

IDENTIFYING NIMROD OF GENESIS 10 WITH SARGON OF AKKAD  
BY EXEGETICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL MEANS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the more intriguing and enigmatic characters in the OT is Nimrod, though his name appears only four times throughout the entire Bible (Gen 10:8, 9; 1 Chr 1:10; and Mic 5:6). His biography is narrated in Genesis 10, and opinions about his identity and character have abounded since ancient times. In Philo's *Questiones in Genesis* 2.82, which dates to the first half of the first century AD, he refers to Nimrod as a giant who opposes God, and the original and chief of sinners. In *Ant.* 1.113–114, Josephus considered not only that Nimrod was alive during the tower of Babel incident, but that he was the one who changed the government into a tyrannical one and incited those at Babel into building the infamous tower, in outright defiance of God.

At present, opinions on the identity and character of Nimrod have continued to abound, and a discussion of some of the more noted options ventured will proceed shortly. For now, suffice it to say that Nimrod is thought by some to be heroic, while by others to be devious; he is considered by some to be a mere mortal, though by others to be divine. Thus the goal of this essay is to sift through the diversity of options for the identity of this enigmatic figure named Nimrod, and to determine—if at all possible—whether his biography can be matched precisely with any known figure from antiquity. In order to accomplish this endeavor, the task will require a careful look at relevant exegetical data, and at the archaeological record that serves to inform the field of ancient Near Eastern (hereafter ANE) historical studies, a vital cognate to biblical studies.

The task will be accomplished by proceeding through the following steps: (1) presenting a working translation that will act as a reference point for the reader; (2) investigating the various words, phrases, and constructions that act as exegetical clues to illuminate what can be known for certain about Nimrod biographically; (3) reviewing and critiquing some of the more popularly held opinions on the identification of Nimrod; and (4) presenting an alternative candidate for Nimrod with the help of archaeology and the support of the exegetical work that will have been done up to that point. Finally, a conclusion will be presented, and the reader will be able to judge whether the present writer has made a successful case.

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## II. TRANSLATION OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE WITH NIMROD'S BIOGRAPHY

Genesis 10:7–12: <sup>7</sup>The sons of Cush *were* Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabteca, while the sons of Raamah *were* Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup>Now Cush sired Nimrod. That one acted irreverently, in order to become powerful on the earth; <sup>9</sup>he became a powerful slaughterer in the sight of Yahweh. <sup>10</sup>Now the starting-point of his kingdom was Eridu, and Uruk, and Akkad, and all of them *were located* in the land of Sumer. <sup>11</sup>From that land, he went out *into* Assyria, and he built up Nineveh, and Rehoboth City, and Kalhu, <sup>12</sup>and Resen—*being located* between Nineveh and Kalhu, which is the great city.<sup>1</sup>

## III. EXEGETICAL INVESTIGATION OF NIMROD'S BIOGRAPHY

Before moving to a discussion of individual words and phrases, a couple of general remarks need to be made. First, there are three essential categories that comprise Nimrod's biography: (1) Nimrod's genealogical background (Gen 10:7–8a); (2) Nimrod's personal character (Gen 10:8b–9); and (3) Nimrod's exceptional exploits (Gen 10:10–12). Exegetical comments will be divided into these three categories.

Second, a brief discussion of how this pericope fits into its immediate context of Genesis 10 and into the greater context of Genesis 1–11 is necessary before proceeding. From all indications, Moses wrote the book of Genesis from the plains of Moab across from Jericho (Num 22:1; 26:63), while Israel was poised to traverse the Jordan Rift Valley and enter Canaan, in order to inherit the Promised Land that would flow with milk and honey so long as they were faithful (Exod 3:8; Deut 6:3), and to unleash God's wrathful judgment against the wicked Canaanites (Gen 15:16; Exod 23:23). Yet Yahweh knew that the Israelites would not fully extinguish the Amorites, Canaanites, and other inhabitants of the land as he had instructed Israel.

Therefore, he gave them Genesis 1–11 as a vaccination against the adverse effects that would be created by constant exposure to a poisonous worldview, to allow them to live skillfully and successfully among peoples with a lifestyle that was antithetical to a God-centered worldview. God himself expressly warned his people in reference to the wicked Canaanites, "For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods; then the anger of Yahweh will be kindled against you" (Deut 7:4). Thus God, out of kindness and the desire to prevent his people from falling away from him and being subject to his fury, provided them with a God-centered worldview, in order to enable them to thrive among the godless peoples of Canaan.

Among other lessons, Moses instructed the Israelites how sin entered the world (Gen 3:1–19), how quickly sin worsened from simple disobedience to the

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<sup>1</sup> The translation is that of the present writer, as will be all subsequent translations, unless otherwise noted. The toponyms may appear to be different than what one finds in standard English translations, but each toponym will be discussed subsequently. The approach taken here, whenever possible, is to use known site names, rather than merely transliterating from Hebrew.

murder of one's own sibling (Gen 4:1–16), and how sin was so rampant on the earth that it led God to destroy all but sea life and the paired land animals on the ark (Gen 6:1–8:22). Yet he also taught them about how Ham's sin led to the curse of the Canaanites (Gen 9:18–29), as well as why there are different languages on earth (Gen 11:1–9), which is due to how Babel's residents conspired together to exalt themselves to God's level. With this as a background, one task here is to discover what lesson God wanted to teach Israel through the story of Nimrod's biography, to prepare them to live successfully as a nation with their own land and—in the anticipatory foreordination of God—the eventual leadership by an earthly king (Deut 17:14).

As for the local context of the Nimrod pericope in Genesis 10, the end of Genesis 9 provides the story of Noah's being shamed by his son Ham, and how this led to a curse on Ham's son Canaan (Gen 9:20–27). Shem received a blessing, while Canaan's line was relegated to being subservient to Shem's line. Genesis 10 then records the genealogy that connects Noah's sons to the known races on earth and their places of habitation, with the Nimrod pericope functioning to illuminate the background to one of the races that predated Israel and inhabited land to the east of Canaan. The lesson that Nimrod provided to the Israelites, which will be developed subsequently, is of a completely different nature than the lesson that Canaan's curse provided, given the vast difference in time and location. The subsequent genealogy in Gen 11:10–32 specifies the physical link between Noah's son Shem and Abram, who was considered to be the key patriarch from whom Israel derived.

1. *Nimrod's genealogical background (Gen 10:7–8a)*. Oddly enough, a number of studies specifically devoted to the identification of Nimrod do not even include Gen 10:7 as one of the applicable verses when they list the pericope for the biography of Nimrod, instead opting for Gen 10:8–12 as being sufficient.<sup>2</sup> Levin does admit that the received text of Genesis attaches Gen 10:8–12 to the genealogy of the sons of Ham in Gen 10:6–7, but he also declares that the Nimrod narrative was affixed to the genealogy of Ham by the J source, because it was too difficult for him to accept the tradition that links Nimrod to Cush.<sup>3</sup> However, without any textual evidence disconnecting Gen 10:8–12 from the genealogy tracing him to Cush or Ham, and without any textual evidence for a J text, Levin's opposition to leaving these verses in their present position is unconvincing.

a.  $\text{כּוּשׁ} \dots \text{כּוּשׁ}$  (“sons...sons”) in Gen 10:7. Sons are listed for two men in this verse: Cush and Raamah. According to Gen 10:6, Cush is named as one of the four  $\text{בְּנֵי}$  (“sons”) of Ham, and in Gen 10:7 Cush is listed as having five sons of his own: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The two sons attributed to Raamah are Sheba and Dedan. Thus Moses lists two generations that descended from Cush,

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<sup>2</sup> K. van der Toorn and P. W. van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible,” *HTR* 83 (1990) 1; Peter van der Veen and Uwe Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter,” *Journal of the Ancient Chronology Forum* 9 (2004) 32; David P. Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?” *Bible and Spade* 14/3 (2001) 67; Yigal Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad,” *VT* 52 (2002) 350.

<sup>3</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 351, 354–55. Cush will be discussed in greater detail subsequently.

with Sheba and Dedan being his grandsons. Both of the father-son relationships are denoted with בֶּן (“son”) in this verse, just as in Gen 10:6, where four sons are listed as having been born to Ham.

b. *כּוּשׁ יָלַד אֶת־נִמְרוֹד* (“Cush sired Nimrod”) in Gen 10:8a. While the verb יָלַד (“beget, bring forth”) most naturally refers to a mother who bears a child, it also is possible for a man to be in view, and thus a father who has sired a son.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, here Cush is said to have sired Nimrod. For two reasons, however, Cush should not be viewed as the biological father of Nimrod: (1) Nimrod is not listed among the five sons of Cush in Gen 10:7. What is more, Nimrod is not even listed among the two grandsons of Cush. (2) The contrast between בְּנֵי and יָלַד, used in Gen 10:7 and 10:8a, respectively, functions as a marker indicating a qualitative difference between Cush’s siring of his sons and grandsons versus Cush’s siring of Nimrod.

Thus Nimrod should be understood only as a remote descendant of Cush, clearly beyond even the possibility of being a grandson, given that Cush’s grandsons already are named as sons of one of Cush’s sons. Moreover, in the Table of Nations listed in Genesis 10, בְּנֵי places the emphasis on the ancestor, whereas יָלַד points to the descendant.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, while Gen 10:8a focuses the reader’s attention on Nimrod, as a remote descendant of Cush, the text offers no indication whatsoever as to just how distant of a descendant he is.

There should be no objection to Cush’s “siring” a remote descendant, since this concept is not exclusive to the Cush-Nimrod relationship. The cognate noun יָלִיד (“son, child, descendant”) is used of a wide range of progeny, including later descendants.<sup>6</sup> In Isa 29:23, the prophet records the words of God, who states that “when he [Jacob] sees his children, ... they will sanctify my name.” Since Isaiah lived over 1000 years after Jacob, there can be no denying that descendants are the children in view, not biological sons or daughters. Another example is the NT’s use of “son of David” as a designation for Jesus (Matt 9:27; Mark 10:47; et al.), which was used to demonstrate that Jesus’ lineage is traced back to David, who predated him by c. 1,000 years.

Finally, when Luke traced Jesus’ lineage back to the origin of mankind, he wrote, “the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38). In a non-biological sense, Adam here is considered the son of God. Yet in Deut 32:18, Moses declared that the people “neglected the rock who bore you and forgot the God who gave birth to you.” Thus here Moses calls remote “descendants” of God those whom he bore, even though they had their own biological fathers and were far removed from God genealogically, per Luke 3:38. In summary, Moses describes Nimrod’s genealogical background in Gen 10:7–8a as his being a remote descendant of Cush, though the text offers no indication whatsoever as to just how remote of a descendant he was.

<sup>4</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “יָלַד,” in *NIDOTTE* 2.455. The genealogies of Cain (Gen 4:17–24) and Seth (Gen 4:25–26) also utilize יָלַד for father-son sirings.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 456.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 457.

2. *Nimrod's personal character (Gen 10:8b–9)*. Having completed his genealogical introduction to the life of Nimrod, Moses turns his attention to Nimrod's character. The question has been asked whether the Bible portrays Nimrod as a godly or an evil character.<sup>7</sup> The subsequent text of Gen 10:8b–9 will answer this question adequately enough on its own, but a clue might exist in the meaning of Nimrod's name. The name "Nimrod" may derive from the Hebrew verb מָרַד, meaning "to rebel (against God)."<sup>8</sup> Some commentators agree with this derivation, noting that his name means, "We will rebel."<sup>9</sup> Others merely attribute the Midrash with making this association.<sup>10</sup> Scholarship is at a loss as to why Nimrod would be called We-Will-Rebel, though most likely it does not reflect his given name or the name he used of himself.<sup>11</sup> Rather, Nimrod is a dysphemism (i.e. the opposite of a euphemism), which denotes a (nick)name with a harsh or negative connotation (e.g. snail mail).<sup>12</sup>

a. אִיִּךְ ("that one") in Gen 10:8b. With no *waw*-conjunction used, a new independent clause begins with the demonstrative pronoun הוּא ("that one").<sup>13</sup> This cannot be a relative pronoun that connects the former clause (Gen 10:8a) with the latter clause (Gen 10:8b), because the Hebrew relative pronoun is אֲשֶׁר ("who, that, which").<sup>14</sup> Yet the NIV opts to use a relative clause, "Nimrod, *who* grew to be . . .," despite the grammar. The subject of the Hebrew independent clause (הוּא) should not be equated with the subject of the last clause ("Cush"). This is the case not only because the pronoun refers to the nearest antecedent ("Nimrod"), but because—as Hamilton correctly pointed out—the emphasis with יָרַד is on the descendant, not the ancestor. The demonstrative pronoun is employed for an emphatic purpose, marking out Nimrod from among his ancestors.

b. הִתְהַלַּךְ ("acted irreverently") in Gen 10:8b. The verb הִלַּל ("begin, profane") presents a difficulty, because when it appears in the *hiphil* stem, as here, the possibility

<sup>7</sup> Livingston, "Who Was Nimrod?" 67.

<sup>8</sup> Simonis and Gesenius, *A List of the Proper Names Occurring in the Old Testament, with Their Interpretations* (London: J. Wertheimer & Co., 1844) 86.

<sup>9</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible" 18; Livingston, "Who Was Nimrod?" 67; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 222.

<sup>10</sup> Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty" 365.

<sup>11</sup> Livingston correctly notes that the author chose not to call Nimrod by his own name and honor him, but instead called him by a derisive name that reveals what he truly is ("Who Was Nimrod?" 69). Even the name "Gilgamesh" probably is not the historical name for the king of Uruk known by this name, as "Gilgamesh" likely is an epithet, since this name means "heroic ancestor" (William H. Stiebing Jr., *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* [New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2009] 45–46).

<sup>12</sup> The ideal example of a dysphemism is the name "Babel," which was not the original name of the city of Genesis 11. Instead, this city was called "Babel" in retrospect, since there God confused/changed the language of all people (Gen 11:9). Thus the original name of the city should be sought when looking for the site of the tower incident, not the name "Babel/Babylon" (Douglas Petrovich, "Identifying the Tower of Babel and (Re-)Locating the Site of Its Construction" [forthcoming]).

<sup>13</sup> Gary D. Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 74; C. L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) 72. The word הוּא either can be a 3ms personal pronoun, or a 3ms demonstrative pronoun. The context here warrants a demonstrative use, with הוּא functioning substantively (for Nimrod).

<sup>14</sup> Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* 61.

for its meaning is quite varied. Moreover, no option perfectly suits how it fits within the clause syntactically. Gary Long lists, “let be profaned, begin, make invalid” as the viable options for the *hiphil* stem of this verb.<sup>15</sup> Van der Veen translates the verb, “became,” but this meaning is not an established or accepted rendering for חלל, though his translation is found in the NASB and NASU. This translation would be suited better for היה (“be, become”), which is used in the subsequent infinitive construct לְהִיָּת (“in order to become”) and as a verb in Gen 10:9, where van der Veen’s translation fits perfectly (“he *became* a powerful conqueror”).

Levin opts for translating as follows: “he *began* to be a mighty man on earth,”<sup>16</sup> which follows the KJV and the NKJV for the rendering of the verb. While this translation is acceptable for the *hiphil*’s range of meaning, it does not suit the context, because an infinitive construct with a ל־prefix, denoting purpose or result, immediately follows the main verb.<sup>17</sup> This would leave the translation, “he began in order to be ...,” which is somewhat nonsensical, as there is no indication of what Nimrod had begun. Certainly “began” is not the ideal option when looking for a translation that suits the syntactical context, let alone the authorial intent.

A better option is found in Long’s “let be profaned” translation, as he went on to stress the concept of a division between the holy and the profane that was perceived within the OT world. The concept of “profane” in the OT often has a moral significance, as a person can offend or insult, especially when the object of the profaning is the name of Yahweh or that which is holy to him.<sup>18</sup> In light of this, and the context that follows, the best understanding of the verb חלל in Gen 10:8b is “profaned.” Due to the vagueness of this word, however, probably the best alternative for rendering the verb into English is, “acted irreverently.”

c. לְהִיָּת (“in order to become”) in Gen 10:8b. As mentioned above, לְהִיָּת is an infinitive construct with a ל־prefix, which in this case was attached to denote purpose. The reason that Nimrod acted irreverently, or profaned, is because he set out to become powerful on the earth. Most English translations and translators, however, fail to render the ל־prefix and its denotation of purpose here, including the following: the KJV/NKJV (“to be”), the NIV/Livingston (“grew to be”), the NASB/NASU (“became”), and the NRSV/Levin/van der Veen and Zerbst/van der Toorn and van der Horst (“was”).<sup>19</sup> These translations lack precision in their rendering.

d. גִּבּוֹר...גִּבּוֹר (“powerful...powerful”) in Gen 10:8b, 9. The adjective גִּבּוֹר (“mighty, powerful, brave, valiant”; substantive: “hero, despot”) presents a great deal of variety in its meaning.<sup>20</sup> The root word emphasizes power and strength, and often excellence or superiority as well, while the adjectival form is used of an individual

<sup>15</sup> Gary Alan Long, “חלל,” in *NIDOTTE* 2:145.

<sup>16</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 351.

<sup>17</sup> Pratico and Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* 241.

<sup>18</sup> Long, “חלל,” in *NIDOTTE* 2:146.

<sup>19</sup> Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?” 67; Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 351; van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 32; van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 1.

<sup>20</sup> Robin Wakely, “גבר,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:806–16.

who possesses the kind of power that surpasses ordinary strength, or accomplishes a great feat.<sup>21</sup> The most common OT use of the word is in texts dealing with military personnel, such as the elite, royal bodyguard of the Judahite king (1 Kgs 1:8, 10). They were the strong and courageous fighters who lived in the “house of the heroes” (Neh 3:16). In this vein, van der Toorn and van der Horst project Nimrod as “the first on earth to be a hero,” choosing to translate the adjective substantivally.<sup>22</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, who agree with this analysis, refer to Nimrod as a great hunter.<sup>23</sup> Yet no positive connotation is warranted here.

Actually, not every גִּבּוֹר is a good hero. The sons of God (Gen 6:4) also were powerful, but they were fallen evil angels who had incorporated human flesh in order to corrupt the purely human line that was to extend from Adam to Jesus and give mankind the hope of redemption, as promised by God (Gen 3:15). Their angelic origin made these sons of God “powerful ones” on the earth, yet their power was not devoted to justice and righteousness, but to subversion and self-will. For this reason, after Jesus’ physical death on the cross, he proclaimed to these imprisoned evil spirits of Noah’s day that he had conquered sin’s grip and overcame their plot to corrupt the Messianic line (1 Pet 3:19–20). In the same way, as will be seen, Nimrod’s power was rooted in violent, tyrannical rule.<sup>24</sup> The vast majority of translations (KJV, NASB, NASU, NIV, NRSV, etc.) and translators render this adjective “mighty.”<sup>25</sup> Yet since this word carries with it a positive connotation, and since Moses communicates *nothing* positive about Nimrod’s character, “powerful” is a better translation.

e. צֵדָה (“slaughterer”) in Gen 10:9. The nominal form צֵדָה (“[edible] provision, food supply, hunter, [animal] slaughterer”) provides another challenge for the exegete attempting to understand the Nimrod pericope accurately. Most basically, צֵדָה refers to that which is eaten, whether grain/bread, fruit, vegetables, food-offerings, or travel-rations.<sup>26</sup> However, given that “powerful foodstuff” is not a viable option for Moses to state that which Nimrod became, another option must be considered.

The same noun appears in Gen 25:28, where Moses notes that Esau had a taste for game, the food that is provided via the hunt. This passage most likely has drawn interpreters and translators *en masse* to render צֵדָה as “hunter” in Gen 10:9, since this rendering is found virtually across the board in the standard translations (KJV, NASB, NASU, NIV, NRSV, etc.).<sup>27</sup> Scholars who attempt to identify Nim-

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 1:806, 811.

<sup>22</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 1. Van der Veen and Zerbst opted for rendering גִּבּוֹר as “the first potentate” (“Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 32), but there is no such word for “first” in the original language, and “potentate” seems to be a term that—while capturing the overall character and leadership style of the man—goes beyond the description that Moses offers here.

<sup>23</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 33.

<sup>24</sup> Wakely, “גִּבּוֹר,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:811.

<sup>25</sup> Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?” 67; Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 351.

<sup>26</sup> Robert H. O’Connell, “צֵדָה,” in *NIDOTTE* 3:799–800.

<sup>27</sup> This claim should not be disputed, because as far back as the *Midrash Rabbah* there were parallels drawn between Esau and Nimrod (*Gen. Rab.* 37:2–3; 63:13).

rod also seem to support “hunter” almost unanimously.<sup>28</sup> The notion of Nimrod as a mighty hunter is extremely attractive to ANE scholars. “The militant hero of ancient times was usually a hunter; the chase of the lion or of the wild ox or of the boar was the next best excitement to war.”<sup>29</sup> The western Levantine kings especially were interested in hunting lions.<sup>30</sup> The amount of resistance to the “hunter” rendering, and number of alternatives offered, is extremely limited.

The context, however, does not favor the use of “hunter” here at all. This notion appears completely out of context in the Nimrod pericope. In Gen 10:8, the text describes how Nimrod had become a powerful man on earth, and in Gen 10:10 it reveals the impressive list of city-states that he subjugated during his conquests. It would be incomprehensible for Moses to sandwich a casual detail, such as Nimrod’s being a mere hunter of animals in his spare time, between two headlines that distinguish Nimrod as virtually unique in human history, at least up until that point in time, as well as uniquely sinister. A better translation than “hunter” must be sought.

Thankfully, a viable option is presented with the help of a foreign cognate of the Hebrew verb **ציד**, the Ugaritic word *dbh* (“slaughter, sacrifice”). The Hebrew noun **ציד** finds a cognate with the Punic construct *zbh syd* (“sacrifice of slaughtering”).<sup>31</sup> Thus the ANE concept of this word either can focus on the food offered as a sacrifice, or on the slaughtering of the—most conceivably—animal that is offered as a sacrifice. This means that the nominal form of this ANE word can refer to the person performing the slaughtering, who acts as a slaughterer of living creatures. Therefore, given that the context of Gen 10:9 rules out “hunter” as a plausible translation, and that the use of **גבור** to describe Nimrod probably connotes violent, tyrannical power,<sup>32</sup> the best translation seems to be “slaughterer,” making him one who powerfully slaughtered a plethora of living humans.

3. *Nimrod’s exceptional exploits (Gen 10:10–12)*. Having completed his discussion of Nimrod’s character, Moses turns his attention to Nimrod’s exploits. The majority of the narrative of Nimrod’s biography describes his feats and accomplishments. While this demonstrates Moses’ intent for his readers to direct the majority of their attention to his exploits, the connection between the character of the man and the deeds of the man should not be downplayed. Moreover, the consistency between them should make any reader conclude that the true nature of Nimrod’s character, interpreted already to be a devious one, is determined by the nature of his deeds. In other words, Nimrod’s exploits were neither heroic nor entrepreneurial, but defiant and dastardly.

<sup>28</sup>Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?” 67; Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 351; van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 32; van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 1; Robert Preus, “Notes on the Inerrancy of Scripture,” *JETS* 8 (1965) 131.

<sup>29</sup>E. G. H. Kraeling, “The Origin and Real Name of Nimrod,” *AJSL* 38 (1922) 216.

<sup>30</sup>Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 363.

<sup>31</sup>O’Connell, “ציד,” in *NIDOTTE* 3:799.

<sup>32</sup>Wakely, “גבור,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:810.

a. **רֵאשִׁית** (“*starting-point*”) in *Gen 10:10*. The translation and syntactical use of the noun **רֵאשִׁית** (“beginning, starting point, first [fruits]”) is fairly simple, especially in *Gen 10:10*.<sup>33</sup> Moses informs his readers that Nimrod’s kingdom has a starting-point, a place of origin. This does not mean that Nimrod hails from any of these places on the list, not even the first site mentioned, but merely that his kingdom finds its origin in them. The reason for the lack of a definite article prefixed to the noun is that nouns in construct cannot take a definite article.<sup>34</sup> The sites about to be named are *the* starting point for Nimrod’s kingdom, despite the anarthrous noun.

b. **מִמְלַכְתּוֹ** (“*of his kingdom*”) in *Gen 10:10*. The prepositional phrase **מִמְלַכְתּוֹ** answers the question of what starting point is being identified for Nimrod. The verbal nominative **מִמְלַכְתּוֹ** (“kingdom, dominion”) refers to the institution or the functional system of *mlk*-rule, or rule by a/the king.<sup>35</sup> Thus by definition of **מִמְלַכְתּוֹ**, and according to all of the areas about to be defined as a part of Nimrod’s kingdom, this descendant of Cush became a king with a vast dominion.<sup>36</sup> Whoever Nimrod was, he must have been a king, and one with a vast kingdom.

c. **בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר** (“*in the land of Sumer*”) in *Gen 10:10*. The prepositional phrase **בְּאֶרֶץ שִׁנְעָר** (“in the land of Sumer”) technically belongs at the end of the clause in *Gen 10:10*. For logical reasons and clarity’s sake, however, it will be treated here. This qualification both serves as the overall sphere that is defined as the starting point of Nimrod’s kingdom and defines the boundaries within which all of the “starting point” cities are located. Therefore, Eridu, Uruk, Akkad, and possibly Calneh are all located within the land of Shinar. Moses contrasts the land of Shinar, often referred to as the plain of Shinar, with Assyria in *Gen 10:11*.<sup>37</sup> Thus there are two distinct geographical regions that comprise Nimrod’s kingdom, with the first defined as the land of Shinar.

The next matter to solve is the identification and extent of the land of Shinar. The cities listed here in *Gen 10:10* provide the Bible’s best picture of the land of Shinar, as it includes Eridu, Uruk, and Akkad. As van der Veen states, biblical Shinar is to be equated with ancient Sumer.<sup>38</sup> Technically, Eridu and Uruk originally were part of southern Sumer in the 3d millennium BC, while Akkad was the capital of the land of Akkad. Eridu and Uruk were located in southern Mesopotamia, but to date Akkad has not been located. Since the present writer does not equate the Babel of Nimrod and the tower of Babel with later Babylon, it is worth noting that Daniel mentions Nebuchadnezzar’s removal of the Temple’s vessels to his god’s

<sup>33</sup> Bill T. Arnold, “רֵאשִׁית,” in *NIDOTTE* 3:1025.

<sup>34</sup> Seow, *Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* 71.

<sup>35</sup> Philip J. Nel, “מִלְכָּה,” in *NIDOTTE* 2:957.

<sup>36</sup> Leroy Birney, “An Exegetical Study of *Gen 6:1–4*,” *JETS* 13 (1965) 51.

<sup>37</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

<sup>38</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 35. For a discussion of the possible derivation of Hebrew **שִׁנְעָר** (“Shinar”) from Akkadian *Šumer*, and the role that may be played in this by the Egyptian equivalent *Sngr*, see van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 3–4. Gardiner states that Egyptian *Sngr* is a kingdom or principality of great importance that only can be Babylonia itself (Alan H. Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica* [London: Oxford University Press, 1947] 209).

temple in the land of Shinar (Dan 1:2), meaning that the Babylon of the Neo-Babylonian Empire was included in Shinar. Thus Shinar can be referred to as southern Mesopotamia/Babylonia,<sup>39</sup> with Babylon—in central Babylonia—acting as a northern extremity of sorts. Sumer and Akkad essentially were united under the Akkadians, which often was the case continuing into the 2d millennium BC, thus leaving Moses and Daniel to consider the entire land to be Sumer.

d. **בְּבֶלְתֵּי** (“Eridu”) in Gen 10:10. With the employment of the proper noun **בְּבֶלְתֵּי** (“Babel, Eridu”), Moses begins the listing of toponyms that will comprise a number of the more outstanding cities of Nimrod’s kingdom, though there is no reason whatsoever to believe that this list is comprehensive. The general designation of cities goes from a southerly to a northerly direction, beginning in southernmost Sumer. Scant few kings of the ancient world ruled kingdoms that encompassed all of southern Babylonia, let alone extended far into Assyria. For that reason alone, the kingdom controlled by Nimrod was a vast and impressive one, and it began with **בְּבֶלְתֵּי**.

Most scholars uncritically associate the **בְּבֶלְתֵּי** of Gen 10:10 with the Babylon of the Old Babylonian Period (c. 2000–1595 BC) and the Neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 638–539 BC).<sup>40</sup> Historical sources suggest that Babylon began as a small town that sprang up only during the Jemdet Nasr Period, and later served as a provincial capital during the Ur III Dynasty (c. 2111–2004 BC),<sup>41</sup> but there are conflicting opinions as to whether the city was described as having been built up at the time of Sargon of Akkad (c. 2320–2265 BC). However, archeology offers no evidence whatsoever at Babylon of any occupation there as early as the 23rd or 24th century BC, when Nimrod would have sat on his throne, not to mention the much earlier time of the tower of Babel. Even surface surveys at unexcavated sites invariably yield pottery from all periods of occupation, so this is no insignificant reason to question the equation of Nimrod’s Babel with Babylon.

Even if Babylon was occupied during the time of Sargon of Akkad, undoubtedly it existed only as an insignificant site at the outset of his kingdom that sprang up in southern Sumer. Since the **בְּבֶלְתֵּי** of Gen 10:10 is designated as being located in the land of Sumer, and since the **בְּבֶלְתֵּי** of the days of the tower of Babel is described as having been built in “a valley in the land of Sumer” (Gen 11:2),<sup>42</sup> this probably is one and the same city. The story of the tower of Babel describes the early part of this city’s occupational history, so undoubtedly Nimrod reigned over the city in a later historical era. Thus since the Babel of Genesis 10 likely is the Babel of Genesis 11, Nimrod’s Babel probably was in existence as early as the time of the tower’s use, pre-dispersion. All of this virtually eliminates Babylon from being Nimrod’s Babel.

Another major weakness in this equation is Moses’ listing of toponyms. It would be highly awkward and unlikely that he would present these toponyms haphazardly, such as choosing his first site in central Mesopotamia (Babylon), followed

<sup>39</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

<sup>40</sup> D. J. Wiseman, “Babylon,” in *NIDOTTE* 4:430; Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

<sup>41</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 192.

<sup>42</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

by several sites down in southern Mesopotamia (near the Persian gulf), then proceed northward again—“passing back through” Babylon along the way—into Northern Mesopotamia (Assyria) to conclude his listing of toponyms. Moses demonstrated precise northerly order in first grouping and naming sites in southern Mesopotamia (Sumer), then grouping and naming sites in northern Mesopotamia (Assyria). He similarly displayed order and precision by plotting sites in consecutive order—compass point by compass point, and site by site—when outlining the borders of the Promised Land: western border (Num 34:6), northern border (Num 34:7–9), eastern border (Num 34:10–12), and southern border (Num 34:3–5).<sup>43</sup>

One hardly can be expected to believe that Moses used such imprecision and such an erratic approach when listing toponyms in the Nimrod pericope. If, however, the  $\text{בְּבֵל}$  of Nimrod’s day—and thus that of the tower of Babel’s day—were located at Eridu, then Moses’ precision would be preserved. The case for locating the original  $\text{בְּבֵל}$  at Eridu requires a comprehensive and detailed set of arguments, and certainly the present writing is not the place to attempt it. However, the case for equating the Babel of Genesis 11 with Eridu is made elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> Eridu, the southernmost of the ancient seats of power in Sumer, is located just to the southwest of Ur, and to a slightly greater distance to the southeast of Uruk. The earliest occupation at Eridu dates to the Ubaid 1 Period, and the site was occupied continuously until the final phase of the Uruk Period.

e.  $\text{אֱרֻד}$  (“and Uruk”) in *Gen 10:10*. The second Sumerian city listed as part of Nimrod’s kingdom is  $\text{אֱרֻד}$  (“Uruk”), which is written as *Erech* in Hebrew. Only here and in Ezra 4:9 is this toponym used. Undoubtedly, this citation refers to the well-known city of Uruk.<sup>45</sup> The ancient site of Uruk, known today as Warka, was occupied from early in the Ubaid Period until the 3rd century AD. In the Late Uruk Period, the site was the most important city in Mesopotamia and included two major religious centers. The earliest evidence of writing was discovered in Uruk’s Eanna temple. During the Early Dynastic I Period, the city covered 400 hectares and was surrounded by a city wall, and afterward it remained an important religious center.<sup>46</sup>

f.  $\text{אֶקְדָּת}$  (“and Akkad”) in *Gen 10:10*. The third Sumerian toponym listed by Moses is  $\text{אֶקְדָּת}$  (“Akkad”), which can be associated securely with the central Mesopotamian city of Akkad, the capital of the Akkadian Empire (c. 2320–2121 BC). Yet Akkad still remains unidentified and archaeologically unexplored, and current political instabilities in the region do not make it likely that Akkad will be discovered in the near future. Some consider that Akkad and Babylon might be one and the same

<sup>43</sup> Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 8–13.

<sup>44</sup> Petrovich, “Identifying the Tower of Babel” (forthcoming).

<sup>45</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 353; van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 35.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (Oxfordshire: Andromeda Oxford Ltd., 1990) 60.

site.<sup>47</sup> The majority of what is known about the city comes from works of art of diverse provenance that were uprooted from their original context at Akkad.<sup>48</sup>

g. *וְכַלְנֵה* (“and Calneh”) in *Gen 10:10*. The MT’s rendering of *כַּלְנֵה* (“Calneh”), if read as such, presents a complicated dilemma. There is no such site near or presumably north of Akkad—if assuming a continuation of Moses’ orderly south-to-north orientation—that lies within the land of Sumer or Akkad. A tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud, found in *Yoma* 10a, identifies Calneh with “Nopher Ninphi,” which is thought to be a reference to Nippur.<sup>49</sup> However, even if this attribution is correct, once again Moses would be guilty of a disorderly arrangement of his toponyms. Southern Mesopotamia is divided into two regions: Sumer in the south and Akkad in the north. Sumer extended from Eridu to Nippur, while Akkad extended from Abu Salabikh to the northern edge of the alluvial plains.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, if Calneh is equated with Nippur, the list of toponyms would vacillate in its direction: from Eridu in the extreme south, northward to Uruk, northward to Akkad, southward to Nippur, then northward again into Assyria.

Unless one were to accept the inferred attribution in the Talmud and Moses’ disorderliness, the only two options that remain are (1) that Calneh mysteriously remains unattributable but is located somewhere to the north of Akkad; or (2) that the Hebrew text read in the MT is not how the text originally was intended to be read. The former option would require a willful suspension of disbelief, since “[t]here is scarcely room for a freak such as Calneh in such company as Babylon [שׁוּר], Uruk and Akkad.”<sup>51</sup> The latter option would *not* require an emendation of the inspired text, but only a rearranging of the non-inspired vowel pointings.

h. *{וְכַלְנֵה}* (“and all of them”) in *Gen 10:10*. If the reading in the MT is not pointed correctly, the text probably read *וְכַלְנֵה* (“and all of them”) originally. Albright first suggested the emendation of the vocalization of the inspired consonantal structure *וּכְלָנָה* from *weCalneh* to *wekullana*.<sup>52</sup> A near-match with this variant vocalization is found in 1 Kgs 7:37 (*כְּלָנָה*), with the only difference being a *qāmēš-hē* used here instead of the *qāmēš* found in *Gen 10:10*. This suggestion has become so attractive to many that they consider it to be the standard translation (e.g. NRSV).<sup>53</sup> If Albright’s emendation is correct, then there is implied predication between “all of them” and “in the land of Shinar.” In this case, “were” or “being” would need to be supplied.

Another compelling reason to accept this reading over the “Calneh” reading is related to geography and the canon of textual criticism known as, “Choose the reading that best explains the rise of the other variant(s).” There are two clear references to Calneh in the OT: (1) In *Amos 6:2*, the prophet asks the Judahites and

<sup>47</sup> Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (2d ed.; New York: Penguin, 1980) 416.

<sup>48</sup> Mario Liverani, “Akkad: An Introduction,” in *Akkad: The First World Empire* (ed. Mario Liverani; Padova: Sargon srl, 1993) 6.

<sup>49</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

<sup>50</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 82.

<sup>51</sup> E. A. Speiser, “In Search of Nimrod,” *ErIsr* 5 (1958) 33.

<sup>52</sup> W. F. Albright, “The End of ‘Calneh in Shinar,’” *JNES* 3 (1944) 254–55.

<sup>53</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 353.

Israelites who feel secure to go over to the cities of Calneh, Hamath, and Gath, in order to see the misfortune that befell those kingdoms at the hands of the Assyrians. Amos served in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793/2–753 BC), and his ministry dates to about 760 BC. The rise to power of Adad-narari III (810–783 BC) in Assyria marked a return of Assyrian intervention in the western Levant. The king of Arpad led an alliance in 805/804 BC, which likely included the kingdom of Patina/Unqi, whose capital was located in the Amuq Plain and called Kunulua.<sup>54</sup> This capital city had a variant spelling used by the Neo-Assyrians, which was *Kullania*, whose tri-consonantal root was replicated by Amos as “CaLNeh.”<sup>55</sup> Yet this Calneh is located in western Syria.

(2) In Isa 10:9, the prophet Isaiah asks rhetorically if Calno (= Calneh) is not like Carchemish, if Hamath is not like Arpad, and if Samaria is not like Damascus. Isaiah served in Judah from the reign of Uzziah (791/0–740/39 BC) until sometime during the reign of Manasseh (697/6–643/2 BC), and thus from c. 745–695 BC. A boundary stele along the Orontes River (southwest of Antioch) hints at a decisive downturn in the political fortunes of the kingdom of Patina/Unqi, and thus Kunulua/Calneh. The inscription describes the transfer of the lands and settlements of an unknown city to Atarshumki of Arpad, apparently at the expense of Zakkur of Hamath, and the realignment of the border between the two kingdoms to the Orontes River, likely the result of action taken during the Assyrian campaign of 796 BC and associated with the events recorded on the Aramaic stele of Zakkur, found at Tell Afis. In the inscription, Zakkur accused Bar-Hadad of Damascus of having induced a coalition of northern kingdoms, including that of Unqi, to attack Hamath and its ruler, Lu’ash.<sup>56</sup>

These biblical references to the city of Calneh all refer to the capital city of a kingdom that undeniably was located in the Amuq Plain of western Syria, as confirmed by the detailed records of Assyrian kings in their conquest lists. Since this city is located far from Mesopotamia and the cities of Sumer that Moses listed, most likely a later scribe who recollected the Calneh of Amos’s and Isaiah’s texts aligned the vowel pointings in Gen 10:10 with those for Calneh, in order to fix the “mistake” that he found in the text of Genesis 10. But since the original vowel pointings undoubtedly were added many centuries after Moses’ original composition, perhaps the memory of the correct reading in Gen 10:10 simply was lost to these later scribes. In any event, the reading of “Calneh” in Gen 10:10 almost certainly is spurious, and Albright’s correction should be followed.

i. **מִן־הָאֲרֶץ הַהִוא** (“from that land”) in Gen 10:11. Genesis 10:11 begins with the transitional statement that Nimrod proceeded **מִן־הָאֲרֶץ הַהִוא** (“from that land”), which obviously implies that he entered into a land outside the confines of the land

<sup>54</sup> Timothy P. Harrison, “Tell Ta’yinat and the Kingdom of Unqi,” in *The World of the Arameans II: Studies in History and Archaeology in Honour of Paul-Engène Dion* 3 (JSOT 325; ed. P. M. M. Daviau, J. W. Wevers, and M. Weigl; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 119.

<sup>55</sup> Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2006) 193.

<sup>56</sup> Harrison, “Tell Ta’yinat” 119–20.

of Sumer. With this statement, the author delineates the existence of two separate regions that comprise the kingdom of Nimrod. Moses does not indicate the direction in which Nimrod traveled to reach the new region of his kingdom, but the previous context clearly suggests that the movement was to the north, and the subsequent context confirms that this indeed is the case.

j. **אֲשׁוּר** (“Assyria”) in *Gen 10:11*. The text now specifies that Nimrod’s kingdom continued to the north, by adding that he went out into **אֲשׁוּר** (“Assyria”), although there is neither a preposition (**כִּי** or **אֶל**) for “into,” nor a directional-**ה** at the end of “Assyria,” as is normally the case when a preposition is absent and movement is made toward/into a place (cf. **מִצְרַיִם** “[into] Egypt” in *Gen 12:14*). This unusual case leaves the grammar to suggest that **אֲשׁוּר** is the subject of the sentence, and thus “Asshur went out” and built up the cities of Assyria. Since Asshur is the son of Shem (*Gen 10:22*) and seemingly attributed with being the originator of Assyria, some may suggest that the presence of Asshur in *Gen 10:11* is the result of an intentional scribal error designed to “correct” the text, as otherwise Nimrod may “wrongfully” be credited as the architect of Assyria.

However, given that there is no textual evidence supporting a reading of “Nimrod” for “Assyria/Asshur” here, there is no solid ground on which to build a case for taking “Nimrod” to be the proper reading. This leaves the association of the proper noun **אֲשׁוּר** with Assyria as the best option, since the biblical text is replete with references that geographically pinpoint this place as ancient Assyria (*2 Kgs 15:29; 17:3; 19:35; 23:29; etc.*), especially due to the Neo-Assyrian Empire’s (934–612 BC) conquest of Israel (723 BC) and attack on Judah (701 BC).<sup>57</sup> The only question that exists is whether this particular reference is to Assyria as a region, or the individual city of Ashur. While both options are possible, syntax favors the former as being more plausible here.

Ashur, for which the region of Assyria is named, was situated on a rocky spur overlooking the Tigris River. The site, now known as Qalat Shergat, was occupied since at least 2400 BC, with Early Dynastic styles found in the Ishtar temple, thus meaning that the site predated the arrival of Sargon of Akkad into Assyria. In the early second millennium BC, merchants from Ashur established colonies in Anatolia (Asia Minor). During the Middle Assyrian Period (c. 1300–900 BC), Assyria expanded under Ashur-uballit I (c. 1363–1328 BC), and Ashur became the capital of a kingdom that stretched from the Euphrates River to the mountains of Iran.<sup>58</sup>

Given that Ashur overlooked an important crossing of the Euphrates, sat on the edge of the dry-farming line, and lay on a vitally important and ancient trading

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<sup>57</sup> The northern kingdom of Israel must have fallen to Shalmaneser V in 723 BC, since Samaria was captured before Tishri 1 of 723 Nisan (Rodger C. Young, “When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for Precision in Biblical Chronologies,” *JETS* 47 [2004] 581, 583). Some scholars still hold to 722 or 721 BC for the fall of Samaria, but no campaign in the Levant during those years is recorded in the Assyrian records (Hayim Tadmor, “The Campaigns of Sargon II of Assur: A Chronological-Historical Study,” *JCS* 12 [1958] 38). The Assyrian invasion of Judah and besieging of Jerusalem by Sennacherib occurred during the summer of 701 BC, in Year 14 of Hezekiah (*ANET* 287; more recently, Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* [Saint Louis: Concordia, 2011] 156).

<sup>58</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 148.

route, this site acted as the gateway in and out of Assyria. For all of these reasons, the city was always vulnerable to incursions from pastoral nomads living in the steppe.<sup>59</sup> The possibility thus exists that Moses' reference to אשור was not a regional designation, but the citing of the name of the strategic city of the same name, which granted access to Assyria's heartland. Yet in the end, assuming that אשור is not the subject of the clause, the region of Assyria is the most secure option to favor.

k. וַיִּבְנֶה (“and [he] built up”) in *Gen 10:11*. The Hebrew verb בנה (“build, rebuild, fortify”) is used of building cities, walls and gates, altars and high places, and houses. While this verb obviously can be used of the building of a city on virgin soil, it also can be used of rebuilding a city, such as Gezer (1 Kgs 9:17), Jericho (1 Kgs 16:34), and the cities of Benjamin (Judg 21:23).<sup>60</sup> Gezer provides a perfect example of such rebuilding of a previously inhabited city, because the Bible itself attests to its occupation before Solomon rebuilt it (1 Kgs 9:16).<sup>61</sup> Many translations reflect Solomon's rebuilding of Gezer by rendering the verb, “rebuild” (NASB, NASU, NIV, NRSV), though other translations prefer to use the less specific form, “built” (KJV, NKJV).

This range of meaning for the verb בנה, which includes the rebuilding of previously inhabited cities, helps the reader to understand better what Nimrod actually accomplished when he left his native land of Sumer, in southern and central Mesopotamia, and ventured into Assyria. Undoubtedly he did not travel there to found new cities on virgin soil in order to assist the native Assyrians in improving their economy, or to facilitate their cities' plans for civic improvement. Instead, Nimrod came to conquer, sparing the cities—whenever possible—that he overtook, building them up to more impressive sizes, and incorporating them into his empire. The building up of these cities would have helped to fuel the engine of the empire, in order to accelerate its potential for expansion to even more distant places. Archaeology bears out this model, as will be seen.

l. אַתְנִיבָה (“Nineveh”) in *Gen 10:11*. The toponym אַתְנִיבָה (“Nineveh”), which features a prefix with a direct object marker, is the first Assyrian city named as part of Nimrod's northern holdings that he rebuilt. There is no reason, exegetically or archaeologically, to believe that this is not the same site to which God sent Jonah in order to proclaim repentance to Nineveh's inhabitants (Jonah 1:1) during Neo-Assyrian times. Nineveh was occupied as early as the Hassuna Period, which predates the tower of Babel, so certainly this is reason enough to conclude that Nim-

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>60</sup> David M. Fouts, “בנה,” in *NIDOTTE* 1:678.

<sup>61</sup> Gezer was occupied long before Solomon: during the Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Iron I Ages. The Philistines occupied the city during the Iron I Age, as seen in Strata XIII to XI. A post-Philistine occupation occurred in Strata X and IX, the latter of which stratum's city was captured by Pharaoh Siamun and burned with fire as the Bible describes (William G. Dever, “Gezer,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* [Jerusalem: IES & Carta, 1993] 2.498–505; K. Lawson Younger Jr., “The Rhetorical Structuring of the Joshua Conquest Narratives,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* [ed. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008] 22).

rod did not build the city on virgin soil. An amazing total of 75% of the mound consists of prehistoric (i.e. before the advent of writing) remains, and during the Uruk Period its development was closely related to that of southern Mesopotamia.<sup>62</sup>

In the second millennium BC, Nineveh was an important city with a prestigious temple to the goddess Ishtar, but it was not the capital of Assyria. The city reached its peak during the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Jonah would have visited Nineveh around 780 BC (2 Kgs 14:25), given that he ministered under the reign of Israel's Jeroboam II (c. 793–753 BC). Sennacherib (704–681 BC) rebuilt Nineveh as his capital and constructed a new city wall, complete with 15 major gates.<sup>63</sup> The remains of this wall that survived allow for a measurement of its circumference today, which calculates to almost 13 km, making for an occupational area with the potential for more than 7 km<sup>2</sup>. Sennacherib's principal palace, the "Palace without Rival," was pillaged and burned when Nineveh fell to a coalition of the Medes and Babylonians, in 612 BC.<sup>64</sup>

m. *וְאַתְרַחְבֵּת עִיר* ("and Rehoboth City") in *Gen 10:11*. The second Assyrian city of Nimrod's kingdom, *וְאַתְרַחְבֵּת עִיר* ("Rehoboth City"), is another toponym that presents difficulties. There is no such site of this name known to be located in ancient Assyria, or in the cuneiform record.<sup>65</sup> Since the Hebrew direct object marker can be translated "with," some suggest that a literal translation of "with open places of the city" would solve the dilemma.<sup>66</sup> These public places would refer to various districts throughout the city that would have been built up within Nineveh. While this option seems attractive, its most serious detriment is that this site appears in a sequence of toponyms, all of which are introduced by the direct object marker (*וְאַתְרַחְבֵּת*).<sup>67</sup> The best option is to consider Rehoboth City as a site that simply has not been preserved or discovered as of yet.

n. *וְאַתְרַחְבֵּת... הַגְּדֹלָה הַעִיר הַזֹּאת הַזֵּה הַגְּדֹלָה* ("and Kalhu ... Kalhu, which is the great city") in *Gen 10:11, 12*. The third Assyrian site is *קָלְחָה* ("Kalhu"), usually found as "Calah" in English translations, which is merely a literal transliteration of the Hebrew toponym. Calah easily is identified with the prominent Assyrian city of Kalhu.<sup>68</sup> The earliest evidence of occupation at Kalhu is from the Jemdet Nasr Period, which is equivalent to the start of the Early Bronze Age in the Levant.<sup>69</sup> Conventional da-

<sup>62</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 186.

<sup>63</sup> H. W. Saggs, *The Might that Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984) 99.

<sup>64</sup> John Malcolm Russell, "Sennacherib's Palace without Rival Revisited: Excavations at Nineveh and in the British Museum Archives," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997) 78–79.

<sup>65</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible" 4.

<sup>66</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, "Nimrod the Mighty Hunter" 35.

<sup>67</sup> Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 452.

<sup>68</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, "Nimrod the Mighty Hunter" 35; van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible" 4; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* 451.

<sup>69</sup> The evidence exists in the form of Ninevite 5 pottery and flint arrows from the southeastern corner of the citadel (William W. Hallo, review of *Nimrod and Its Remains*, by M. E. L. Mallowan, *JAOs* 88 [1968] 773).

ting for this is c. 3000 BC, based on <sup>14</sup>C dating.<sup>70</sup> However, there is reason to date the physical evidence and the period more recently than this.<sup>71</sup> Of greatest importance is that the Jemdet Nasr Period predates both the Early Dynastic Period and the Akkadian Period, and thus the city was inhabited before Sargon of Akkad ever lived.

Some material from the Old Assyrian Period of the 18th century BC was found at Kalhu, including the tomb of a chieftain located in the southeastern corner of the acropolis.<sup>72</sup> Kalhu was a provincial capital during the Middle Assyrian Period, but its relative obscurity soon ended. In the Neo-Assyrian Period, the capital of Ashur had become too small for Assyria's enormous administrative apparatus, so Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) chose Kalhu as the new capital of the empire. It remained the capital until Sargon II (722–705 BC) selected Khorsabad (Dur-Sharrukin) to succeed it in 717 BC, where he built a large palace and temples, constructed massive city walls, and dug a canal to irrigate the region and provide water for the inhabitants.<sup>73</sup>

In Gen 10:12, the text adds the parenthetical remark that *קָלְחָהּ* is “the great city.”<sup>74</sup> The excavation of the site, the cuneiform record, and the historical annals from surrounding nations seem to dispute the possibility that Kalhu was a great city either at the time of Sargon of Akkad, or in Moses' day. Therefore, there is a legitimate possibility that this parenthetical statement was inserted by a later, scribal

<sup>70</sup> The date of 3100–2550 BC was reached by the radiocarbon dating of organic materials from the same cultural horizon and occupational level as the Ninevite 5 pottery at sites in the Khabor drainage, near the Euphrates (Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Glenn M. Schwartz, *The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies* (ca. 16,000–300 BC) [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003] 211–13).

<sup>71</sup> Bietak has demonstrated that a chronological discrepancy related to <sup>14</sup>C dating exists at Avaris (Egypt), and possibly throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, which became apparent when he found a conflict between <sup>14</sup>C data and the historical chronology of the material culture of Egypt's 18th Dynasty. The <sup>14</sup>C chronology and historical chronology of the 15th century BC are in conflict due to a sharp rise in calibrated radiocarbon dates, which are offset up to 100 to 150 years beginning at that time. Perhaps this indicates a systemic failure in the Mediterranean's <sup>14</sup>C evaluation, or that maybe the absorption of <sup>14</sup>C was different—for environmental reasons—in the 15th century BC and before (Manfred Bietak and Felix Höflmayer, “Introduction: High and Low Chronology,” in *The Synchronisation of Civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Second Millennium B.C. III: Proceedings of the SCIEEM 2000—2nd Euro-Conference: Vienna, 28<sup>th</sup> of May—1<sup>st</sup> of June 2003*) [ed. Manfred Bietak and Ernst Czerny; Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007] 20).

<sup>72</sup> Hallo, review of *Nimrod and Its Remains 773*; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000–330 BC*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1995) 362.

<sup>73</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 162; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000–323* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 233.

<sup>74</sup> According to Levin, the syntax indicates that Resen is meant as the referent of the great city (Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352). However, this is not the case, given the lack of a relative pronoun after Resen. In light of this, no non-restrictive relationship exists between Resen and “between Nineveh and Kalhu.” Moreover, a relative pronoun does stand between Kalhu and the great city, creating a non-restrictive relationship here. Thus “which is the great city” clearly modifies the nearest antecedent, which is Kalhu.

transmissionalist who did so under the inspiration of God. If this was the case, most likely the scribe lived in the 9th century BC or later.<sup>75</sup>

o. *וְאֵת־רֶסֶן* (“*and Resen*”) in *Gen 10:12*. The final city added to the list of Assyrian sites that were built up by Nimrod is רֶסֶן (“Resen”). Levin aptly stated that this city is totally unknown.<sup>76</sup> Van der Toorn expects that Rehoboth-City and Resen should refer to other great Neo-Assyrian centers, such as Khorsabad,<sup>77</sup> but the fatal flaw in his expectation is that Nimrod long predated the Neo-Assyrian Empire.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the only south-to-north movement (in Mesopotamia) of an empire-builder must be dated to the third millennium BC, as the second and first millennia BC featured no such candidates until the kings of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

The LXX reads “Dase(n)” here, which may be explained by a scribal error of sight, due to the similarity between *daleth* and *resh* in the Hebrew script. Van der Toorn suggests, however, that if Resen is a corruption of Desen, the possibility exists that the toponym refers to Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad), which became Sargon II’s capital in *c.* 717 BC.<sup>79</sup> Van der Toorn attempts to bolster this possibility by stating that Dur-Sharrukin rests halfway between Nineveh and Kalhu, but evidently the map he used was misleading, because Nineveh lies between Dur-Sharrukin (to the north) and Kalhu (to the south).<sup>80</sup> In the end, Van der Toorn wisely notes that the potential association between Dase(n) and Dur-Sharrukin is hardly more than a strained guess.<sup>81</sup> At present, the best option for Resen, or Dase(n) if the reading in the LXX is correct, is to declare its location to be unknown.

p. *בֵּין נִינְוֵה וּבֵין כַּלְחָה* (“*between Nineveh and Kalhu*”) in *Gen 10:12*. Wherever Resen is located, it must lie *בֵּין נִינְוֵה וּבֵין כַּלְחָה* “between Nineveh and Kalhu” (*Gen 10:12*). Both Nineveh and Kalhu are situated along the Tigris River, on its eastern bank, thus having allowed the river to act as a natural boundary against enemies attacking from Mesopotamia or the Euphrates region. Nineveh sits upstream from Kalhu by 40 km, as the crow flies. The only notable Assyrian site between these two important cities is Alu Ashuraya, which is located a few miles downstream from Nineveh,<sup>82</sup> but there is no other reason to connect it with Resen.

<sup>75</sup> For excellent examples of such inspired scribal updating or adding of parenthetical information to an inspired text written by an earlier biblical author, see Michael A. Grisanti, “Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture,” *JETS* 44 (2001) 582–90.

<sup>76</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 352.

<sup>77</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 5.

<sup>78</sup> When addressing the suggestion that perhaps Nimrod is Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC), a king during the Middle Assyrian Period, Mathews pointed out that the table of Genesis 10 as a whole reflects a much earlier period than the 13th century BC (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* 450). This criticism is only more applicable when considering facets of the later Neo-Assyrian Empire.

<sup>79</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 6.

<sup>80</sup> See the map in Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 185.

<sup>81</sup> Van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 6.

<sup>82</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 185.

## IV. THREE FLAWED OPTIONS FOR NIMROD'S IDENTITY

1. *Ninurta as Nimrod.* The first opinion on the identity of Nimrod is that he was Ninurta, the patron god of Lagash, whose name means God of War (*Nin Ur*). Ninurta, son of Enlil and Ninlil, was the Sumerian god of the south wind, and as such was the god of war, who destroys rebellious lands. The oldest myth in which Ninurta acts as a divine warrior is *LUGAL-E*, which describes Ninurta as a great and powerful warrior-king who vanquished the mighty monster in the mountains to the east of Mesopotamia. He also served as the great hunter, who was thought to protect the land from all forms of beasts and demons. Following the reign of Ashurnasirpal II, Ninurta was worshipped in Assyria as a principal deity, particularly in relation to his role as hunter and god of war. Due to these connections with Nimrod, his identity as Ninurta is seen to be “highly probable.”<sup>83</sup>

The first flaw of note regarding the theory that Nimrod is Ninurta relates to Nimrod's exploits. Nimrod was seen to possess a human kingdom, which Ninurta did not possess. Moreover, Nimrod's kingdom included specific cities that were maintained within it, but these were not cities that Ninurta ever controlled, even if there were cult centers to Ninurta in one or more of these cities over the course of history. The second flaw relates to Nimrod's genealogical background. According to Genesis 5 and Genesis 10, Nimrod was fully human, having derived ultimately from Adam, through Ham and Cush. Ninurta was a Sumerian and Akkadian deity. Thus while there are numerous general similarities between the two, Ninurta fails at more than one biographical requirement. Yet in order for a candidate to be a legitimate option, he must fulfill all of the requirements.

2. *Pharaoh Amenhotep III as Nimrod.* Kurt Sethe identified Nimrod with Pharaoh Amenhotep III (1408–1369 BC) of Egypt's 18th Dynasty. Amenhotep III was known for his great hunts, and according to Sethe, this pharaoh also boasted of extending his rule to the Euphrates,<sup>84</sup> though there is no historical evidence to substantiate that Amenhotep III controlled more than the southern Levant and the coastal region of the northern Levant.<sup>85</sup> One attractive element about this view is that it avoids “the Cush problem.” Traditionally, biblical Cush lies immediately to the south of Egypt, in the area that ANE scholars refer to as Nubia, and that traditionally has been referred to as Ethiopia in the LXX. Most of Cush's descendants listed in Gen 10:7 seem to have been located in Arabia.<sup>86</sup> Given that the Nimrod pericope was set in Mesopotamia, and not Africa or west of the Euphrates, the notion of a Mesopotamian Cush has been considered highly suspect.

This view can be commended for its selection of a human candidate, but the view's main selling point is merely that it avoids “the Cush problem,” which asset

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<sup>83</sup> Van der Veen and Zerbst, “Nimrod the Mighty Hunter” 33–36; van der Toorn and van der Horst, “Nimrod before and after the Bible” 10.

<sup>84</sup> So Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis Kapitel 1–12,9* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953) 122.

<sup>85</sup> James M. Weinstein, “Egypt and the Levant in the Reign of Amenhotep III,” in *Amenhotep III: Perspectives on His Reign* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 223–36.

<sup>86</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* 221.

hardly overcomes its flaws. The first flaw is that this view ignores the Mesopotamian geography that is so integral to the Nimrod pericope.<sup>87</sup> The geographical context of the Nimrod story is undoubtedly Mesopotamia and refers to a king who had ventured from Sumer to Assyria.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, no Egyptian king ever controlled the land between the two rivers. Amenhotep III never even controlled northeastern Syria, let alone extended his territories to the Euphrates or beyond.<sup>89</sup> The closest that any pharaoh came to controlling part of Mesopotamia is when Thutmose III (c. 1506–1452 BC) advanced as far as the Euphrates in his Year 33, crossed the river in pursuit of attacking enemies, and destroyed the cities and towns along the Euphrates by putting them to the torch, which events are described on the Gebel Barkal Stele.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, no Egyptian pharaoh is a viable candidate for a conqueror and controller of vital Mesopotamian cities, let alone key Assyrian cities.

The second flaw with this view is the antiquity of the cities on the conquest-list, especially those in southern Sumer, which date to a time about 1000 years earlier than Amenhotep III. A related chronological problem is that Amenhotep III was on the throne only two years when Moses (c. 1527/6–1406 BC) died. The third flaw with this view is related to Nimrod's genealogical background. The biblical text clearly states that Nimrod traced his lineage to Ham through Cush. However, Amenhotep III traced his lineage to Ham through Mizraim (Gen 10:6). In fact, the biblical name Mizraim is merely a transliteration of the Hebrew proper noun מִצְרַיִם (“Egypt”).<sup>91</sup> The Egyptians' lineage thus is traced through Mizraim, not through Cush, making Amenhotep III a non-candidate for Nimrod, based on genealogy. The fourth flaw with this view is that the starting-point of Amenhotep III's kingdom was not a city in southern Mesopotamia, but the cities of Egypt. Therefore, Amenhotep III—or any Egyptian pharaoh, for that matter—cannot be equated with Nimrod.

3. *Gilgamesh as Nimrod.* Some have equated the legendary Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh with Nimrod.<sup>92</sup> Controversy long has surrounded the topic of Gilgamesh's historicity, since he is depicted as a semi-divine hero in several Sumerian epics. He also possesses superhuman strength, as he allegedly built the city walls of Uruk to defend his people from danger, and travelled to meet a sage who had survived the Flood. However, the *Sumerian King List* claims that Gilgamesh held the kingship over Uruk, as he is listed as the fifth king of the First Dynasty of Uruk. For this reason, most now consider him to have been a historical figure, even if his career has been embellished through mythology.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 356.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 354.

<sup>89</sup> The nature of Amenhotep III's involvement with Babylon was friendly, with Babylon's refusal to support a Canaanite conspiracy against Egypt, and requests from Babylon's king for the pharaoh to send gold for a building project (Kenneth A. Kitchen, “Amenhotep III and Mesopotamia,” in *Amenhotep III* 250–61).

<sup>90</sup> *COS II* 15.

<sup>91</sup> As Livingston aptly stated, “Mizraim became the Egyptians” (“Who Was Nimrod?” 67).

<sup>92</sup> For a list of adherents, see Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty” 357.

<sup>93</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 45.

For Livingston, there are enough parallels to persuade him that Nimrod and Gilgamesh are one and the same. Gilgamesh exercised tyranny, took control by his own strength, opposed deity, and did his utmost to get people to forsake that deity. Livingston even called Gilgamesh “a type of early city founder.” Livingston’s other contention is that the Gilgamesh hero set out to kill the perpetrator of the Flood, since he took the monstrous Enkidu with him on the long journey to Cedar Mountain to find and destroy the culprit who sent the Flood. Gilgamesh found him and eventually cut off the creature’s head. Finally, Livingston takes issue with Gilgamesh’s statement to Enkidu, when Gilgamesh declared that he would make a name for himself if he falls in battle while attempting to slay the terrible Huwawa, who is said to be the terrible one who sent the Flood.<sup>94</sup>

While Gilgamesh bears many character traits and qualities in common with Nimrod, many other figures in ancient Mesopotamian history likewise possess such traits, so there is no reason to prefer Gilgamesh on this basis alone. The first notable flaw is that there are no historical inscriptions attesting to Gilgamesh, so the veracity of his historicity cannot be established conclusively.<sup>95</sup> The second notable flaw is that Gilgamesh is not known to have founded any cities. He was the king at Uruk, if the *Sumerian King List* is correct, but there is no record of his conquering any of Sumer’s cities, let alone overtaking the cities of northern Mesopotamia and expanding building operations there. History judges Gilgamesh as a king who did not amass an empire.

The third notable flaw with this view is related to Gilgamesh’s alleged attempt to seek and slay the one who destroyed life on earth with the Flood. While this is no more than a mythological account, even if it were taken as reflective of the truth about Gilgamesh’s character, this does nothing to connect Gilgamesh with Nimrod any more than it would connect any other candidate to him. The biblical account knows nothing of Nimrod’s attempt to strike out at God for sending the Flood. The final notable flaw with this view is that Gilgamesh’s alleged declaration to make a name for himself better ties him to the tower of Babel than to Nimrod, though this is not enough to put him at Babel for the building of the tower. In short, Gilgamesh cannot be considered a plausible option for Nimrod, since the weaknesses of this view far outweigh its strengths.

#### V. THE PREFERABLE OPTION FOR NIMROD’S IDENTITY: SARGON OF AKKAD

Having completed a detailed study of Gen 10:7–12 and an evaluation of the views for the identification of Nimrod that are most prevalent in the scholarly literature, the final task at hand is to identify correctly who Nimrod is, and to demonstrate why this identification is secure. Nimrod is none other than Sargon the Great, the King of Sumer and Akkad, who is history’s first empire-builder. The identification of Nimrod with either Sargon or Naram-Sin has been brought up in the past,

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<sup>94</sup> Livingston, “Who Was Nimrod?” 68–70.

<sup>95</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 45.

generally only in passing.<sup>96</sup> The present writer believes that a conclusive case now can be made for equating Nimrod with Sargon. The following arguments will serve to support the veracity of this claim. Before concluding this task, reasons will be given as to why Sargon is to be preferred over his grandson, Naram-Sin, for the dubious distinction of being identified with Nimrod.

1. *Sargon's geographical origin of Kish possibly associated with Nimrod's genealogical origin of Cush.* The association of Cush with the Sumerian city of Kish is not a new one. As early as 1914, van Gelderen opined that Cush is the "Babylonian city of Kish."<sup>97</sup> In 1922, however, Kraeling concluded that van Gelderen and others had not presented a convincing case in connecting Cush with Kish.<sup>98</sup> The main argument lodged against this association is that the descendants of Cush were located in Africa and Arabia, from all that is known in the Bible.<sup>99</sup> Yet Livingston renewed support for van Gelderen's view in 2001, suggesting that Sumerian Kish "took its name from the man known in the Bible as Cush."<sup>100</sup>

How, then, does one reconcile the problem that biblical Cush is restricted geographically to Africa, if Cush is to be connected with Sumerian Kish? The answer is that numerous descendants of Cush, from varying regions, had the opportunity to name their town or their territory after the same progenitor. Cush is the grandson of Noah, and thus many peoples would have descended from Cush's progeny. There is no reason to restrict one line of his to being named after him; several lines may have honored him by calling their cities or territories "Cush/Kish."<sup>101</sup> Moreover, this geographical locating of Nimrod's Cush at Sumerian Kish would make much better sense of the location of the second river that deviated from the one that flowed from the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:13). How could the third and fourth resultant rivers be the Tigris and the Euphrates (Gen 2:14), which are known to border Mesopotamia, while the second river was in distant Nubia (or "Ethiopia", per KJV) of Africa? The location of the river flowing around the land of Cush only makes sense if Cush is in Mesopotamia.

<sup>96</sup> Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty" 361.

<sup>97</sup> C. van Gelderen, "Who Was Nimrod?" *The Expositor* 9 (1914) 276.

<sup>98</sup> Kraeling, "Origin and Real Name," *AJSL* 38 (1922) 218.

<sup>99</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* 446.

<sup>100</sup> Livingston, "Who Was Nimrod?" 67.

<sup>101</sup> A similar example of this dynamic is the ethnic Habiru/Apiru (or SA.GAZ, the Sumerian logographic equivalent of Habiru), who appear in cuneiform texts in c. 2500 BC, long before Abram's time. In light of this pre-Abrahamic attestation, and the geographical discrepancy (Abram/Hebrews in Canaan, but earlier Habiru in Mesopotamia), many have been unwilling to associate the Habiru/Apiru with the Hebrews. The solution to the dilemma is that the two non-guttural consonants found in the tri-consonantal root of *bri*, the exact consonants that appear in Akkadian and Ugaritic (*br*, possibly meaning "cross over, go beyond"), also are found in "Eber" (Gen 10:21), the ancestor of Abram from whom the word undoubtedly derives. Thus Abram is one of numerous Eberite peoples who were named after a distant ancestor (Eber), all of whom are known as Habiru (or Apiru in Egyptian) due to their retention of Eber's ancient namesake (Douglas Petrovich, "The Case for Equating the Habiru/Apiru with the Hebrews" [forthcoming]; cf. idem, "Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh," *Master's Seminary Journal* 17 [2006] 104).

Perhaps not coincidentally, the origin of Sargon of Akkad is the city of Sumerian Kish. Sargon's name is *Sharrum-kin*, which in later times was pronounced Sharken, and is preserved in the Bible as Sargon. In Akkadian, *Sharrum-kin* means, "the true/legitimate king," which strongly hints at his being a usurper, since he went to the trouble of announcing his legitimacy with his regnal name. The *Sumerian King List* states, "[As for] Sharrum-kin, his [father] was a date-grower; [Sargon was the] cupbearer of Ur-Zababa."<sup>102</sup> According to a text known as the *Sargon Legend*, Ur-Zababa, the king of Kish, awoke from a dream and appointed Sargon as cupbearer (vizier). The claim was made that Sargon revolted against his master and became king in his place, at Kish. Not long afterward, Sargon expanded his control to other areas, which will be demonstrated shortly.<sup>103</sup>

Kish was occupied during the Jemdet Nasr Period, the Mesopotamian archaeological era immediately after the Late Uruk Period and immediately before the Early Dynastic Period. According to the *Sumerian King List*, Kish was the first city on which "kingship was lowered from heaven" after the Flood. Kish eventually did come to dominate the landscape of Sumer, and by the Early Dynastic III Period, Mesopotamian rulers adopted the title, "King of Kish," which functioned as a claim to supremacy over all of Sumer.<sup>104</sup> The trading network that preceded the Akkadian Empire was originally from Uruk—and subsequently from Kish—to Ebla.<sup>105</sup> Thus Kish was the leading figure in the jockeying for power in Sumer just prior to the rise of Sargon the Great. Kish survived into the Akkadian Period and beyond, so Sargon undoubtedly maintained control of the city.

Levin believes that the decisive factor in the possibility of linking Nimrod with Sargon is the identification of biblical Cush with Kish.<sup>106</sup> In actuality, though, this argument is not nearly as secure or compelling as the other arguments that can be made for equating these two empire-builders. At the same time, the genealogical basis for Nimrod's and Sargon's being the same individual is established quite plausibly. Since the Akkadian language was so diverse from Sumerian, more resembling a Semitic language, the linguistic evidence does not argue against this connection, especially since Semites such as Abram's forefathers originally were settled at near-by Ur, another contemporary Sumerian city of note.

<sup>102</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 96–97.

<sup>103</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 69. The *Sumerian King List* names five men who supposedly ruled Kish after Ur-Zababa. Most likely, those last five names in Kish's dynasty were only vassal rulers under Sargon. The only certainty is that Ur-Zababa and Sargon were contemporaries.

<sup>104</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 45. This analysis fits well with the archaeological remains, since the once impressive Palace A at Kish dates to this very period. Inlays from the Kish friezes associated with the temple date, at the earliest, to the transition from Early Dynastic II to IIIA, while a platform was dated securely to Early Dynastic IIIA on account of a Fara-type tablet that was found while dismantling the platform (P. R. S. Moorey, *Kish Excavations, 1923–1933* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1978] 57, 61).

<sup>105</sup> Lisa Cooper, *Early Urbanism on the Syrian Euphrates* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 42. The archives at Ebla revealed an important trading network through Mari known as the "Kish-Mari-Ebla axis," which brought commodities into (timber, dates, olives, pottery, porcelain, grains, etc.) and out of (lapis lazuli) southern Mesopotamia (Liverani, "Akkad: An Introduction" 5, 8).

<sup>106</sup> Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty" 361.

2. *Both Sargon and Nimrod credited with bringing Akkad into prominence.* As already mentioned, the city of Akkad has not been discovered, so there are limitations as to what can be said about the ancient city that became the capital of the Akkadian Empire. Ancient sources imply, however, that Akkad was located somewhere in the vicinity of Babylon and Kish.<sup>107</sup> The *Sumerian King List* states that Sargon was the “king of Akkad, the one who built Akkad, became king, and reigned 56 years.”<sup>108</sup> Critics who dispute the *Sumerian King List* and Sargon’s role at Akkad quickly point to an inscription of Enshakushanna, king of Uruk, who claims to have conquered Akkad. As the king of Uruk, Enshakushanna would have preceded Sargon’s opponent—Lugal-zage-si, king of Uruk—which indicates that Akkad existed before Sargon came onto the scene. Thus Akkad seems to have predated Sargon. There are flaws in this criticism, however.<sup>109</sup>

First, some additional background information is needed. Lugal-zage-si of Uruk had claimed hegemony over all of Mesopotamia, but an Old Babylonian inscription describes how Sargon conquered Uruk in battle and captured Lugal-zage-si, whom he presented as a trophy to Enlil (the storm god) at Nippur. Sargon then restored Kish to her former greatness and returned her population to the city, which Lugal-zage-si had overrun or destroyed. Sargon also inherited Lugal-zage-si’s possessions, with an impressive list that included Uruk (his capital), Ur, Umma, Lagash, and 50 other towns, making Sargon the *de facto* master over all of southern Mesopotamia. Sargon even installed his daughter as *entu*-priestess of An (the sky god) at Uruk and *entu*-priestess of Nanna (the moon god) at Ur.<sup>110</sup> Probably at this point, Sargon planned for his relocation to Akkad and making it his new capital. Not only did Sargon confirm some kind of privileges and exemptions to Kish, but he continued to use the site as his capital city while Akkad was under construction.<sup>111</sup>

What critics such as van de Mieroop fail to note is that Sargon never claims to have built Akkad on virgin soil, nor does he say that he built his city from nothing. The archives at Ebla reveal the political situation in Mesopotamia and northern Syria just prior to the rise of Akkad and Sargon’s dynasty. The toponym most mentioned in the archives is Kish, making Ebla’s archives contemporary with the 1st Dynasty of Kish. Conversely, the archives make no mention whatsoever of Akkad.<sup>112</sup> While the evidence from Ebla’s archives could suggest that Akkad was not in existence, it clearly suggests that at the least, Akkad was an insignificant player in the politics of Sumer (and beyond) just before the rise of the Akkadian Empire.

<sup>107</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 70.

<sup>108</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 97.

<sup>109</sup> Marc van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London: Routledge, 1999) 75. The tablet was found at Nippur.

<sup>110</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 97; Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 70.

<sup>111</sup> Mario Liverani, “Model and Actualization: The Kings of Akkad in the Historical Tradition,” in *Akkad: The First World Empire* 60.

<sup>112</sup> Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981) 73.

Therefore, a plausible and evidence-honoring case can be made that Sargon built up Akkad after he had subdued all of southern Mesopotamia, founding his new capital at a previously insignificant site that strategically would provide him with a launching point from which to extend his empire to the northwest, where the untold wealth of Mari and Ebla awaited, and to the northeast, where the heartland of Assyria lie vulnerable.

The biography of Nimrod fits this course of events perfectly, even if cryptically. The kingdoms of Nimrod and Sargon both began in Sumer. The first city listed as part of Nimrod's kingdom is Eridu, the southernmost Sumerian site and first city built in Sumer, which Moses soon would be implementing into the narrative and implicating in his story of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The second city listed as part of Nimrod's kingdom is Uruk, Mesopotamia's center of power when Sargon rose to the throne in Kish, and the city that he first had to defeat if he desired to rule over all of Sumer. The third city listed as part of Nimrod's kingdom is Akkad, which Sargon is credited as having built up and developed into his capital, "from which land" he could campaign in the north and widen the borders of his domain.

3. *Both Sargon and Nimrod involved in initial building projects in Assyria.* In the north, Sargon campaigned against Simurru, a Hurrian region, the claim for which is supported by the evidence of a date formula from Nippur. This is the first recorded southern Mesopotamian penetration into Assyria.<sup>113</sup> Despite the lack of Sargon's own inscriptions that attest to northerly campaigns along the Tigris, Roux justifiably considered them just as certain as Sargon's better attested campaigns, due to the large number of Akkadian cuneiform tablets that have been excavated in the region.<sup>114</sup> The extension of Sargon's rule to Ashur and Nineveh is attested by the honorary inscriptions on the monuments of native governors. At Ashur, a head was found that distinctly dates to the reign of Man-Ishtushu, the second son of Sargon to reign after him.<sup>115</sup> Nigro even refers to the argumentation for this dating as being convincing.<sup>116</sup> Since Man-Ishtushu's reign was less than impressive, both to ancient and modern historians, this head that signifies his control at Ashur almost certainly means that Ashur was seized under his father, Sargon. Inscriptional evidence confirms that Man-Ishtushu controlled both Ashur and Nineveh, where he renovated the Ishtar temple, as witnessed by the later Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I, who found statues of Man-Ishtushu at both sites during the course of restoring the temples there.

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<sup>113</sup> William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (2d ed.; Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998) 53. Hallo presumes that this penetration came about late in Sargon's reign, but there seems to be no reason why it must have occurred late in the reign. Hallo probably concluded this merely based on the scant amount of documentation of Akkadian influence in the north, which is not a compelling reason.

<sup>114</sup> Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (2d ed.; New York: Penguin, 1980) 147.

<sup>115</sup> Evelyn Klengel-Brandt, "Die Rekonstruktion einer altakkadischen Königsstatue aus Assur," *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 125 (1993) 141.

<sup>116</sup> Lorenzo Nigro, "The Two Steles of Sargon: Iconology and Visual Propaganda at the Beginning of Royal Akkadian Relief," *Iraq* 60 (1998) 94.

The famous bronze head at Nineveh clearly is Akkadian, as well, though a dispute exists over which king is represented. Initial conclusions were that the head is that of Sargon, but many have suggested it should be attributed to his grandson, Naram-Sin, based on the brilliant technique of craftsmanship and elaborate style.<sup>117</sup> Yet the view of an earlier dating fits the already-advanced metalworking in Mesopotamia in Sargon's day. Regardless of whom the bronze head from Nineveh represents, all of the inscriptional and artifactual evidence from Ashur, Nineveh, and Nippur combines to paint a vivid picture that Sargon of Akkad had established himself at the chief sites in Assyria, before either of his sons or his illustrious grandson took the throne.

The presence of Sargon in Assyria is made all the more plausible based on his involvement along the upper courses of the Euphrates and as far as northwestern Syria, where he conquered the Amorites. He remains the clear choice for the conqueror of Mari, which he razed, and he conquered what was left of Ebla after Mari's earlier destruction of the city.<sup>118</sup> On his way to Anatolia, Sargon undoubtedly led his army up the Euphrates, which can be deduced from an inscription of his: "Sargon the king prostrated himself in prayer before Dagan in Tuttul. (Dagan) gave him the Upper Region: Mari, Yarmuti (and) Ebla, as far as the forest of cedars and the mountain of silver." His supposed prayer took place in Tuttul, at the confluence of the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers, the city of which was formerly Mari's port of operations for her involvement in the Khabur basin. A Hittite king of the 17th century BC even recalled that Sargon crossed the upper Euphrates, onto the western side of the river, in order to receive the submission of the city of Hahhum.<sup>119</sup>

Despite the inscriptional evidence related to northern Mesopotamia, and to a greater extent northern Syria, some critics still doubt that Sargon was involved in Assyria. Stiebing Jr. is convinced that Sargon never campaigned in northeastern Mesopotamia, citing a lack of material support for this claim.<sup>120</sup> In addition to the aforementioned direct inscriptional evidence, there is pre-Sargonic circumstantial evidence from the archives at Ebla to oppose Stiebing Jr.'s doubt. Apart from Adab, no other southern Babylonian city was named in Ebla's archives beyond the illustrious Kish. The obvious inference must be that during the Early Dynastic III Period, all of the commercial exchange between northern and southern Mesopotamia was conducted via Kish. This reality presupposes Kish's mastery over the cities

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<sup>117</sup> Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* 99.

<sup>118</sup> The epigraphical and archaeological evidence together argue strongly in favor of the view that Sargon's conquest of Mari included a complete destruction and conflagration of the city. This picture fits well with the historical reconstruction of events provided mainly by the archives at Ebla, which represent a time not at all too long before Sargon's conquest. As Archi and Biga succinctly put it, "The brutal destruction of Mari was the work of someone who wanted to annihilate his enemy entirely, and not someone aiming to draw the city into his own political sphere. Such behavior fits Sargon perfectly" (Alfonso Archi and Maria Giovanna Biga, "A Victory over Mari and the Fall of Ebla" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 55 [2003] 34).

<sup>119</sup> Hans Güterbock, "Sargon of Akkad Mentioned by Ḫattušili of Ḫatti," *JCS* 18 (1964) 3–5.

<sup>120</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 71–72.

and towns of northern Babylonia.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, when Sargon defeated Lugal-zage-si, he inherited the mastery over the Assyrian lands of northern Mesopotamia.

If inscriptional and circumstantial evidence is still not enough to persuade critics that Sargon controlled northern Mesopotamia and Assyria, perhaps evidence from archaeology can finish the task. Such evidence comes from the sites of Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan, and Tell Brak, all of which form a triangle in relatively close proximity and are situated immediately opposite the northern centers of Assyrian power, just on the other (western) side of the Tigris River. During the Tell Leilan IIIc phase—which ended in *c.* 2400 BC, corresponding to the transition from Early Dynastic II to Early Dynastic IIIA in southern Babylonia and the rise of the 3d Dynasty of Kish—settlement patterns on the Khabur plains and the adjacent Assyrian steppe were altered radically with the sudden emergence of indigenous state-level society. This transition is seen in the large planned city at Tell Leilan, whose population increased by more than sixfold during this time.<sup>122</sup>

The Leilan IIa phase (*c.* 2400–2300 BC) featured the construction of a 2 meter-wide defensive wall around Leilan’s acropolis and other vital areas, as well as the cessation of fine craft-incising on the ceramics and the initial appearance of mass-produced pottery. The military power of the Subarian countryside united against the threat from the 1st Dynasty of Lagash, which was dominant in Sumer at the outset of this phase, but they were unable to resist the might of Lugal-zage-si and Uruk when he gained supremacy in Sumer during the middle of the century.<sup>123</sup>

The Leilan IIb phase (*c.* 2300–2200 BC) began with Mesopotamia united under Sargon and the Akkadian Empire. Akkadian rule brought imperialized irrigation-based agriculture to southern Mesopotamia, and it altered life in northern Mesopotamia. The Akkadians established Tell Brak as an imperial distribution center, from where they controlled Tell Leilan and Tell Mozan. Numerous changes were instituted: (1) Population redistribution removed second-level centers and sustained imperialized production. (2) The stacked kiln wasters that document (1.5-liter) vessel-production suggest that they were used to distribute Akkadian standardized worker-rations of barley and oil. (3) A city wall of 8 m in thickness was constructed for the first time around the entire site. (4) Civic water courses were stabilized by channelization and repeated clearing, reflecting Akkadian expertise in canal management, which was developed in southern Mesopotamia.<sup>124</sup>

The material culture revealed a greater Akkadian influence than Hurrian influence. A palatial building attributed to Naram-Sin, made of bricks, was excavated at Tell Brak. In *c.* 2200 BC, corresponding to the reign of Naram-Sin, the Akkadian-dominated occupation of phase IIb at Tell Leilan and Tell Brak suddenly ended,

<sup>121</sup> Piotr Steinkeller, “Early Political Development in Mesopotamia and the Origins of the Sargonic Empire,” in *Akkad: The First World Empire* 119.

<sup>122</sup> H. Weiss, M.-A. Courty, W. Wetterstrom, F. Guichard, L. Senior, R. Meadow, and A. Curnow, “The Genesis and Collapse of Third Millennium North Mesopotamian Civilization,” *American Association for the Advancement of Science* 261 (1993) 996, 998.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 998.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 998–99.

and the sites were abandoned. The subsequent remnant occupation at Tell Brak was half of the size of the area formerly occupied. Similar abandonments took place at almost all excavated sites of this period across the Khabur plains and the Assyrian plains, including Chagar Bazar, Arbit, Germayir, Tell B'deri, Kashkashuk, Abu Hgeira, Melebiya, Tell Taya, and even Tepe Gawra. The extant epigraphic documentation from southern Mesopotamia suggests that only remnant occupations remained at Urkesh and Nineveh.<sup>125</sup>

With all of the inscriptional and archaeological attestation of Sargon and the earlier part of the Akkadian Empire evident throughout the north (Syria, Khabur, Assyria), there is no doubt that Sargon is the Akkadian king who first subdued these territories and built upon them to serve the empire.<sup>126</sup> This picture fits well with the biblical description of the exploits of Nimrod, who built up the principal cities of Assyria, including Nineveh, Rehoboth City, Kalhu, and Resen (Gen 10:11–12), even if two of these sites cannot be identified at present. Thus Sargon's Assyrian conquests, civic improvements, and overall exploitation enable him to be the ideal candidate for biblical Nimrod, whom Moses credited with building up numerous sites in Assyria.

4. *Both Sargon and Nimrod had a lasting influence related to Assyria.* Toward the end of Sargon's reign, he introduced the eponymic dating system in the empire. Eponymic dating is a system for keeping track of successive years by designating each year with a title related to a memorable event from that particular year. The eponymic system of dating replaced the older systems, such as dating by the names of local officials, which was used at Shuruppak, and dating according to the numbered regnal years of the king, which was used at Urukagina and Lagash. The eponymic system was used subsequently in Assyria, throughout its long history.<sup>127</sup>

This administrative innovation that was preserved indefinitely in Assyria demonstrates the profound and lasting influence that the great Akkadian ruler had on Assyria. Nimrod similarly had a lasting influence on the Israelites, at least as his exploits relate to Assyria, which would be expected from the man who built up their principal cities. At the end of the OT era, the prophet Micah uttered a prophetic message of what would happen when the Assyrians invade the Promised Land. In this prophecy, he used synonymous parallelism when he declared, "And they will pasture the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrance points" (Mic 5:6). Here, Micah is equating the land of Nimrod with the land of Assyria. Therefore, Sargon and Nimrod both demonstrate a lasting effect on the historical record in regard to their impact on Assyria.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 999. The seal impressions at Urkesh betray Akkadian influence.

<sup>126</sup> The question might arise as to why Moses would use the verb "built up" of Nimrod's work in Assyria, if in fact Sargon also built up Akkad, essentially from an inconsequential town to the capital of the world's first empire. The answer may be the striking fact that northern Babylonia never seemed to develop a system of independent city-states that was typical of southern Babylonia (Steinkeller, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia" 116).

<sup>127</sup> Hallo and Simpson, *Ancient Near East* 58.

5. *Both Sargon and Nimrod were legendary for their military exploits and brutality.* While this argument is not exclusive to Sargon, without it the case would be weakened. His accession to the throne and subsequent submission of Mesopotamia and surrounding lands to Akkadian sovereignty were accompanied by a calculated propagandistic campaign, the first such enterprise to extend itself to these limits. At the level of official art, royal relief became a functional medium for conveying ideological messages and for invoking fear into the hearts of his enemies. Two stelae and an obelisk will serve to testify to the strict links between ideological purposes and visual media during the founding phase of the Akkadian Empire.<sup>128</sup>

Sargon's Stele of Ishtar, currently housed in the Louvre, displays a standing royal figure with a cloak over his left shoulder, holding a net in his left hand, which contains seven living prisoners entangled within it. With his right hand, the royal figure strikes the head of one of the prisoners with the head of the mace that he swings at his captive. The figure has been interpreted convincingly as Ishtar, the Akkadian dynastic goddess who plays the part of a warrior-deity. The scene powerfully illustrates the victory epitomizing the blessing of Ishtar in battle and the cruelty that the Akkadians practiced against the enemies that they faced and defeated.<sup>129</sup>

A second stele of the Akkadian Empire, the highly celebrated Sargonic Victory Stele from Telloh, which likely dates to Sargon's reign and exists only in fragmentary form, is best summarized by its publisher: "Considering the nature of the relief and the inscription together, one may next inquire what this stele was intended to commemorate. The pictorial representations clearly suggest a successful military campaign with slaughtering and enslavement of captives."<sup>130</sup> Oddly enough, the fragmented text makes no mention of military matters, but only lists tracts of land situated in the Lagash region, with no personal names associated with them.

A third ideological and propagandistic tool from the reign of Sargon, also located in the Louvre, is the first obelisk-like monument of ancient Mesopotamian art, known as Sargon's Obelisk. On the upper register of Side C of the obelisk, Sargon depicts a series of battlefield encounters. The imagery is marked at regular intervals by the repetition of Akkadian soldiers, with their well-muscled legs visible through their skirts. Their geometric patterns portray the resolute advancement of the Akkadian army through continuous movement.<sup>131</sup>

Confronted with these soldiers, the enemies' postures create a sequence of increasing drama. The first enemy soldier on the left has been struck in the flank by a spear that he is trying to extract, in a fatal effort. The second vanquished enemy is suspended by his arms. The third enemy is kneeling with his head pushed down against the ground, as an Akkadian soldier is binding him with neck-stocks. Another

<sup>128</sup> Lorenzo Nigro, "The Two Steles of Sargon: Iconology and Visual Propaganda at the Beginning of Royal Akkadian Relief," *Iraq* 60 (1998) 85.

<sup>129</sup> Nigro, "Two Steles of Sargon" 85–86. A drawing of the stele is on page 86.

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, "The Sargonic Victory Stele from Telloh," *Iraq* 47 (1985) 15, 25.

<sup>131</sup> Nigro, "Two Steles of Sargon" 93, 98. Depictions of Side C of the obelisk are on page 97.

er register of Side C depicts a considerable number of vultures, along with a wild dog, which are feasting on a mass of human carcasses.<sup>132</sup>

These stelae, which are merely a minor representation of a much larger corpus of evidence, depict the sheer brutality of the Akkadian army, and the extent to which they went to inflict tortuous pain on their defeated and captured enemies. The stelae also demonstrate the ferocity with which the Akkadian soldiers carried out the political goals of the monarchy, and the execution of the royal blueprint to dehumanize those enemies who were unfortunate enough to survive the battle. Just as with Sargon, Nimrod carried out a campaign of world domination, at least the domination of the world that was known to him in and around Mesopotamia.

The biblical description of how Nimrod carried out this plan is explicitly clear: he became a powerful slaughterer in the sight of Yahweh (Gen 10:9). He would slaughter men just as a man offering an animal sacrifice would take his blade and slaughter the creature, without conscience or regret. This is certain, because the qualification that it was done in the sight of Yahweh connotes man's sinful rebellion against his creator, in the spirit of Ps 66:7.<sup>133</sup> For this reason, the meaning of Nimrod's name is apropos, and his biography matches well with Sargon the Great, the king of Sumer and Akkad who viciously built his empire on the blood and bodies of all those whom he slaughtered, and all in calloused defiance of Yahweh.

6. *Sargon's candidacy for being Nimrod is superior to that of Naram-Sin.* For a number of scholars, Naram-Sin is either just as worthy of being the ideal candidate for Nimrod as Sargon is, or a better one. As Levin stated the case, "The identification of Nimrod with either Sargon or Naram-Sin has been brought up in the past," such as van Gelderen's suggestion in 1914 that Naram-Sin is to be equated with Nimrod.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, not only does Naram-Sin come from the correct era and dynasty, which automatically makes this Akkadian king a legitimate candidate, but his exploits seemingly outshine those of his grandfather.

For example, votive and building inscriptions of Naram-Sin were found locally at Nippur, Adab, Ur, Marada, Girsu, Tutub, and abroad at Susa and Nineveh. Such inscriptions attributed to the grandson of Sargon, found at Nineveh, among other Assyrian cities, would match well with Nimrod's foundation of this great Assyrian city. His borders probably were even more expansive than those of Sargon. He adopted a new title, "King of the Four Quarters," which most interpret to mean that he claimed sovereignty over every direction on the compass, and thus was the self-proclaimed king of the world. Naram-Sin even took the step of proclaiming himself to be divine, thus offering the concept of divine kingship to the world.<sup>135</sup>

Yet despite Naram-Sin's impressive résumé, his candidacy for being equated with Nimrod is hindered by a number of factors. (1) Naram-Sin claimed that he had performed a feat never before achieved in history: his conquest of Ebla and

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>133</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* 450.

<sup>134</sup> Levin, "Nimrod the Mighty" 361.

<sup>135</sup> Stiebing Jr., *History and Culture* 72–74.

Armanum. The small matter that he conveniently forgot to mention is the claim of his grandfather, Sargon, who boasted of a similar feat when he claimed to have conquered Mari, Jarmuti, and Ebla.<sup>136</sup> Thus Naram-Sin may not have been the first to conquer sites such as Ebla. (2) Naram-Sin was not the innovator that his grandfather was. The biblical narrator portrays Nimrod as a trendsetter, and one who began his kingdom in Sumer, then later expanded it into the Assyrian lands. Naram-Sin, however, began his reign with northern and southern Mesopotamia already in his possession. This directly opposes the flow of the biblical text, which clearly limits the starting-point of Nimrod's kingdom and outlines its expanding progression.

(3) Genesis 10:11 notes that Nimrod went out into Assyria and built up important cities there. The archaeological record for these northern territories, however, reveals that an earlier Sargonid king than Naram-Sin built up those cities. The stratigraphy reveals several phases of occupation during the Akkadian Period, but the buildings of Naram-Sin that were built in several of the northern cities, such as the palace at Tell Brak, are dated firmly to the final phase of the Akkadian-Period occupation at those sites. For these reasons, Naram-Sin must be rejected as a candidate for biblical Nimrod. Without any reasonable doubt, Sargon of Akkad rises far above any other candidate for being the historical figure referred to in the Bible as Nimrod.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The identification of biblical Nimrod with a historical personage has proven to be a challenge to commentators and scholars throughout the centuries. Proof of the difficulty of this task is found in the healthy number of candidates who have been presented as options. From ancient times, fantastical renditions of Nimrod's deeds have fascinated many generations of readers of the Bible, some of which go beyond what the text strictly has to say about him, thanks in part to the doubt as to when and how he lived.

As far back as 1876, the American traveler John Philip Newman predicted, "The day may not be far distant when Nimrod's Biography [et al.] shall become standard works among the civilized nations of the earth."<sup>137</sup> The present work has sought to declare that this day has arrived, thanks to the help provided by the two-edged sword of exegesis and archaeological discovery, the latter of which includes the epigraphical record, and it was accomplished by sifting through the relevant data and the options of those who have been considered to match Nimrod's biographical sketch precisely.

The first and second steps in the task were to present a working translation and the results of an investigation into the various lexical, grammatical, and syntactical features of the Nimrod pericope in Gen 10:7–12, which would form the exe-

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<sup>136</sup> Liverani, "Kings of Akkad in the Historical Tradition" 77, 79.

<sup>137</sup> John Philip Newman, *The Thrones and Palaces of Babylon and Nineveh* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1876) 360.

getical foundation from which a proper study could be launched. These two steps proved instructive, leading to at least the following set of truths about Nimrod:

(1) Nimrod's genealogical background requires him to have been a distant descendant of Cush, beyond the possibility of being a grandson. (2) Nimrod's character is defined by his having profaned, meaning that he acted irreverently in order to become powerful on the earth, and by his having become a powerful slaughterer in the sight of Yahweh, meaning that he butchered an enormous number of people in plain sight of God. (3) Nimrod's exploits include the possession of a kingdom, thus requiring him to be a king, whose kingdom began with the great power-centers of Shinar (= Sumer, or southern Babylonia). (4) Nimrod's kingdom expanded into Assyria, where he built up cities that eventually grew to be prominent seats of Assyrian power.

The third step in the task was to review and critique some of the more popularly held opinions on the identification of Nimrod, which includes the consideration of Ninurta, Amenhotep III, and Gilgamesh. Ninurta, the Sumerian god of war, was put forth as an option for Nimrod due to his being a great hunter, an Assyrian deity, and portrayed as being a warrior-king. Ninurta was rejected as a legitimate candidate due to the lack of his possessing a kingdom (over Sumer and Assyria) and his basic lack of humanity, which specifically should connect him genealogically to Adam, through Cush and Ham.

Pharaoh Amenhotep III was ventured as an option for Nimrod since Cush, also known as Nubia, historically has been located immediately to the south of Egypt, and since this pharaoh was known for his great hunts and allegedly extending his rule to the Euphrates. Amenhotep III was rejected as a legitimate candidate since the Nimrod pericope is set in Mesopotamia (and not in Africa or west of the Euphrates), since Amenhotep III lived approximately 1000 years after these centers of power in southern Mesopotamia (described by Moses no more than two years before this pharaoh took the Egyptian throne) actually thrived, since Amenhotep III's genealogical background traces back to Ham through Mizraim (and not through Cush), and since the starting-point of his kingdom was the cities of Egypt (and not the centers of power in Sumer, as required).

Gilgamesh was presented as an option for Nimrod because he was a semi-divine hero, because the historical Gilgamesh was a king in the First Dynasty of Uruk, because he lashed out at deity for sending the Flood, and because he possessed superhuman strength. However, Gilgamesh had to be rejected as a genuine candidate since there are no historical inscriptions attesting to Gilgamesh, since he did not overtake or build up any cities (either in Sumer or Assyria) and thus did not possess an actual empire, since the Bible never describes Nimrod as having attempted to strike out at God for sending the Flood, and since his declared desire to make a name for himself better ties him to the tower of Babel than to Nimrod (though even that connection is dubious).

The fourth and final step in the task was to present the case for Sargon of Akkad as the proper candidate for Nimrod. The evidence for this connection consists of five arguments that were presented and supported: (1) Sargon's geographical origin of Kish may be associated with Nimrod's genealogical origin of Cush.

- (2) Both Sargon and Nimrod were credited with bringing Akkad into prominence.
- (3) Both Sargon and Nimrod were involved in initial building projects in Assyria.
- (4) Both Sargon and Nimrod had a lasting influence related to Assyria.
- (5) Both Sargon and Nimrod were legendary for their military exploits and brutality.

The detailed evidence presented for each of these arguments leads the objective student of the Bible and ANE history to the inescapable conclusion that Sargon is not only the best candidate for historical Nimrod, but the proper candidate. The biography of Sargon of Akkad, recently illuminated by the discovery and publication of inscriptional and material cultural evidence provided by epigraphy and archaeology, matches that of Nimrod perfectly. The divine and human authors of the Bible, knowing that Israel soon would be a monarchy, provided this vivid picture of how far a king or kingdom could stray from God if given over to the lust for power.