⁴⁵ Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Let All the People Praise You: Biblical Studies and a Hermeneutics of Hunger,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72 (2010): 11–12.

⁴⁶ O’Connor, “Let All the People Praise You,” 11.

On the other hand, some interpreters hold that this is the story of a crime of humankind and punishment by God as the Bible indicates it. John T. Strong argues that the story of the Tower of Babel is about the crime of humanity of idolatry and hubris and God's punishment on them.⁴⁷ André Lacocque, who had a double degree in Jewish Literature (Ph.D.) and Old Testament (Th.D.) from the University of Strasbourg, France, shared the same opinion. Moreover, he says, "The division of languages is universally seen as 'making life more difficult or as punishment'."⁴⁸

Legend, Parody, or History

With many debates on it, it is understandable that the debate about the historicity of the narrative of the Tower of Babel lies at the center of all debates. Gunkel argued that the story of the Tower of Babel is a legend and not a history.⁴⁹ For him, this narrative satisfies the criteria of a legend, because (1) it is originally an oral tradition; (2) it is in the nature of the tradition of those who are not in the habit of writing; and (3) because it is based on the oral tradition it tends to be corrupted over a length of time, therefore inadequate to be the vehicle of history.⁵⁰ Modupe Oduyoye, a Nigerian exegete and philologist, who gives an insight from an Afro-Asiatic interpretation, agrees with Gunkel. In Oduyoye's view, "The writer, for the purpose of prehistory in Genesis, exploited a legend whose date could not be placed in a prehistoric period."⁵¹

⁴⁷ John T. Strong, "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 4 (2008): 625–34.

⁴⁸ André Lacocque, "Whatever Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 40.

⁴⁹ Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, 14, 16.

⁵⁰ Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, 3-4.

⁵¹ Modupe Oduyoye, *The Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of Men: An Afro-Asiatic Interpretation of Genesis 1–11* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 80.

However, the view of the narrative of the Tower of Babel as a legend is not the only opinion. Kenton L. Sparks, professor of biblical studies at Eastern University, has another view. In his opinion, the Tower of Babel is a parody against Sargon II, a Neo-Assyrian king who ruled from 722–705 BCE, who we know for “ambitious building projects, his claim to have united the world with ‘one speech,’ and his ultimate failure to complete a palace, which was finally abandoned at Dur-Sharrukin.”⁵² Then, in his opinion, this story “originated as a piece of political resistance to Assyrian occupation.”⁵³ From this origin then, the author of this part of the Bible gives the same “crime and punishment” scheme “that appears in his paradise/fall, Cain/Abel, and flood stories. Together these stories convey an important theological message, namely, that hubris is a human flaw that provokes divine judgment.”⁵⁴ Thus, for Sparks, it does not matter whether the Tower of Babel is history or not because the goal of the author of the narrative was to share the theological message on the crime of humanity and the punishment of God as the important aspect of obedience to God’s law and the consequences of disobedience to God.

Wenham has another opinion. He sees the Tower of Babel as a protohistory, which means that the narrative has “a form of writing that has links to the past but interprets history for the sake of the present.”⁵⁵ For him, “The picture is there, but the details are fuzzy.”⁵⁶ That is why, in his understanding, the story of the Tower of Babel tries to share the historical realities, such as the reign of Nebuchadnezzar 1 (1123–1101

⁵² Kenton L. Sparks, “Genesis 1–11 as Ancient Historiography,” in Halton and Gundry, *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, 135.

⁵³ Sparks, “Genesis 1–11 as Ancient Historiography,” 135.

⁵⁴ Sparks, “Genesis 1–11 as Ancient Historiography,” 136.

⁵⁵ Charles Halton, “Introduction: A Desiccated Finger and the Study of Genre,” in Halton and Gundry, *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, 20.

⁵⁶ Halton, “Introduction: A Desiccated Finger and the Study of Genre,” 20.

BC), the ziggurat of Babylon, etc., in the setting of the distant past.⁵⁷ So, Wenham shares a somewhat similar opinion with Sparks that the story of the Tower of Babel is not exactly as it is written, but in reality, there was a historical event as the basic story in the narrative of the Tower of Babel. The historical event is used as the basis of what the author wants to tell the reader of his message. With that objective, he wrote a protohistory to his readers.

Another differing opinion comes from James K. Hoffmeier, a professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archaeology at the Divinity School of Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. He argues that “the Genesis narrative relates historical facts, real events that happened in space and time.” He bases his argument on the information that “points to features within Genesis, such as geographical clues and literary elements, that signaled to ancient readers that these stories were to be understood as historical.”⁵⁸ His argument includes the source of a Sumerian tradition from Samuel Noah Kramer, the Sumerologist who translated the text, who declares, “puts it beyond all doubt that the Sumerians believed that there was a time when all mankind spoke one and the same language, and that was Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, who confounded their speech.”⁵⁹ So, in Hoffmeier’s arguments, if accepts the possibility of a memory of humans speaking one language that was told in the Sumerian tradition, then “It is possible to propose that both the Sumerians and Gen 11 preserve a common memory of a world unified by one language.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Wenham, “Genesis 1–11 as Protohistory,” in Halton and Gundry *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, ed. 94–95.

⁵⁸ Halton, “Introduction: A Desiccated Finger and the Study of Genre,” 20.

⁵⁹ Samuel Noah Kramer, “The ‘Babel of Tongues’: A Sumerian Version,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 1 (1968): 111; cf. James K. Hoffmeier, “Genesis 1–11 as History and Theology,” in Halton and Gundry, *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither?*, 56–57.

⁶⁰ Hoffmeier, “Genesis 1–11 as History and Theology,” 57. This theory will be discussed furthermore in chap. 4.

With these many debates on the narrative of the Tower of Babel, is there still any other reason or argument to believe in the historicity of the Tower of Babel? Or should one rather view it as a legend or a fiction or a protohistory? The next chapter will discuss some other arguments to support the possibility of the historiography of the Tower of Babel.

CHAPTER 4

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE TOWER OF BABEL: THE *TOLEDOT* FORMULA, OTHER ANCIENT SOURCES, AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

This chapter will consider the historiography of the Tower of Babel based on three aspects: first, the argument of the *toledot* formula; second, the information from other ancient sources which tell the story of the Tower of Babel or which are similar to the narrative of the Tower of Babel; and then the possibility of archaeological discoveries of the Tower of Babel.

The *Toledot* Formula

One important point to discuss concerning the historiography of the narrative of the Tower of Babel is the argument of the *toledot* formula.

The Meaning of the *Toledot* Formula

Matthew A. Thomas, in his recent monograph on the *toledot* formula, says, “In studying Genesis it has long been recognized that a repeated formula: ‘these are the *toledot* of *Name . . .*’ (the *toledot* formula) plays a primary role in the organization of the book.”¹ In the English translation, *toledot* is translated into ‘the account’ (NIV), or ‘the generations’ (KJV, ASV, RSV, ESV), or ‘the history of the generations’ (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition). Those translations indeed convey some of the correct meaning of the word *toledot* which shows the generations or the history of the generations or the account

¹ Matthew A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the ‘Toledot’ Formula* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 2.

of the generations. Due to the complications of the meaning of the term in various contexts, this thesis will follow the view of Thomas in using the transliteration of the Hebrew word *toledot*.²

The *toledot* formula occurs eleven times in Genesis and once each in Numbers and Ruth. It starts from the creation (the *toledot* formula in Gen 2:4–26), to the formula on all human beings (the *toledot* of Adam, Gen 5:1–6:8), to the *toledot* of Noah, an ancestor after the flood (Gen 6:9–9:29), to the *toledot* of his sons (Gen 10:1–11:9), to the *toledot* of one of Noah’s son, Shem (Gen 11:10–26), to the *toledot* of Terah, Abraham’s father (Gen 11:27–25:11), to the story of two sons of Abraham, the *toledot* of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18) and Isaac (Gen 25:19–35:29). After that, the narrative of Genesis focuses on descendants of Isaac: these are Esau (Gen 36:1–8 and 36:9–37:2) and, in particular, Jacob (Gen 37:2–50:26). Then in Numbers 3 comes the *toledot* of Aaron and Moses; and lastly, it appears in Ruth 4:18–22, with the family line of Perez to David.

For the sake of the objective in this thesis, I will focus on the formula in Genesis, in particular, the *toledot* formula which relates to the narrative of the Tower of Babel.

The Importance and Function of the *Toledot* in Understanding Genesis 11:1–9

There are three important things about the *toledot* formula to understand the Genesis narrative. The first two relate to its function in the context and the third one relates to the use of the conjunction ‘*waw*’ in its reading.

Its function to point out its characters. The first function is that the *toledot* formula narrows the narrative from the old character or the main character to the new or

² Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 2n4.

the secondary character(s). In this function, there are some points to be noticed. The first point is that the *toledot* shows how God led the history of the creation to the history of His chosen people in the creation. Through the *toledot* formula, readers see how Genesis explains human history, in particular, the history of one nation, Israel.

Thomas shows that in the *toledot* formula “the narrative moves from talking about all of humanity (the *toledot* of Adam) to focusing on one specific people group (the *toledot* of Jacob/Israel) and eventually to the leadership of this group (the *toledot* of Aaron and Moses in Num 3).”³ Jason S. Derouchie’s research, supports Thomas and says, “The shift from the heavens and earth (Gen 2:4) to Adam (5:1) to Noah (6:9) to Shem (11:10) and to Jacob (37:2) witnesses the movement from (1) all creation to (2) humanity in general to (3) all living humanity (after the execution of the rest) to (4) a subset of living humanity (through a shift in genealogical focus) and finally to (5) Israel.”⁴

In the context of the narrative of the Tower of Babel, Genesis starts to report Noah’s narrative, where it narrows the narrative from Noah as the main character to his sons as secondary characters (Gen 10:1–32). Then, the record of the Tower of Babel came onto the stage in Genesis 11:1–9. After that, in Genesis 11:10–29, it records the *toledot* of Shem, as the main character, narrowed to Abram as the secondary character. In this way, the narrative wanted to report that the Tower of Babel was a part of the narrative of Noah and his descendants from his three sons. After the Tower of Babel, the narrative focused on Shem’s descendant, in particular, Abram, from whom Israel came.

The second point in its function to narrow the narrative to the secondary character(s) is in the use of genealogies to preserve the family lines of the secondary character(s), in particular, in God’s preservation of His plan of salvation through a certain

³ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 2.

⁴ Jason S. Derouchie, *The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis*, *JETS* 56, no. 2 (2013): 235.

person in the line of the secondary character(s). In this matter, even if the narrative focuses on the main character, the *toledot* formula shows how God works in His preservation of the family lines of secondary characters. So, the *toledot* formula in the Genesis narrative shows how God works in human history to fulfill His plans.

For example, the *toledot* of Adam in Genesis 5:1–6:8 focuses on Adam as the main character. It shares how God blessed him with many descendants from his son, Seth. However, this narrative also showed how God preserved his descendants as secondary characters even though Adam, as the main character, sinned before God (Gen 3) and his first son, Cain, also sinned and killed his brother, Abel (Gen 4). The *toledot* of Adam in Genesis 5 shares how God preserved Adam’s descendants until Noah came (Gen 5:32), which started a new era of Adam’s descendants.

After that, in the context of the narrative of the Tower of Babel, Genesis 10:1–11:9 shares the account of the sons of Noah, where it records the family lines of secondary character, which were the sons of Noah. In this matter, the narrative of the Tower of Babel, which is part of the *toledot* formula of Noah and his sons, shows how God preserved Noah’s descendants after the flood and the incident of the Tower of Babel.

Then, in Genesis 10:32 (part of the *toledot* of Noah), the Bible reported that the nations spread out over the earth, which Genesis 11:9 (the narrative of the Tower of Babel) explained further as the work of the Lord to scatter them (the nations, which were all Noah’s descendants) over the face of the whole earth. This is the work of the Lord to preserve the secondary characters in this *toledot* formula.

This divine intervention led to the new generation of chosen people with whom God fulfilled His plan (Gen 10:10–32, the *toledot* of Shem which led to Abram or Abraham and his descendants). Thomas writes, “The *toledot* formula has long been seen as an important structural element in the book of Genesis. In seeking to uncover the surface structure of Genesis, one must contend with this repeated heading. The fact that it

leads the reader on a clear trajectory toward Israel is intriguing.”⁵ With this way of teaching, the Genesis narrative shows that in its view and teaching, the Tower of Babel is God’s way of fulfilling His plan through the generations from Shem.

Semantic and syntactic functions. Another important point in understanding the role of *toledot* formula is by looking into its semantic and syntactic functions. These functions help us see “the cohesion of the text” showcased by the term *toledot*.⁶ Thomas says that “cohesion may be described as semantic relationships that are not connected to structure. In this formula, the semantic relationship built by the term *toledot* is that between progenitor (father) and offspring (son[s]).”⁷ It means that the use of *toledot* in the heading links the subject (in this matter is Noah in Gen 6 or his sons in Gen 10) with the material that follows (the offspring of Noah in Gen 6 and descendants of Noah’s sons in Gen 10). Furthermore, Thomas explains that “the formula creates coherence across the varied materials of the *toledot* sections by providing a semantic link among the sections they introduce.”⁸ In this argument, Genesis put the narrative of the Tower of Babel as a coherent part of the varied materials of the *toledot* sections in the narrative of Noah’s sons before it focused on the *toledot* of Shem.

Moreover, the *toledot* also shows that the formula “alerts the reader— syntactically and semantically—to the presence of new material. The formula provides background information about the subject matter that is coming and reintroduces the progenitor whose offspring the narrative is about to turn to.”⁹ The name of the progenitor

⁵ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 6.

⁶ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 24.

⁷ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 24.

⁸ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 24.

⁹ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 31.

is the theme of the narrative that the reader already knows, usually because it has been recently discussed in the text. Thomas explains, “By using the term *toledot* as a point of departure with new information, the reader’s progress is arrested, as the new information is assimilated into what the reader already knows. The new information comes unexpectedly at the beginning of the statement, thus signaling a new topic for discussion.”¹⁰ In short, “The term *toledot* signals the topic of the coming material.”¹¹

In this matter, the *toledot* of Shem in Genesis 11:10 took the role of signaling the coming material, while the previous *toledot* of Noah and his sons took a position as a cohesive narrative with the material on Noah, his sons, and their descendants (including the narrative of the Tower of Babel).

The function of *waw* in the *toledot* formula. Another thing to be noticed is the analysis of the role of *waw* in the *toledot* formula.¹² Derouchie claims that from all texts with the *toledot* formula, actually there were only five macro sections of *toledot* divisions. He says that “the five *toledot* units beginning without an explicit connector stand grammatically independent from the preceding material, the five *toledot* units fronted with the coordinate conjunction are intentionally linked to the *toledot* units that precede, thus creating five, not ten, sections in the book.”¹³ The coordinate conjunction in Derouchie’s analysis is *waw*.

In his analysis, the five major sections in Genesis with the *toledot* formula are directly linked to the points of transition from all creation (heavens and earth, 2:4) to humanity in general (Adam, 5:1) to all living humanity (after the execution of the rest,

¹⁰ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 33-34.

¹¹ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 34.

¹² Derouchie, *The Blessing-Commission*, 229-35.

¹³ Derouchie, *The Blessing-Commission*, 232–33.

Noah, 6:9) to a subset of living humanity (through a shift in genealogical focus; Shem, 11:10) to Israel (Jacob, 37:2).¹⁴ Jared M. August supports this view and says that “ten toledot are five primary or main toledot headings. According to this assertion, the main headings are Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 11:10; and 37:2. The subheadings are 10:1; 11:27; 25:12, 19; and 36:1.”¹⁵ Or in other words, those that do not begin with a *waw* are independent headings that mark the five major headings of the book, while those that do are sub-headings to the previous narrative with the *toledot* formula.¹⁶

From this point of view, “It has become increasingly evident that the author of Genesis included this structure to provide direction and unity for the entire book.”¹⁷ Also, as M. H. Woudstra says, the author of Genesis has given a clue to the composition of his book as “a composition which suggests a well thought-out plan.”¹⁸

In other words, Genesis uses the *toledot* structure for a specific purpose. And only five of these are to be considered central to the development of the book. The other five should be considered as subheadings that develop specific points of the primary storyline in greater depth. This fivefold division is vital to a proper understanding of Genesis because it reveals the progressive unity of this book and each *toledot* directs the reader’s attention to the next development in the outworking of God’s plan.¹⁹

With those explanations, we can accept Thomas’ conclusion that “the table of nations is so called because it is a genealogy of all of humanity, and many of the names in

¹⁴ Derouchie, *The Blessing-Commission*, 245; cf. Jared M. August, “The *Toledot* Structure of Genesis: Hope of Promise,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174 (July-September 2017): 267–68.

¹⁵ August, “The *Toledot* Structure,” 267–68.

¹⁶ August, “The *Toledot* Structure,” 268.

¹⁷ August, “The *Toledot* Structure,” 267.

¹⁸ M. H. Woudstra, “The *Toledot* of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-Historical Significance,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (November 1970): 188.

¹⁹ August, *The Toledot Structure*: 268–70.

the list correspond with various people groups of the ancient world. Here all of humanity is recorded for posterity.’²⁰ We also can agree that the part of the story of the nations (Noah’s descendants) ends in the final verse in Genesis 10: “These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.” However, as a part of the *toledot* formula (Noah’s *toledot* and his sons’ *toledot*), the story of Noah’s descendants continues with the narrative of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–11) which followed by the *toledot* of Shem as the new narrative. So, the Tower of Babel “records the reason for the spreading of the various nations across the earth,” and “it is understandable to record the nations here before they separate.”²¹

This part of Genesis also records a change in the way God works to fulfill His plan. It is the first time Genesis records the *toledot* for one family and not for all of humanity. Noah’s sons and their families are still alive and are spreading across the world. They are all recorded in the Table of Nations (the *toledot* of Noah’s sons) before the focus narrows to Shem’s descendants. In this matter, “The Table functions to renew (after the flood) the desire of God that humanity should multiply and fill the earth. God’s intention in creation is still maintained. As the focus of the story is about to narrow to the line of Shem, it is also plausible that the genealogy functions here to preserve a memory of the other lines of surviving humanity after the flood.”²²

Furthermore, Thomas adds that “a genealogy, the Table of Nations, intervenes in order to preserve the family lines of all three brothers before the focus narrows. The

²⁰ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 44.

²¹ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 44.

²² Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 90.

divine promise never again to destroy the world in such a way changes the possible ways in which the narrowing of focus could happen in the future.”²³ Then, he adds,

The syntax and usage of the formula clearly point to its function as a heading for the material following it. The syntax of the formula causes the reader to pause, and its semantics point ahead to future generations. The formula reacquaints the reader with a character already known and introduces new information: the existence of descendants and a new focus on that next generation. . . . A pattern of a narrowing of focus emerges as in each generation the reader’s attention is drawn toward one descendant.²⁴

The specific descendant on that *toledot* was Abram or Abraham, from whom came Israel. Thomas argues, “While the *toledot* section of Terah begins with a genealogy, it primarily consists of the stories of his son, Abram. Abram is called by Yhwh to move to a new land, perhaps continuing the spreading over the earth after the Tower of Babel incident and in fulfillment of God’s command to fill the earth in 1:28 and repeated in 9:1 and 7.”²⁵

From this analysis of the *toledot* formula, it can be concluded that the author of Genesis puts the Tower of Babel in the era of the *toledot* of Noah. That means it was before the Patriarchal era, which started in Genesis 12, with Abram as the central figure. The Tower of Babel is the narrative of God’s punishment for the sin of the people of that era, but also God’s preservation of humanity to fulfill His plan of salvation, which continues through the descendants of Shem. With this conclusion, this thesis tries to show the possibility of the historiography of the Tower of Babel from sources outside of the Bible.

²³ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 128.

²⁴ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 47.

²⁵ Thomas, *These Are the Generations*, 45.

The Historiography of the Tower of Babel: Other Ancient Sources

There are some sources from ancient times that share an event that looks similar to the Tower of Babel.²⁶ This thesis will only quote two of them: first, the information from the work of Titus Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, and second, from the Sumerian epic, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*.

Titus Flavius Josephus

The Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus was born in the year that Gaius ascended to the throne of the Roman Empire, AD 37, and died sometime after AD 100.²⁷ Although he was a Roman citizen, Josephus was a Jew and “was doubtless writing to honor his fellow countrymen and to defend Judaism.”²⁸ He recounted the history of the Jews in his book *Antiquities of the Jews* and shared the story of the Tower of Babel in book 1, chapter 4. Following are some observations from Josephus related to the Tower of Babel:

1. Noah and his three sons have to persuade others to come down from the higher places, because they were “greatly afraid of the lower grounds on account of the flood, and so were very loath to come down from the higher places, to venture to follow their examples.”²⁹
2. After the flood, Noah and his descendants first dwelt in the plain land called Shinar.³⁰

²⁶ Some examples that are not discussed in this thesis are Pseudo Philo, one of the earliest post-Biblical accounts (c. 70 CE). He said that the pronouncement for building the Tower of Babel is ascribed to not only Nimrod (son of Ham) but also to Joktan (son of Shem) and Phenech (son of Japheth); and Berosus, a historian of Babylonia and a priest of Bel (Marduk). He lived during the time of Alexander the Great and Antiochus I Soter. Berosus wrote a history of Babylonia (possibly title *Babyloniaca*) which was titled *Chaldaica* by Josephus and Clement of Alexandria. The work was divided into three parts with the second part deals with the Flood through Nebuchadnezzar (747 BCE). Gabriel Oussani, “Berosus,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), accessed June 14, 2018, <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02514a.htm>>).

²⁷ William Sanford LaSor, foreword to *Josephus: Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1974), vii.

²⁸ LaSor, “Foreword to *Josephus*,” vi.

²⁹ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³⁰ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

3. Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah. He was “a bold man, and of great strength of hand.”³¹
4. It was Nimrod who made them excited “to such an affront and contempt of God.”³² He said that “he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach! And that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers!”³³ Also, the people were very ready to follow Nimrod to build a tower.³⁴
5. They built the tower with burnt brick, with mortar, made of bitumen, so that “it might not be liable to admit water.”³⁵
6. Then, God caused a tumult among Nimrod and the multitude, “by producing in them diverse languages; and causing that, through the multitude of those languages, they should not be able to understand one another.”³⁶
7. Because of the confusion of the language, the place, where Nimrod and the multitude built the tower, is now called Babylon from a Hebrews’ word, Babel, which means, Confusion.³⁷

From Josephus’s reference, it can be said that the Tower of Babel erected in the time of Noah’s great-grandson, Nimrod. The tower was built not as a place to worship God or gods, but as a place of refuge if the flood struck again. In building the tower, Nimrod led his people to depend not on God, but on their own strength. However, God became mad at them and confused their language. God made them incapable of communicating with each other and, through this, God scattered them. The place of the event is now called Babylon.

That means, based on Josephus’ testimony, the Tower of Babel is a historical event with the estimated year not long after the Flood. The record of Genesis 11:1–9 is

³¹ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³² Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³³ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³⁴ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³⁵ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³⁶ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

³⁷ Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works*, 30.

very similar to Josephus's record. Some additional information on the narrative of the Tower of Babel is that Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah, was the leader of that event, and the place where they built the tower was called Babylon.

Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta

The second ancient source to be considered is *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, the epic Sumerian story of Enmerkar, king of Sumerian Uruk, and the distant lord of Aratta. Since this is “The longest Sumerian epic yet discovered, it is the source of important information about the history and culture of the Sumero-Iranian border area.”³⁸

Enmerkar was an ancient Sumerian hero and king of Uruk (in Hebrew is Erech, one center of Nimrod's kingdom in Gen 10:10), one of the important cities in ancient Mesopotamia, a city-state in southern Mesopotamia. He is thought to have lived at the end of the 4th or beginning of the 3rd millennium BC. Enmerkar, along with Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh, was one of the three most significant figures in the surviving Sumerian epics.³⁹

There are some interesting and important points from this epic relating to the Tower of Babel. First, this epic shares the topic of the division of languages. As Kenneth A. Kitchen says, “The topic of the division of languages is itself very old. Its early found expression in a passage in the epic Sumerian story of Enmerkar, king of Sumerian Uruk, and the distant lord of Aratta (in Iran), in a nineteenth/eighteenth century composition relating to a king of circa 2600.”⁴⁰ The part which shares the confusion of tongues is

³⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica, *Enmerkar: Mesopotamian Hero* (Encyclopædia Britannica, June 02, 2017), accessed June 14, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enmerkar>.

³⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica, *Enmerkar: Mesopotamian Hero*.

⁴⁰ K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 426; cf. David G. Burke, “Babel, Tower of,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195046458.001.0001/acref-9780195046458-e-0083>.

linked to the building of “a city and a tower” and clearly modeled on the ziggurat (stepped temple tower) characteristic of Sumerian cities. It is written,

At such a time, may the lands of Cubur and Hamazi, the many-tongued, and Sumer, the great mountain of the *me* of magnificence, and Akkad, the land possessing all that is befitting, and the Martu land, resting in security—the whole universe, the well-guarded people—may they all address Enlil together in a single language! For at that time, for the ambitious lords, for the ambitious princes, for the ambitious kings, Enki, for the ambitious lords, for the ambitious princes, for the ambitious kings, for the ambitious lords, for the ambitious princes, for the ambitious kings—Enki, the lord of abundance and of steadfast decisions, the wise and knowing lord of the Land, the expert of the gods, chosen for wisdom, the lord of Eridug, shall change the speech in their mouths, as many as he had placed there, and so the speech of mankind is truly one.⁴¹

This means, according to this epic, the division of language (which was similar to what was told in Gen 11:9) happened in the time of Enmerkar, circa 2600 BC. It was in the time that Nimrod reigned in Genesis 10:8–12 and 11:1–9.

From that point, David Rohl, a British Egyptologist, offers an argument that suggests Nimrod is connected to the Sumerian saga of Enmerkar.⁴² In his argument, the element ‘kar’ at the end of Enmerkar is the Sumerian’s word for ‘hunter.’⁴³ So, Enmerkar, the king, also meant, in Rohl’s view, Enmer, the hunter.

Furthermore, Rohl compares Enmer to the information about Nimrod in the Bible and shows that there are some similarities between Enmer of the epic of Enmerkar and Nimrod, the descendant of Noah. First, Genesis 10:9 also says that Nimrod was the mighty hunter. Second, Nimrod was also a great king in the ancient world. Genesis 10:10–12 recorded how great his kingdom was and how he expanded his power. The third similarity between Enmer and Nimrod was in their name. Both Enmer and Nimrod

⁴¹ J. A. Black et al., trans., “Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,” in *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, accessed June 15, 2018, <http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/section1/tr1823.htm>, Oxford 1998-.

⁴² Saxon-Israel True Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel—‘A Fact or Biblical Myth’ documentary film in HD,” YouTube Video, 00:49:02, published on February 1, 2017, accessed June 14, 2018, <https://youtu.be/kixskKa6WXY>.

⁴³ Saxon-Israel True Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel.”

had almost the same consonants in their name, that is ‘NMR.’⁴⁴ There is only one different consonant between Enmer and Nimrod in that Nimrod has one additional consonant, ‘D,’ at the end of his name.

So, the question is, were Enmer and Nimrod two different persons? Or is there any possibility that they were the same person with two different names, one in Sumerian and the other name in Hebrew? If they were the same person, then what was the reason that there was an additional consonant ‘D’ in the name of Nimrod in the book of Genesis?

To answer these questions, Rohl gave an explanation.⁴⁵ In his opinion, Nimrod is a kind of ‘pun.’⁴⁶ The ‘D’ consonant in the name of Nimrod (NMRD) turns the name into the verb, ‘to rebel.’ So, Nimrod is not the original name, but it is the word designated to people who ‘rebel.’ It can be done as a pun to Enmer because it constitutes the same three first consonants from Nimrod. If Rohl’s explanation is correct, then Enmerkar, the king of Sumeria in this epic, was Enmer, the hunter, who was the king of Sumeria and was the same person as Nimrod in Genesis 10:8–12. Enmer was called ‘Nimrod’ in the Hebrew Bible as a pun of ‘to rebel,’ because Enmer, the king who is also the mighty hunter, led his people to rebel against God. His act of rebellion led him to be known as Enmer, the king and hunter who led his people to rebel against God. Then, in Hebrews, he was called Nimrod, the pun of his name.

In this matter, the Bible did not say anything about Nimrod (or Enmer, the rebel) leading his people in rebellion. However, if we compare the information about Nimrod in Genesis 10 with the *toledot* formula of Genesis 10:1-32 and 11:10-26 while seeing the narrative of the Tower of Babel as a part of the Table of Nations narrative, we

⁴⁴ As we know that there is no vowel in the original form of Hebrew written text.

⁴⁵ Saxon-Israel True Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel.”

⁴⁶ Saxon-Israel True Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel.”

can easily see that the closest rebellion of people in Nimrod's time against God is the incident shared in the Tower of Babel narrative. With this theory, then the division of language in *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* happened in the time of Enmerkar, circa 2600 BC, who was also Nimrod from Genesis 10:8–12 and 11:1–9.

This theory needs more time and evidence to be proven; however, it does give some good arguments for believing in the possibility of the historiography of the Tower of Babel which is shared in Genesis 11:1–9.

The Historiography of the Tower of Babel: The Archaeological Discoveries

In the previous part, I have shared that there are at least two views to support the possibility of the historiography of the Tower of Babel. These views are the unity of the narrative from the analysis of the *toledot* formula and the possibility that Enmer from the ancient sources is the same person as Nimrod in Genesis. However, there is another problem with the historiography of the Tower of Babel, namely the exact place of the Tower of Babel. Some reasons behind the problems of deciding the exact location of the Tower of Babel lie on the fact that there is not enough evidence to verify the exact location of the Tower. This part will present two possibilities of the location of the Tower of Babel.

Traditional View of the Tower of Babel

The first view, the Traditional View, is the most popular one. Many biblical scholars, such as Gordon J. Wenham and John E. Hartley, connect Babel in Genesis 11 with the city known to ANE historical studies as Babylon, from the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1595 BC) and during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (ca. 638–539 BC). They connect the Tower of Babel with a ziggurat built at Babylon's sacred precinct which

is called *Etemenanki* or ‘the house that is the foundation of heaven and earth.’ There are several reasons for this view.

The first reason why many biblical scholars think that the Tower of Babel was the story about the ziggurat *Etemenanki* in Babylon was because of its appearance.⁴⁷ Bob Becking says, “The building plan of the *Etemenanki* is comparable to the ancient Sumerian ziggurat temples. A cuneiform text of uncertain provenance contains an inscription on the construction of the building and next to it an image of the tower.”⁴⁸ In this matter, the ziggurat is “a typical Mesopotamian temple-tower, which was square at the base and had sloping, stepped sides that led upward to a small shrine at the top.”⁴⁹

The second reason to support the traditional view is the similar name of the Tower of Babel with the place where *Etemenanki* is, that is Babylon, the great kingdom in the Old Testament. Hodge argues that “the word for ‘Babel’ and ‘Babylon’ is the same in Hebrew. This Hebrew word is translated twice in Genesis 10–11 as ‘Babel’ and elsewhere translated as ‘Babylon.’ The ‘Babel’ translation is likely chosen to distinguish the former from the latter empire.”⁵⁰ So, in Hodge’s opinion, “Babel and Babylon are indeed the same place by the biblical accounts and can be found on maps even in the present time. This is the most probable place where the events of the tower occurred. Subsequently, a later empire was built.”⁵¹ As a popular name in ANE, then it is reasonable if people used Babel as the name of the tower.

⁴⁷ Aron Pinker, “Tower of Babel: God’s Towering Pride,” *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (April-June 1999), accessed June 8, 2018, http://jbnqnew.jewishbible.org/assets/Uploads/27/JBQ_27.2.pdf#page=21, 96.

⁴⁸ Bob Becking, “Destruction and Exile: Israel and the Babylonian Empire,” in *The Old Testament in Archaeology and History*, ed. Jennie Ebeling et al. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 516.

⁴⁹ Barker et al., *The NIV Study Bible*, 23 (n. for v. 4).

⁵⁰ Hodge, *Tower of Babel*, 47.

⁵¹ Hodge, *Tower of Babel*, 48.

The third reason is the possibility that they used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar because stone was scarce in the area where they built the tower. Barker et al. argue that “stone and mortar were used as building materials in Canaan. Stone was scarce in Mesopotamia, however, so mud brick and tar were used (as indicated by archaeological excavations).”⁵²

The last reason is, according to many scholars, because there is no other solid alternative for the location of the Tower of Babel. There is no archaeological discovery of other ziggurats as big as *Etemenanki*, and there is no other place which is called Babel in ancient times.

This view has been held as the only view of the Tower of Babel until recent years when some scholars began to argue against it.

The major problem of the Traditional View is with the date of the Tower of Babel in its view. According to Petrovich, “By anyone’s account, Etemenanki was constructed between the Old Babylonian Period and the beginning of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, though most likely its original construction dates to the second millennium BC.”⁵³ Furthermore, he says, “The obvious flaw in connecting Etemenanki with the biblical tower of Babel is that the latter tower long predates the lifetime of Abraham, while the former tower long postdates the life of Abraham. If the chronology of biblical history is to be taken seriously, a tower—and conceivably a site, as well—that can be connected to the Bible’s tower of Babel must be sought sometime during the 3rd millennium BC, if not earlier.”⁵⁴

⁵² Barker et al., *The NIV Study Bible*, 23 (n. for v. 3).

⁵³ Douglas Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel of Genesis 11 and Locating the Uncompleted Tower” (unpublished article given to me by Peter Gentry on June 3, 2017), 1.

⁵⁴ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 1.

Sailhamer agrees with Petrovich. He says, “Evangelicals approach the Tower of Babel narrative as if it were about a Sumerian ziggurat and accordingly explain the narrative in light of that context. In doing so, they seem unaware of the fact that such background material comes from a historical context of events that stem from hundreds, or even thousands, of years earlier than Moses.”⁵⁵

The problem with the date of the Traditional View also arises when it is compared with the beginning of writing used in ancient times. In Petrovich’s view, “Writing’s advent postdates the time when a universal language was in use, the post-Babel dispersion must be sought in the pre-historical period, thus before the advent of writing. This reality is confirmed by the absence of any examples of the universal language in written form.”⁵⁶

Another problem with the Traditional view is the inhabited time of the city of Babylon which does not fit with the information of the time they built the Tower of Babel according to Genesis. Petrovich argues with the inhabited time of the city of Babylon. He says, “The city of Babylon almost certainly was uninhabited at the time of the post-Babel dispersion.”⁵⁷ So, based on the possible date of the Tower of Babel, for Petrovich, it is impossible to support the view that the Tower of Babel was built in the area where *Etemenanki* is.

The last objection to the Traditional View comes from Hoffmeier, who argues that the term for the Tower of Babel in the Bible refers to a defense structure and is not associated with a temple. He says, even if “its dominant ziggurat has given rise to generations of scholars who maintain that there must be a connection between this

⁵⁵ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 71.

⁵⁶ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 2.

⁵⁷ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 1.

pyramid-like temple and the tower in the Hebrew tradition.” However, “The Hebrew word rendered ‘tower’ in the Genesis narrative is *migdal*, normally referring to a defense structure or a lookout, and not a term associated with a temple. So the connection of the tower of Gen 11 and temple or ziggurat in Babylon is tenuous.”⁵⁸

That is why, in Petrovich’s view, the Traditional View “involves archaeologically uncritical assumptions.”⁵⁹ There are some serious objections to the Traditional View on the location of the Tower of Babel. With that conclusion, Petrovich suggests another alternative as the possible location of the Tower of Babel, and that is *Eridu*.⁶⁰

Eridu: The Oldest City in Ancient Mesopotamia

In the modern world, Eridu is known as the site at Tell Abu Shahrain, located in southern Mesopotamia (modern *Dhi Qar*, in Iraq territory). In Sumerian, it was called *Nun.ki*.⁶¹

Michael D. Danti and Richard L. Zettler state, “Eridu is best known for its sequence of temples excavated by the directorate general of Iraq. Eighteen building levels above a 30-centimeter-thick layer of occupational debris (level XIX), spanning a period from the Early Ubaid period into the Late Uruk period, were uncovered.”⁶² Furthermore,

⁵⁸ Hoffmeier, “Genesis 1-11 as History and Theology,” 57.

⁵⁹ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 1.

⁶⁰ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 3-4.

⁶¹ Saxon-Israel True Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel.”

⁶² Michael D. Danti and Richard L. Zettler, “Eridu,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. Eric M. Meyers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195065121.001.0001/acref-9780195065121-e-348>.

Eridu is considered to be “among the oldest cities in Mesopotamia, antedating the Flood, and the first city to hold kingship.”⁶³

There are some important points that make Eridu possibly an alternative location where the Tower of Babel was built. First, Petrovich explains that there were only two cultural mass-dispersions from Mesopotamia during the pre-historical period: the Ubaid Expansion and the Uruk Expansion. Moreover, in his opinion, the Uruk Expansion fits better as the one to be associated with the post-Babel dispersion of Genesis 11:8–9. He argues, “The Uruk Expansion included permanent migratory movement into northern Mesopotamia, across the Tigris River and along the Zagros Mountains to the east, into outlying regions of southeastern Iran, into the upper Euphrates region, westward across northern Syria and into southeastern Anatolia, and even down into distant Egypt.”⁶⁴ With this expansion, he adds, cultural dispersions were started from southern Mesopotamia and not from central Mesopotamia of Babylon’s location. This cultural dispersion in southern Mesopotamia is “exceeding any expectations that might have been raised by the achievements of the Ubaid Period, which immediately preceded it.” So, he concludes, “All of the evidence points to the Uruk Expansion as the event that should be equated with the post-Babel dispersion of Genesis 11.”⁶⁵ With this information, the date of the event is more consistent to the date of Genesis 11 than the Traditional View.

The second point to be noticed is in the naming of Babylon or Babel. The naming of the city ‘Babel’ in Genesis 11:1–9 has to be understood as a play on words with the term for ‘confused’ (Hebrew verb *balal*). Kline says, “ ‘Babel’ puns on the word

⁶³ Danti and Zettler, “Eridu.”

⁶⁴ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 2.

⁶⁵ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 2.

‘confused’.”⁶⁶ It is a paronomasia, a repetition of words similar in sound which are not related etymologically. Currid also supports this by saying that “the name ‘Babel’ literally means ‘gate of God’, and so may reflect the people’s desire to build a tower that rises to the very gates of heaven. The arrogance and self-confidence of the people are underscored once again.”⁶⁷ However, their arrogance led them to confuse (*balal*) in communication with each other. So, the word Babel in the narrative of the Tower of Babel should not be considered the same as the name of the great kingdom of Babylonia in around 700 to 600 BC.

On this point, Petrovich explains that there are some archaeological discoveries that show Eridu was also called Babylon before the dispersion. For example, one version of the Sumerian King List (SKL) exalts Eridu as the first city to receive kingship from heaven. Even more, Eridu’s kingdom is listed in the SKL “as having begun before the raging deluge (i.e., universal Flood) swept in . . . is known to be the antediluvian section’s origin because of its role in the Sumerian creation epic.”⁶⁸ Then, Petrovich continues, “Other texts from the middle of the second millennium BCE record ‘Eridu’ as the city being described, when in fact Babylon is the city of reference. During the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the king of Babylon occasionally called himself LUGAL NUN^{ki}, meaning ‘king of Eridu’ (in Babylon).”⁶⁹ So, he concludes that “this long and varied textual tradition of interplay between names ‘Babylon’ and ‘Eridu’ lends strong credence to the possibility that Babel was located at Eridu.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016), 49.

⁶⁷ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1: *Genesis 1:1–25:18* (New York: Evangelical Press, 2003), 242.

⁶⁸ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 4.

⁶⁹ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 4.

⁷⁰ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 4.

The third argument from archaeological discoveries is that there is “no other contemporary structure remotely compared with the grandeur of the great temple to Enki at Eridu.”⁷¹ Furthermore, Petrovich argues, “The most outstanding feature uncovered to date is the long sequence of 18 successive temples that extended from the Ubaid 1 phase until the Late Uruk Period, with most of the temples dating to the Ubaid Period.”⁷² However, this discovery leads us to another question. Could there have been a much earlier ziggurat standing adjacent to the temple of Enki, notably on the very spot of the massive Temple II/I-era platform where in *ca.* 2040 BCE Amar-Sin completed Eridu’s ziggurat that has survived to the present?⁷³

The problem with the Eridu alternative is when it is compared to the ziggurat in Ur, there is not ample evidence among the archaeological discoveries in Eridu’s area to support this alternative. However, the absence of evidence does not necessarily mean the evidence of absence. So, the possibility of Eridu as the location of the Tower of Babel is still plausible for consideration.

⁷¹ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 5.

⁷² Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 5.

⁷³ Petrovich, “(Re)Locating the Site of Babel,” 6. Rohl shares a similar view in Saxon-Israeli Ture Israelites Seek Enlightenment video, “Tower of Babel.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis argues that the Old Testament narrative is historically accurate. The standing of this paper is supported by many reasonable arguments of historiography for its historicity. With these arguments, this thesis suggests that the narrative of the Tower of Babel as described in Genesis 11:1–9 has reasonable grounds of historiography to be considered as a historical event.

In light of the aforementioned arguments, I attempt to present what kind of information that supports the possibility of the Tower of Babel existence in the period of Noah's descendants, before Abraham's time, in the land of Shinar, when all people at that time spoke one language. Moreover, I also try to provide any plausible arguments for the location of the incident by checking the possibility of a place to build the building as big as the Tower of Babel. From this research, this thesis finds some problems and alternative solutions on the historiography of the Tower of Babel.

The first problem in the historiography of the Tower of Babel is that scholars do not have the same opinion on the Genesis account of the Tower of the Babel. They can be grouped in three categories:

1. Scholars who think that we cannot decide whether this narrative was a historical event or not. Claire Amos is of this group of opinion.
2. Scholars who are in the position that this narrative was not a history or at least was not as Genesis 11:1–9 tried to share as history. Hermann Gunkel thinks that the Tower of Babel is a myth and does not have a historical basis. Modupe Oduyoye shares a somewhat similar opinion that the Tower of Babel is a legend. Kenton L. Sparks thinks that it is a parody against Sargon II, a Neo-Assyrian king who ruled in the eighth century BCE. Gordon Wenham thinks that the narrative of the Tower of Babel only shares a protohistory, which is the historical realities, such as the reign of Nebuchadnezzar 1 (1123–1101 BC), the ziggurat of Babylon, etc., in the setting of

the distant past. In general, these are some among theories that do not hold the historicity of the Tower of Babel as Genesis 11:1–9 shared.

3. On the other hand, some scholars hold that the Tower of Babel narrative as Genesis share is a history. Some among them are James K. Hoffmeier and Meredith G. Kline. They believe that the narrative of the Tower of Babel is a history.

The second problem, until now there are also debates on the time and location of the Tower of Babel event. At least, there are two positions on this matter:

1. Bodie Hodge, John. D. Currid, and Walter R. Bodine hold a position that Shinar was the region known as Babylonia or Chaldea in southern Mesopotamia. From this point of argument, some scholars, including Claus Westermann, Kenneth A. Mathews, Paul H. Seely, W. Osborne, and John E. Hartley, argue that Babel in Genesis 11 relates to the city known to ANE historical studies as Babylon, the capital city of Hammurabi during the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1595 BC) and of Nebuchadnezzar during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (ca. 638–539 BC).
2. Douglas Petrovich and John Sailhamer disagree with the first opinion. They do not say which the exact place of the Tower of Babel was, but they have an opinion on the time of the Tower of Babel event. They based their argument on the chronology of biblical history (which connected the Bible's Tower of Babel sometime during the 3rd millennium BCE or earlier) and an archaeological assumption that material in the narrative comes from a historical context of events of years earlier than Moses. Kline also holds the view that the date of the Tower of Babel event was in the millennia or between the period of Noah and Abraham. David Rohl, with his theory on Enmerkar, suggested that the location of the Tower of Babel, which is close to the time of the reign of Enmer from the epic Sumerian story, was around third century BCE as what had been told in Genesis. So, in Rohl's opinion, the possible location was not in Babylon from the Old Babylonian Period (ca. 2000–1595 BCE) and during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (ca. 638–539 BCE), but in Tell Abu Shahrain, located in southern Mesopotamia (modern *Dhi Qar*, in Iraq territory).

The third problem, related to the first and second problems, there is also a problem with the identity of these people in Genesis 11:1–9. There are at least two groups of scholars on this issue:

1. Those who hold the opinion that this narrative was not history and share the opinion that this is an event in Babylon, think that this narrative recorded groups of unknown people. Gunkel and von Rad are among those who hold this view.
2. On the contrary, Bodine, Kline, John Phillips, and J. Rogerson think that these people are Noah's descendants who were led by Nimrod (Gen 10:9) who came down after the flood to find places to live. Rohl supports this latter argument with his theory on the name of Enmerkar as the same person with Nimrod.

Despite problems on these issues of historiography, there are some reasonable

arguments on the historiography of the Tower of Babel as has been told in Genesis 11:1–9. First, based on the *toledot* formula, it is reasonable to consider that Genesis 11:1–9 happened in the era of Noah's sons or the longest was in the era of his descendants in the third generation. As has been discussed in chapter 4, the *toledot* formula shares the story of people and event in the period between two *toledot* formulas. The narrative of the Tower of Babel was in between the *toledot* of Noah's sons (Gen 10) and the *toledot* of Shem (Gen 11:10–27), which means that Genesis wants to tell that the Tower of Babel happened in that period.

Second, there are some other ancient sources, such as the writing of Josephus and, in particular, the epic Sumerian story, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, which support the theory of the historicity of the division of languages. Moreover, the epic Sumerian story of Enmerkar, king of Sumerian Uruk, and the distant lord of Aratta (in Iran), was as old as a nineteenth/eighteenth century composition relating to a king of third centuries BCE which shares the confusion of tongues that linked to the building of a city and a tower which is modeled as a ziggurat characteristic of Sumerian cities.

The last thing to be considered is the theory of Rohl on the connection of Nimrod with Enmerkar where he believes that Nimrod means Enmer, the rebel, is a kind of pun to Enmer, the hunter. Rohl argues that the epic Sumerian on Enmerkar shares the same king and hunter with the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:1–9. From his theory, then Rohl suggested that the time of the event of the Tower of Babel was close to the time of the reign of Enmer from the epic Sumerian story. It was around third century BCE as what had been told in Genesis. This alternative is also supported by, among others, Petrovich who argues that the Uruk Expansion fits better with the post-Babel dispersion in Genesis 11:8–9 and some archaeological discoveries which share the fact that Eridu was also called Babylon before the dispersion.

Having discussed all these arguments, this thesis concludes that there are

reasonable historiography arguments to consider that the Tower of Babel happened as it was recorded in the narrative of Genesis 11:1–9. The *toledot* formula has a solid argument for placing the narrative in the era of Noah's and his descendant, until the third generations.

Second, from ancient sources, in particular, the epic Sumerian story, *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, there is a reasonable historiography argument to consider the possibility of the Tower of Babel as has been recorded in Genesis 11:1–9. The theory of Enmerkar as the same person with Nimrod has a reasonable argument to be considered.

Third, in contrast to the traditional theory, the theory of Rohl on Eridu has to be considered seriously on the possibility of the location where Nimrod and his people built the Tower of Babel. The only problem with this theory is that there are still not enough archaeological discoveries on the alternative location of *Eridu*. However, the absence of evidence does not necessarily mean the evidence of absence. So, the possibility of Eridu as the location of the Tower of Babel is still plausible for consideration.

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ABSTRACT

ISSUES OF HISTORIOGRAPHY CONCERNING THE TOWER OF BABEL

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The historicity of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9) has raised considerable debate among Old Testament scholars. Several scholars believe that there are some reasonable arguments to support the possibility of its historicity, as related in Genesis 11:1–9, while some other scholars disagree.

This thesis starts with the assumption that the narrative of the Tower of Babel happened in the context of the time of Noah and his three generations of descendants. With that assumption, this thesis tried to analyze the possibility of the argument of the historicity of the Tower of Babel based on the archaeological discoveries, ancient sources, and the biblical argument, in particular, the *toledot* argument.

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