

THE GARDEN-CITY:
TRACING THE BIBLICAL THEME OF THE CITY THROUGH SCRIPTURE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

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ABSTRACT

In Genesis, the Garden of Eden is God's perfect creation. After the mess that mankind made of history by its sin, the reader expects an eventual return to a garden. The surprise is that, in Revelation, God's new creation is not a new garden, but a city.

What does considering "city" as a biblical theme reveal? This paper answers this question by understanding how biblical texts overlap with one another, grasping the concept of what a city was for the OT people, and most importantly, analyzing the biblical stories with the purpose of tracing the biblical theme of the city through Scripture. After the perfect Garden of Eden, Cain's city, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Babylon make the reader skeptical of the city. However, the cities of refuge and Jerusalem provide hope. The prophets delight in Jerusalem and anticipate a future city. Jesus' followers are a city on a hill. Paul rejoices in his citizenship in the city above. Ultimately, God's decision to end Scripture with the image of a city reveals his plan of redemption. God doesn't erase the city. God *redeems* it. God meshes man's city with God's Garden into the fully cultivated Garden of Eden, the *Garden-City*.

INTRODUCTION

Garden City, NY, was originally created as an escape from the towering metropolis of New York City. Garden City had its beginnings in the Garden City movement in the twentieth century which promoted a healthier, more balanced place to live. Due to overarching concerns about city life, the idea was to create a perfect suburbia that combined the best elements of the city and the countryside. The founders of such cities were reacting to the common conception of life in the city as dirty, smelly, and congested. The solution presented itself as a city with all the elements of a garden: tree-lined sidewalks, organized city parks, and radial boulevards that extended out from the center of a neatly organized, concentric-circle-shaped city.¹ Today, many Americans call Garden City home in many different states. The Garden City movement strikes home with many individuals who see the value in escaping the city and incorporating elements of nature, or more specifically, a garden, into their lives.

The city today is often stigmatized as a dirty, ugly place where crime and poverty are high, and morals and safety are low.² This notion is easy to superimpose on the Bible's accounts and references to cities. But these notions, based on modern conceptions of the city, do not often fit well over the pages of Scripture, which already burst with inherent meaning and significance.

1. "Garden city movement," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_city_movement.

2. Justin D. Steinke, "A City Great to God: Ten Years of WELS Planting to Inform the Next One Hundred Missions" (Senior Thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2023), 10–12. WLS Essay File.

The biblical city confronts the reader with an ambiguous reality that seems to pull in opposite directions.

It appears as though Moses had a great disdain for the city. At no point does he poignantly reject the city, but the histories that he weaves together throughout the Pentateuch do not speak favorably about the city. The first city in the Bible is subtly slipped into a genealogy of the family of the first murderer, Cain. The next city's sole desire was to rise up into the heavens, to control a realm that rightfully belongs only to God. Moses continues by telling about the tragedy of Sodom and Gomorrah: the cities that burned to a crisp beneath fire from heaven because their moral values were so far from God's intention for humanity. The panorama doesn't get any better when Moses writes about the Israelites' slavery beneath the Egyptians for the purpose of constructing cities.

However, as the authors of the Bible continue to write Scripture, the ambiguous nature of the city becomes clear. God actually chooses a city on earth where he himself will dwell. The prophets turn their gaze toward this city, reflecting God's choice and prophesying glorious things for its future. 400 years later, the great city of Babylon is allowed to besiege and destroy this city of God. Babylon is brought up sporadically throughout the rest of the pages of Scripture as something dangerous for the morals, safety, and the faith of those who believe in God. Despite this, the authors of the New Testament speak about a citizenship in a new city above. On the last pages of Scripture, God presents his new heavens and earth in the form of a city.

As the reader of Scripture pores over the writings of the prophets and apostles, questions may emerge: Amid these seemingly conflicting views, prophecies, and histories concerning cities, is there a discernible thread that runs through the course of the Bible? Is there a theology of the city that the reader of Scripture ought to see? Did Moses think anything, whether positive

or negative, about the city? For that matter, did any of the other writers? Or, at the end of the day, does perceiving a purpose and a connecting theme throughout ignore the straightforward notion that the city is simply a place, a physical location in which events and stories take place? These are the questions this paper will endeavor to answer.

The research strongly suggests that there is a theme of the city in Scripture and that it is beneficial for the reader of Scripture to know about it. Ellul nicely sums up the findings of this paper which will be explored in much greater detail when he says that “there are two directions to be followed, both of which are basic to the history of the city. One originates in Cain, the other in Eden, and they converge finally in the new Jerusalem.”³ While it is harder to discern what each individual author thought about the city as a whole, it becomes clear when reading the Bible as a unified work written by the Holy Spirit. Links between texts reveal connections that deepen our understanding. Knowing what a city meant to the people of the Ancient Near East provides a base from which to launch into the grand topic of the city. Just as these physical cities had meaning for people in biblical times, they also took on a symbolic sense that teaches and leads us today to a deeper appreciation of God’s grand plan of salvation.

As this paper navigates Scripture, hermeneutics, and the Ancient Near Eastern world, it will reflect what Staneck has come to see: “Throughout the Old Testament the city has a mixed to a bad reputation. But as the story progresses, the city—and Jerusalem in particular—becomes the place of God’s saving acts for His people.”⁴ More centrally stated, “The city plays a pivotal role in the arc of redemptive history.”⁵

3. Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, trans. Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 163.

4. Matthew O. Staneck, “Reflection on the City,” *Lutheran Forum* 57.1 (2024): 18.

5. Timothy Keller, *Loving the City*, Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 113.

Studying the whole Bible leads the reader to a clear conclusion that there is a strong thread that runs through the biblical cities. This paper will focus on the Bible's view of the city as it stretches from Genesis to Revelation. From the city's less-than-ideal beginnings, God had plans to grow the seed of his garden and mesh it with the city, resulting in the Garden-City in Rev 21–22. The biblical theme of the city traces the threads of God's original creation, made perfect in Eden, and the original city, made imperfect by man, until they meet in the New Jerusalem that comes down from above (Rev 21:2). This thesis aims to bring out the beauty and implications that come from seeing the theme of the city by considering how one can read the different authors of the Bible as one cohesive writing, exploring the definition of a city and what it meant in the Ancient Near Eastern world, and understanding the links and connections that support this theme. I hope this thesis serves to increase the knowledge and appreciation of Scripture's wonderfully unified message.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research for this paper spanned several different fields. For each field of research, this paper made use of information gleaned from many valuable resources instead of a few key ones. It was helpful to hear the many voices that spoke about interpreting Scripture, about what a city meant to people in the Ancient Near East, and about the biblical theology of the city. As a general rule, most of the resources consulted in writing this paper agreed with one another in recognizing a biblical theology of the city. While most of the authors recognized this concept, they sometimes had differing views of its meaning and interpretation. This paper attempts to synthesize the interpretations of the cited authors and to find a place to speak in this conversation.

The first section of this paper deals primarily with hermeneutics and how to interpret Scripture when reading in places where there are potential allusions. Chad Bird's *The Christ Key* was very helpful, particularly in his treatment of intertextuality, a central concern of this paper. He puts the often very philosophical conversation into understandable terms and drives the reader to see Christ, the key who unlocks the doors to the rooms of the OT. In the section on intertextuality, I also found Moyise's article "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review" to be very informative. Moyise distilled the complicated, often misconceived concept of intertextuality down to a few ways it is actually used in scholarship. As this paper will demonstrate, intertextuality is a complicated concept that is often misused and misunderstood. Other leading resources included Van Pelt's *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* and Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.

The second section of this paper aims to depict what an Ancient Near Eastern city was, focusing on its definition for those who lived during that time period. John Walton has written extensively on OT cosmology and has contributed significantly to my understanding of how an individual living in the OT period would have understood or viewed a city. John Walton's *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* proved useful in this regard. It was also beneficial to read through what various dictionaries had to say. While there was generally agreement across the board, *Theological Wordbook of the OT* and *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* were among the most useful for understanding the concept of the biblical city.

The majority of research went into the third section of this paper which presents the biblical theology of the city. The authors of works that pertained to this topic of the paper disagreed in small measure on certain things, or they neglected to talk about matters that other authors did. Overall, their writings agreed with one another. In this section of the paper, it was especially helpful to consult these series: *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, and *Concordia Commentary*.

Due to the piecemeal nature of these sources, the work of building this paper involved assembling information from many sources and determining whether these authors could be understood properly in light of the Scriptures. A principal source this paper will reference and discuss is *The Meaning of the City* by Jacques Ellul. He wrote about the theme of the city as it is found all the way through the Bible. Jacques Ellul has anti-city and anti-technology leanings that show through in his writing. For this reason, not everything completely squares with the Bible. However, his deep thinking and the connections he makes are valuable for discussion and contemplation. Another work that addressed the full panorama of the biblical theology of the city was *The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation* by

Edward W. Klink III. While his work did not revolve around this theme, he directly addressed the theme of the biblical theology of the city in many chapters. Timothy Keller's *Loving the City* also spoke directly to the scriptural theme of the city. His unique experience as a pastor in New York City has given him a love for city mission work, which comes through in his book. Another valuable source was Tim Mackie and Jon Collins' podcast series entitled *The City*. Their deep thinking often gave me food for thought. The last resource that needs to be mentioned is *The City of God Against the Pagans* by Augustine. Very nearly all the works that were consulted for research mentioned Augustine's landmark work. As one of the first and most well-known works on this topic, Augustine shows that this has been a subject of discussion for a long time.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some theses that primarily treat the subject of mission work that can and should be done in cities.⁶ Mission work in cities is the natural, real-world application and follow-through of this thesis. However, this paper will discuss in detail what wasn't as heavy a focus in previous theses: uncovering, evaluating, and appreciating the intertextual connections that appear in the biblical mentions of "city" to understand the biblical theology of the city.

6. E. Allen Sorum, "A Theology of Missions with Special Application to North American Cities" (Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Master of Sacred Theology, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1995). WLS Essay File. Lucas F. Bitter, "The World at Our Doorstep: The Stream of Immigrants Flooding into North America's Largest Cities Demands Our Stronger Commitment to Global City Mission Work" (Senior Thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2013). WLS Essay File. Steinke, "A City Great to God."

INTERPRETATION AND INTERTEXTUALITY

The Bible presents the reader with an intricate web of interrelated stories, motifs, and concepts written by prophets, apostles, and poets. Fascinatingly, what remains clear is that it is one grand, connected story that points to Jesus' saving work (John 5:39). Despite the span of years over which the Bible was written, the different topics each author addresses, the different settings from which the authors wrote, and the personal experiences of the author, one can't help but notice the connections that seem to bring every page of Scripture closer to one another. Van Pelt accurately compares it to a large picture puzzle. "Each puzzle piece (individual book) has its own unique shape and bears its own unique image. But these individual shapes were designed to fit together into something whole, and the image of the whole provides the context and makes sense of the smaller, individual images."⁷ The Bible is more of a library than a book, containing viewpoints, statements, and cultures from a diverse group of authors. The Bible is a mosaic. Each piece contributes its own color, but all in service of the grand, overarching masterpiece of which it is a part. "The Bible should be read as a unity and as narrative testimony to the identities and actions of God and of Jesus Christ."⁸ Because the Bible has been authored in its totality by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) and the whole Bible serves God's purpose (Isa 55:11; 2 Tim 3:15–17), it can correctly be understood as one uniform book.

7. Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 23.

8. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 16.

However, the Bible was also written by individual people, at different times, and to various cultures and classes of people. The Holy Spirit used their voices to craft individual messages. When they wrote, they meant to communicate a certain message, not to be confused with something else. What this means is that when two texts seem to come into contact with one another, the reader has the responsibility to uphold the true authorial intent of what was written in both texts. To accomplish this, there must be guidelines in place to prevent the reader from doing whatever they want with the text. Moyise offers, “previous studies on the Old Testament in the New have often divided references into quotations, allusions and echoes.”⁹ Quotations involve a break in the author’s style to speak the words of another author directly, an allusion is a reference to another text woven into the author’s words, and an echo is a faint trace of an older text that is more likely to be perceived by those who know it well. Understanding when the reader is being confronted with an allusion or an echo can be subjective; therefore, this work needs to be handled carefully. But with God’s help, “We, like archaeologists, get dirty while digging into and sifting the various levels of speech, metaphor, allusion, foreshadowing, and patterning in these ancient textual sites to discover what artifacts the Spirit has left there.”¹⁰

How to Understand Intertextuality

Fairly recently, a new category of describing and interpreting overlapping texts has made its way onto the scene of biblical interpretation: Intertextuality. Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian woman, had studied the concept of “dialogism” (in which the meaning of the text is completed by multiple

9. Steve Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies: A Review,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23.2 (2002): 419.

10. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key: Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament* (Irvine: 1517 Publishing, 2021), 4.

voices in dialogue)¹¹ under Mikhail Bakhtin. She further developed Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and, as a result, coined the term *intertextualité* (intertextuality). For Kristeva, every text is a reply to every single one of its predecessors, but it is even more than that. A text is immediately absorbed into the same world as its predecessors; every text, not only the self-consciously allusive, is therefore a virtual "mosaic of quotations."¹² Chad Bird puts Kristeva's term more simply: "In its elementary sense, intertextuality is the interplay between two or more texts."¹³

While this is a simple way of understanding it, intertextuality is a term that has taken on a life of its own. Moyise says that "the literary term 'intertextuality' was introduced into biblical studies in 1989 and concerns the complex relationships that exist between texts."¹⁴ Moyise also claims that intertextuality was of special interest to those who studied the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, "for old texts appear to be given new meaning by being used in new contexts."¹⁵ The question that remains for the reader is how to understand the current text when an older one is being referenced. Or even more generally, can a reader of the Bible read two texts on top of each other at all?

Moyise concludes with Alter that it is valid and even necessary to read the Bible in this way. Alter states, "A coherent reading of any artwork, whatever the medium, requires some

11. Ian Buchanan, "Dialogism," *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780198794790.001.0001/acref-9780198794790-e-187>.

12. Kenneth A. Cherney Jr., "Allusion as Translation Problem: Portuguese Versions of Second Isaiah as Test Case," (Dissertation Presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Stellenbosch University, 2014), 14. WLS Essay File.

13. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key*, 12.

14. Moyise, "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies," 418.

15. Moyise, "Intertextuality and Biblical Studies," 418.

detailed awareness of the grid of conventions upon which, and against which, the individual work operates.”¹⁶ In the case of someone reading the Bible, the grid consists of the body of knowledge gleaned from previously written Scripture, the culture in which the author wrote, and symbols that represented a commonly understood theme for the author and his primary readers. Moyise chimes in with support for the general concept of intertextuality, but he proposes five categories for intertextuality that interpreters should consider. With the use of these categories, Moyise is confident that interpreters can use the term intertextuality in a way that communicates clearly and simply the relationships they see between two or more texts.

For the purposes of this paper, there is no need to examine every one of his five categories thoroughly, but it is worth making brief mention of them before arriving at the most integral category for this topic. The term “narrative intertextuality” refers to the use of a past story to provide a framework for a current argument. For example, Moyise argues that in Rom 8:18–39, Paul wants his readers to be thinking of the story of the Exodus, but not necessarily of any specific text.¹⁷ The whole story provides the framework. “Exegetical intertextuality” assumes exegetical conclusions derived from other places in Scripture. To illustrate this, Moyise suggests that Gen 17; Deut 28–30; Jer 7; 9; Ezek 36 are all fundamental background passages for Romans 2:17–29, and that the direct quotation of Isa 52:5 is simply a key passage among them that drives the conclusion home.¹⁸ “Postmodern intertextuality” refers to the practice of readers assigning meaning to the text based on their own experience. Under this term, the text offers itself to the

16. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 55.

17. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 421.

18. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 423.

reader, and the reader “enters into a dialogue with the possibilities the text has to offer.”¹⁹ This is a dangerous method of interpretation, opening the door to anything the reader can conceive of. “Dialogical intertextuality” refers to allusions or links between texts that highlight the fact that the source text is not as malleable as one might think. Moyise says that its two-way nature becomes clear as the source text actually speaks to and imposes its assumptions and meaning on the present context of the alluding text.²⁰ It is usually only thought that the new text changes the old, but Moyise suggests that it goes both ways.

Finally, the concept that most serves the aim of this paper is what Moyise terms an “intertextual echo.” An echo is less obvious than a quotation, or even an allusion. However, hearing an echo in Scripture, a faint whisper that traverses years and cultures to land in the reader’s consciousness, is something that can’t be disregarded. Of course, the reader will have to ask how it is helpful, and if it is a legitimate connection. It is a difficult task. “Naturally, there is considerable debate as to how much verbal agreement is necessary to establish the presence of an allusion. An echo is a faint trace of a text and might be quite unconscious, emerging from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel.”²¹ Although sometimes difficult to discern, Moyise is confident that thinking in terms of scriptural echoes is helpful. Anecdotally, he reminisces and raises the concept of a popular game show on television in which contestants had to guess the title of a piece of music from its opening bars. “Sometimes, the winner managed this from just two notes.”²² As far as biblical evidence, he mentions the veiled link between Phil 1:19 and Job

19. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 426.

20. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 424.

21. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 419.

22. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 419.

13:16. “The echo is not marked and Paul’s words are quite understandable without recourse to Job. But the echo does add something to a reading of the text, for it invites the reader to see parallels between the two situations.”²³ The trained reader of Scripture may perceive this echo and benefit from Paul’s reference. Viewing Scripture from this lens encourages dialogue between the sacred texts and deepens the reader’s appreciation and understanding.

Benefits of Reading the Bible Intertextually

Treating the Bible this way is not only beneficial but also recognizes the reality of how Scripture is written. “In the Bible there are ‘winking wordplays,’ artful allusions to past narratives, and the kind of skillful storytelling that has left hearers spellbound for millennia.”²⁴ He continues to explain the pervasiveness of biblical connections: “Were the Bible hyperlinked, you’d be hard-pressed to hunt down a single verse without multiple words hyperlinked to other words, in other verses, in other books, in both testaments.”²⁵ Alter confirms and agrees that paying attention to the features, analogies, and connections with other texts “leads not to a more ‘imaginative’ reading of biblical narrative but to a more precise one.”²⁶ This is because the Bible is not a disconnected series of individual stories, but a mosaic of writings contributing to the grand overarching story.

23. Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 420.

24. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key*, 11.

25. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key*, 11.

26. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 22.

Reading the Bible intertextually serves the concept of biblical theology that occupies the position of prominence in this paper. “The Bible is not just a diverse assortment of stories and materials, it altogether comprises a master narrative.... There is a basic plotline to which all the parts relate and which makes sense of all the pieces.”²⁷ In the field of biblical theology, “one may trace certain themes running through the entire Bible, carefully observing how the passage of time enlarges and enriches them.”²⁸ To study Scripture through the lens of biblical theology and equipped with the knowledge of how quotation, allusion, and echo function is to read Scripture faithfully, appropriately, and with a sense of wonder. As the reader tracks intersecting themes along the chronological path of Scripture, “thoughtful readers look along this trajectory”²⁹ and uncover further the hidden connections that lie a few page-flips away. “From the first page to last, the Bible tells a single, unified story that reveals glorious truths about God, humanity, the world, and the purpose of all creation.”³⁰ The reader of Scripture who takes a step back will see that “our Lord, the master storyteller, had everything in view before he even began to tell the story itself.”³¹

27. Timothy Keller, “The Story of the Bible: How the Good News About Jesus Is Central,” in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2631.

28. D. A. Carson, “The Bible and Theology,” in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2633.

29. D. A. Carson, “A Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible,” in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2638.

30. Edward W. Klink III, *The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation*, ed. Benjamin L. Gladd, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2023), 11.

31. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key*, 123.

Cautions for Reading the Bible Intertextually

Before this paper moves on from the discussion of interpreting the Bible, it would be remiss not to address the cautions that must go hand in hand with the benefits of intertextuality and biblical theology. “Interpreters are not free to see connections in anything they want.”³² Since the authors of Scripture have clearly desired to communicate meaning with the reader, the reader is in no position to create meaning or connections where they don’t exist. Gibbs insists that since most kinds of allusion are implicit, “we should expect that the interpreter would require a strong combination of different kinds of implicit evidence to be present before concluding with certainty that a passage has intertextual connections with an earlier passage.”³³ Connections are not something that the interpreter can assert without good reason to do so. If the connection is thin, the interpreter must be careful not to put a great amount of significance on it, since the author may not have intended it.

The concern about intertextuality is legitimate. At times, scholars are quick to find meaning that might not actually exist because they regard it as something that would be beneficial and not because it is actually there.³⁴ Some connections scholars have made “might lead us to question whether we have read too much theological significance into certain elements in the text.”³⁵ Instead of arranging every tiny detail in Scripture to align with the preconceived notion that the interpreter has, they must recognize that allusions will most often be signaled.

32. Micah L. Otto, “The Garden Temple: Analyzation and Implications of the Relationship Between Eden and the Tabernacle/Temple” (Senior Thesis, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2024), 10. WLS Essay File.

33. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 137.

34. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 138.

35. John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *Genesis–Deuteronomy*, The IVP Bible Background Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 13.

“When one biblical story alludes to an earlier one, as often happens, clear textual signals are given in the citation of key words or phrases, sometimes even whole statements, from the antecedent story.”³⁶ It is true that “An ‘allusion marker’ requires nothing more than a feature that seems incongruous in the alluding text, thereby raising suspicions that the feature originated elsewhere.”³⁷ However, this does not give the reader permission to see allusion markers in every word, all the time.

While these pitfalls are real and occur more often than they should, this should not scare bible scholars from embracing the benefits that arise from the faithful use of seeing intertextual connections. Instead, the reader of Scripture will use this lens as a faithful tool to see Scripture as the grand, continuous story that it is. Along with intertextuality, there are other tools that must work alongside and accompany it. The interpreter will treat God’s Word as the very word of our almighty God, the interpreter will allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, and the interpreter will understand that the Bible is to be read as history, as literature, and as the writing of someone else who truly meant something by it. This paper aims to direct all its interpretation through the lens of these scriptural principles. The theme of the city offers much for discussion and interpretation, which will follow.

An Overview of the City and Biblical Theology

As this paper intends to show, the city is a place, a symbol, and a theme that appears on the first pages of Genesis and endures to the very last pages of Revelation. Now that the ground rules of

36. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 76.

37. Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr., review of *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, by Ziony Zevit, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 77, no. 4 (2020): 130.

interpretation have been established, it is time to turn to the subject matter of the city. When the Bible is regarded as a whole, is there some united, connected, observable pattern that the reader of Scripture can point to? What does the progress of this theme say for the reader of Scripture in connection with the rest of God's word?

“As redemptive history progresses, the Bible moves from a largely negative view of the city (emphasizing the city's rebellion) to a more positive one (emphasizing the city's strengths, power, and strategic importance).”³⁸ The question that sparked this paper essentially boils down to this: what can a Bible reader concretely say about the “city theme” in the Bible? The Zondervan Study Bible starts this conversation well:

Whereas the opening chapters of Genesis focus on a garden with two human inhabitants, the concluding chapter of Revelation describes an enormous, populated city. Resplendent in glory, the new Jerusalem completes what God began when he created the earth. From beginning to end, Scripture is especially interested in constructing a holy city upon the earth, where God and humanity will reside in intimate harmony.³⁹

This captures the very heart of the direction of this thesis. The theme of the city demonstrates God's powerful redemption. The theme of the city displays the beauty of Scripture. Despite the conflicted hearts and sinful desires of man who did not deserve anything from God, much less his grace, God was and is working all the time to present to all people something too wonderful for imagination. The theme of the city purposefully fixes our attention on God's plan to build the first garden and the first city into the *Garden-City*.

38. Keller, *Loving the City*, 118.

39. T. D. Alexander, “The City of God,” in NIV Zondervan Study Bible, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2666.

WHAT IS A CITY?

To accurately speak about the biblical theme of the city, and since the majority of this paper will be dealing with the OT, it will be helpful to define how people living in OT times thought of a city. It is not immediately obvious to the present-day reader, but the way that we classify cities now is not the way that the Hebrew people would have thought of a city. The word for “city” in Hebrew is עִיר. The word עִיר is accurately translated as “city,” but the difference has far more to do with the idea that this word conjures up in either language. While both words refer to a permanent settlement, the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* offers this with respect to the word עִיר: “none of our modern terms such as city, town, or village adequately convey the meaning or the mental picture contained in this word.”⁴⁰ When this word is mentioned in the Old Testament, the reader must realize that something distinct, but not altogether different from our modern conception of a city, is being discussed. In this regard, it will be useful to dive into the Hebrew world and dissect the recognizable traits of the city.

While the study of the Greek word πόλις would be useful here, I did not deem it necessary for the logical progression of this paper. The word πόλις is the word for “city” in the Greek NT. Certainly, for people living in NT times, the word πόλις would have evoked a different sense and meaning. Instead of the defining factor being what was inside the wall, as will be seen in the case of the Hebrew word עִיר, πόλις called to mind a larger area. “The Greek word *polis* included more than the city proper, the *astu*; it also included the surrounding

40. Carl Schultz, “עִיר,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* 2:664.

countryside and designated a city-state.”⁴¹ More importantly than the physical aspects, the ideational aspects of a πόλις greatly differ from those of an עִיר. “The Greek idea of ‘city’ differs radically from that of Israel. In its developed use *pólis* has as its core meaning a political institution, whereas *‘îr* (cf. Greek *‘astu*) focused on a protected place.”⁴² While the Greek idea of citizenship will play into and enrich the biblical theme of the city in the NT, the biblical theme of the city largely springs from and ends in the Hebrew עִיר. For this paper, this brief introduction of πόλις will have to suffice. The discussion now turns back to defining the Hebrew עִיר.

The עִיר: A General Definition

Just like John Walton, “our interest here is to try to understand how the ancients thought about cities and urbanization.”⁴³ To start, an עִיר has this in common with a city, that it is a “large and densely populated urban area.”⁴⁴ This definition may even be very similar to the definition that someone today might give about the word city. It was a community, organized for the benefit of society, that operated with many people living in close quarters. This description is not unique to Israelite cities. Cities have always existed, and they typically have other identifiable features. Because of the multitude of people and abilities, cities often grow architecturally and economically. “Ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic cities have been defined both by architectural design and economic structure. Architecturally, a city is a settlement where people

41. Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, “Cities,” *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity* 1:298.

42. Schultz, “עִיר,” 2:664.

43. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 253.

44. *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, s.v. “עִיר.”

live physically close together around a complex of monumental buildings surrounded by a wall.”⁴⁵ While this is not the key feature or a requirement, it is a generally observable truth. It is an urban area.

The word itself is common. Commentators’ average estimate for the number of occurrences of עִיר in the HB ranged from 1,090⁴⁶ to 1,092⁴⁷ times (this is perhaps due to passages like 1 Chr 7:12, where עִיר may either be referring to a city or to a proper name). Frank Frick also suggests that this word is linked to the root עוּר which means to “rouse oneself.”⁴⁸ If this is true, it lends to the concept of a city being raised up from the flat ground into tall towers and architecture.

The עִיר Has Walls

Without a doubt, the number one defining feature of an עִיר is the walls that surround it and hem it in. “The chief feature distinguishing a city from a village was that it had a wall.”⁴⁹ This fact becomes clear throughout the OT (1 Sam 6:18; Ezek 38:11). Walls became the hallmark of what defined a city. This all-important feature invites scriptural authors to make comparisons between cities and villages that don’t have walls (Lev 25:29–31). Walls, the central attribute of a city, also captured the minds of authors who drew metaphors from them (Prov 21:22; 25:28). From

45. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, eds., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 258.

46. Yamauchi and Wilson, “Cities,” 1:290.

47. BDB, s.v. “עִיר.”

48. BDB, s.v. “עִיר.”

49. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “city.”

the walls, watchmen protected and guarded the city (2 Sam 18:25–27; 2 Kings 9:17–20; Isa 62:6). Walls appear repeatedly in the Old Testament, symbolizing defense, but also exclusion and isolation.

Aside from their symbolic nature, they had a primary practical purpose: protection. “Walls were important defensive additions that encircled Israelite towns.... They were meant to intimidate, and enemies generally avoided attacking walls, instead digging tunnels or using treasonous schemes to access walled towns.”⁵⁰ In the days when armies could not fly planes or drones overhead, walls were a formidable obstacle that prevented entrance into the city. This was not taken for granted, and the life-saving potential of a wall caused it to become the key attribute. “The importance of cities lay in the resistance they could offer to aggressors because of their fortifications, in the protection they could give to their inhabitants.”⁵¹ In fact, a writing discovered at the ancient Syrian site of Ras Shamra recorded what people living outside the city did in times of emergency. “In time of emergency, alarm would be given from the city walls, and those who were outside the walls performing various tasks would rush inside the city in response to the alarm.”⁵² The walls, and therefore the city, offered protection.

Besides military powers, what lay beyond the walls was also known to lack the control and societal order that flourished within the walls. “Disreputable persons such as traders, tanners, prostitutes, and beggars lived outside the walls.”⁵³ There is no doubt that this notion contributes to the ire of the prophets against the capitals of Jerusalem and Samaria when these injustices and

50. Amanda Cookson Carver, “Cities in the Ancient Near East, Critical Issues,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

51. Schultz, “עִיר,” 2:664.

52. Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*. SBL Dissertation Series 36 (Missoula: Scholars, 1977), 93.

53. Yamauchi and Wilson, “Cities,” 1:290.

corruptions were allowed to prosper *inside* the city walls (Isa 1:21; Ezek 22:3; Amos 3:9–10; Mic 3:9–11). The walls were not only a protection against foreign invasion but also from the influence of those who dwelt outside the city walls.

The עיר Was the Center of Commerce and Trade

Another important aspect of a city was its centrality. Cities “served as focal points for trade, culture and religious activity for a much larger region.”⁵⁴ When urbanization really accelerated in the latter stages of the third century BCE, cities were not necessarily designed for people to live in. “They housed the public sector, for the most part religious buildings and storage facilities enclosed by a wall.”⁵⁵ Of course, cities did not remain like this. Early on, the Bible speaks of cities like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–19:29) that were home to many people. This does not mean that simply because many people lived here, most of the action in an ancient society took place within the city. While the city proper was inside the wall, it extended its influence and reach outside of its walls.

A core element of a city was, in fact, that it had “daughters.” These were the surrounding villages that comprised the larger group of people that depended on a certain city. Moses relates how the Israelites captured “Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements” (Num 21:25 NIV). But the word for “surrounding settlements” is בְּנוֹתֶיהָ. Literally translated, בְּנוֹתֶיהָ means “its daughters.” The same concept occurs in Num 32:42 and 1 Macc 5:65. “Daughters” of a city became equal to the English word “village.” The relationship was one of protection, and also the source of its life.

54. Walton and Matthews, *Genesis–Deuteronomy*, 23.

55. Walton and Matthews, *Genesis–Deuteronomy*, 33.

This was because “daughter villages” didn’t have walls.⁵⁶ Within the city, people from surrounding villages could trade, sell, and carry out the functions of daily life that a city facilitated more easily than in their own scarcely populated villages. The village and the city depended on one another; the city on the produce of the villages, and the villages on the connections and defense of the city.⁵⁷ As the city became a place where people lived, farmers would work out in their fields during the day, and then retire into the safety of the city walls at night.⁵⁸ The relationship between the city and its surrounding lands was not one of stark contrast, but rather a complex, interconnected relationship that supported life.

It also entailed a mental orientation. Malina suggests that “people who live with their face toward a given central place form a general ingroup. In antiquity, these people were residents of the city and its attending villages. The outgroup is formed by people whose face looks toward other cities.”⁵⁹ Thus, the city and its walls were both a defensive bastion, the central hub for daily life, and the conceptual center towards which people oriented themselves.

The עיר Was a Religious Center

According to Price, at least in the Ancient Near East (ANE), the עיר usually “had its own ruler, who may have been called a king.”⁶⁰ The King often took on a significant religious role in the

56. Schultz, “עיר,” 2:664.

57. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 92.

58. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “city.”

59. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Jerusalem in the Revelation of John: The City as Symbol of Life with God*, Zacchaeus Studies (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000), 41.

60. James D. Price, “עיר.” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* 3:396.

city, ensuring stability on the part of their respective God. Especially in the ANE, “the belief emerged that kings could restore the religious centers of the city and in doing so return the deity’s essence.”⁶¹

This tight connection between city and religion came about because “it was believed that cities existed before humans. Cities were the creations of the gods and were made for the gods.”⁶² Thus, unlike today’s conception of cities being modern and trendy places, “The Mesopotamians’ idea of their cities was thus tied to a respect for the past. Cities were monuments of the age-old culture; they were not new and modern, but old and respectable. They were not human creations but divine ones.”⁶³ Each city had its own patron deity in which they made their home.⁶⁴ As a result, when kings of the ANE built their palaces, they often stocked them full of all kinds of garden-like art and iconography, from their tree-like pillars to their royal gardens. They wanted to make it look as though their god was living there and giving them life.⁶⁵

This close connection between the ruler, the temple, and the city arose from early Mesopotamian cities in which “the temple complex was the city.”⁶⁶ As things progressed and cities became larger in the ANE, this concept remained. In the ANE, as people moved into the

61. Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Citizenship in the Ancient World,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

62. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 254.

63. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 254.

64. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 255.

65. Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, hosts, *BibleProject Podcast*, The City, episode 2, “Why Cain Builds a City,” BibleProject, May 1, 2023, 74 min., 49 sec., <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts>.

66. Walton and Matthews, *Genesis–Deuteronomy*, 33.

city walls, “the phrase ‘house of a deity’ referred not only to the temple wherein people worshipped a deity, but also to the surrounding city in which the essence of the deity dwelled.”⁶⁷

This information is primarily gathered from ANE cities, but it is important to note that this was the world the Israelites lived in. While it was different in Israel, because there was one official city, “we find quite a bit of continuity with ancient Mesopotamian ideas.”⁶⁸ The city was intimately connected to the city's God. We often think of God as dwelling only in the temple, on which he chose to put his name (1 Kgs 9:3). However, the concept of God filling the city and dwelling therein was also assimilated into Israelite culture. The Israelite writers frequently called Jerusalem the “Holy City,” probably “from the feeling that the sacredness of the temple extended in some measure over the city.”⁶⁹ Malina concurs that while in other cultures the purpose of the city was the well-being of the citizens, in the Middle East, “the purpose of life in the city was the well-being of the central deity: to know, love, and serve the deity (love=covenantal loyalty).”⁷⁰ Since God had made Jerusalem his dwelling place and center of control, God “was understood to rule the world from Jerusalem as temple, city, state, and cosmos.”⁷¹

The religious aspect of the city also became a matter of identity for city-dwellers. Even as early as the Greek Empire, citizenship was a matter of identifying with a city-state or living within the bounds of a city. But in the cultures surrounding the Israelites, citizenship was dependent on religious affiliation. An individual was a member of a city or society because of

67. Garrett, “Citizenship in the Ancient World.”

68. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 256.

69. Merrill F. Unger, “City, Holy” *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* 209.

70. Malina, *The New Jerusalem in the Revelation of John*, 47.

71. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 256.

their religious allegiance.⁷² For the Hebrew people, this was clear. The promised land, and Jerusalem, in which their God resided, was the center of their mental orientation and the source of their identity. Since their conceptualization was that each city's god dwelled within, the Mesopotamians considered the city to be the "ideal social context. Nomadism was inferior and uncivilized. The order that characterized a city was parallel to and contributed to the order of the cosmos. Indeed, the cosmos found its ultimate ordered state in the city. The world could not exist at any meaningful level without cities."⁷³ Some scholars disagree with this statement. Scholars like Frank Frick show how people in the past have used Jer 2:2–6; Hos 2:14–16; Zeph 2:13–15 to prove the desert ideal: the notion that the Israelite nation would fare better if they were far away from the evil influence of Canaanite cities in the desert.⁷⁴ However, this concept of the meaningfulness of cities fits nicely within the meta-narrative arc of the city in the Bible, as the section on "Biblical Accounts" will demonstrate.

The עיר's Population of Many Functions as One

While the word עיר had no specifications for size,⁷⁵ scholars offer varying estimates about what typically constituted an עיר. The results of Keller's research revealed that "most ancient cities numbered only about one thousand to three thousand in population but the residents were tightly

72. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "citizenship."

73. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 253.

74. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 210–26.

75. Price, "עיר," 3:396.

packed within the city wall.”⁷⁶ Scholars estimate the population densities of ancient cities to be anywhere from 100 persons per acre⁷⁷ (the near equivalent of modern-day Manhattan⁷⁸) to 240 persons per acre.⁷⁹ While this may be helpful, the point is that what characterized a city was not the number of people, but the density. They were at least as crowded as the largest city in the present-day United States.

Despite cities’ large nature, they were often addressed in the Bible as a single entity. “Cities as corporate societies are hence subject to the divine blessings and curses. They are established and destroyed depending on their relationship to God.”⁸⁰ Thus, it was important for cities to be founded on the God who is able to bless the city and make it flourish (Ps 127:1).

The עיר Is Different Than a City

Walled cities were a major part of human civilization in the past. Their discontinuation simply came from the fact that they could no longer defend against modern-day weapons. The world has become less spiritual and supernatural, meaning that the idea of a god dwelling in a specific city has fallen by the wayside. The individualistic culture that Americans live in has weakened the sense of unity derived from the city. Americans don’t rely on the city for defense or life, but in the ANE, life in an area without a walled city meant danger. As this analysis enters the arena of

76. Keller, *Loving the City*, 114.

77. Yamauchi and Wilson, “Cities,” 1:290.

78. Keller, *Loving the City*, 114.

79. Keller, *Loving the City*, 114.

80. Schultz, “עיר,” 2:664.

biblical writings, it will be essential to check modern conceptions of the city at the door and carry the ancient conception of the city that persisted for so long.

This is not always easy. Everyone carries their own personal opinion about the concept of a city, which comes with a lot of baggage. Keller recounts a biased remark from one of his colleagues: “God made the country, and man built the suburbs, but the devil made the city.”⁸¹ On the other side of things, and just as problematic, is the notion that the cities are primarily “hope-filled centers of human life.”⁸² As this discussion advances into the depths of the Bible’s teaching of the city, it is critical to hold the neutral position that “the biblical view of cities is neither hostile nor romantic. Because the city is humanity intensified—a magnifying glass that brings out the very best and the worst of human nature—it has a dual nature.”⁸³ However, the Bible does not portray a debate between the city and the countryside. The Bible’s discussion of the city centers around two classes of cities. The one has its foundations on what man can achieve apart from God (Gen 11:4). The other has its foundation in God and what he can do for mankind (Heb 11:10). The Bible demonstrates God’s desire to ultimately condemn the city in which man walls himself off from God (Rev 18:21) and to dwell with mankind in the city he has built for us: the *Garden-City* (Rev 21:2).

81. Keller, *Loving the City*, 157.

82. Staneck, “Reflection on the City,” 17.

83. Keller, *Loving the City*, 113.

BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

This paper will examine major biblical accounts as they relate to the theme of the city. Each story, prophecy, and poem adds a piece to the mosaic of the city that spans the length of the Scriptures. Because of the interconnected nature of these accounts, I will attempt to bring threads to light as early on as possible, and then trace their progression through the rest of the Bible.

The Pre-City Garden of Eden

In the unblemished Garden of Eden, there were no buildings, bridges, or skyscrapers in sight, and yet, here is where the biblical theme of the city plants its roots. If the Bible didn't continue past the first two chapters, the reader wouldn't have very much to say about a biblical theme of the city in Scripture. But later on, there is a wealth of references, acknowledgements, and allusions that take the reader back to the Garden of Eden. As the trajectory of the city is traced out from beginning to end, it becomes clear that its roots go deep into the setting of the first man and woman in Eden. While there was no city to be found, God had plans to cultivate this garden into the Garden-City of Rev 21–22. The beauty becomes apparent when one realizes that the Garden City is an integration of God's original creation and man's creation.

The Garden of Eden was a paradise. It was good and perfect in all its totality. God said so himself when he declared of all creation that it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). However, it did not stay perfect for long. The fall into sin changed everything. But there are some things to take note of that set the stage for later accounts. Klink says that Gen 1–2 should not be interpreted in

isolation but should be viewed as the prologue not only to Genesis, but also to the rest of Scripture. “The opening chapters of Genesis have an intentional literary purpose with interpretive significance for not only the book of Genesis but also the entirety of Scripture and the biblical story.”⁸⁴ With this in mind, this paper will mention some aspects of Eden that bear on the theme of the city.

Besides the perfect environment God gifted to mankind, he also provided another special gift that occupies Gen 2: the woman. The first thing to note about this account is that Eve is an עֵזֶר. This theologically rich word God uses to describe Adam’s future partner may be used in a play on words later on. For now, it will suffice to observe the similarities between the unpointed words for helper (עֵזֶר) and city (עִיר). They both begin with an *ayin* and end with a *resh*. The only thing that visually sets them apart is the stem that goes down from the top of the *zayin*.

According to Tim Mackie, there is little to distinguish them audibly due to the guttural nature of the *ayin* that overpowers the middle letter.⁸⁵ Scott Noegel sees a pattern of Hebrew wordplay in this account as well, centering around the sound of these and other words in Gen 2–3.

“Immediately after we hear of the couple’s עֲרוּמִים ‘ārūmmīm ‘being naked’ (Gen 2:25), the narrator paronomastically alerts us to the snake’s עָרוּם ‘ārūm ‘cunning’ (Gen 3:1).”⁸⁶ עֹר, which means “skin” (Gen 3:21), adds to the wordplay. In total, the words are עֵזֶר (helper), עָרוּם (cunning), עֹר (skin), and עִיר (city). Every character provides their own version of this letter combination, and it forms a backdrop for this account. Each person provides something, whether that is the helper, craftiness, nakedness, skin for a covering, or, as will be seen next, a city.

84. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 21.

85. Mackie and Collins, “Why Cain Builds a City.”

86. Scott B. Noegel, “Wordplay” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Atlanta: SBL, 2021), 83.

Another peculiarity to notice is the word Moses uses to describe God making the עֵצֶר. He does not use the typical verb עָשָׂה, but instead selects the construction verb, בָּנָה (Gen 2:22). This is a noteworthy choice, given that בָּנָה only occurs again in Amos 9:6 to describe the work of creation.⁸⁷ Additionally, BDB lists primarily inanimate objects (city, house, fortress, wall, gate, tower, altar, etc.) as the object of the verb בָּנָה.⁸⁸ Gen 2:22 remains an unusual use of the verb בָּנָה without many parallels. Lawrenz and Jeske agree with the beauty contained in using this verb in such an atypical way:

The Hebrew verb for building, בָּנָה is used for God's fashioning of the tender and delicate form of the woman from the raw materials taken from the man's body. As an able and resourceful builder constructs elegant, graceful buildings from raw materials of stone, wood, and metal, so the all-wise and almighty God made the most beautiful of his creatures from a rib and the flesh attached to it taken from the man.⁸⁹

With the use of this word, God portrays himself as a master-builder, capable of constructing all things. God “builds” a helper, a support system, a comfort, and the source of life for mankind. God builds something wonderful for man that provides stability and safety, a delivering ally. By using this word in an unorthodox way, Moses intentionally implements awkward language to get the readers' attention and establish a concept that he wishes to call to mind in future accounts.⁹⁰

Finally, the עֵצֶר that God created was a woman. The interesting connection here lies in the fact that cities are feminine nouns in the Hebrew language. While Frick concedes that the feminine gender of עֵצֶר matches the general truth that places are feminine in the Hebrew

87. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, vol 1 of *Genesis*, trans. John J. Scullion S.J., Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 230.

88. BDB, s.v. “בָּנָה.”

89. Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2004), 120.

90. Mackie and Collins, “Why Cain Builds a City.”

language, he claims that “the reason given for the names of countries and towns being so regarded is that they were thought of as the mothers and nurses of their inhabitants.”⁹¹ Otto agrees with this sentiment.⁹² When Adam was in need, God provided a feminine support that would produce life and stability. This is what a city is supposed to mirror, but, unfortunately, it is a theme that is riffed on negatively in many narratives that follow. Soon after, Moses recalls these theme markers to show how the ideal in Eden would be tarnished by Cain.

The City of Cain

Immediately in Gen 4, the layering of stories begins. Cain was the first son born to the original couple outside of paradise (Gen 4:1). He traveled east (Gen 4:16) just as his parents had a chapter earlier (Gen 3:24). Cain “went out from the LORD’s presence” (Gen 4:16) and there created the first city. Although subtle, Moses may have used intentional language to alert the reader to the parallels that exist between the original creation of God and this new creation of Cain that subverted what God originally wanted for him. The linguistic threads point the reader to see that Cain had now become the builder and creator of what God had originally built and created for him.

Moses writes in Gen 4:17 that Cain built a city (וַיִּבְנֶה עֵיר). In this seemingly insignificant, small phrase, Cain makes a big impact. He begins the other intertwining thread of the biblical theme of the city: the city of man. Moses intentionally uses the language of “building” discussed above so that when the reader arrives at Gen 4:17, the full weight of the

91. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 25.

92. E. Otto, “עיר.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 11:54.

significance is realized. In similar fashion to how God built (בנה) a helper (עזר) for man, Cain now built (בנה) a city (עיר) for himself. Cain usurped the position of master-builder and provided his own help in the form of walls, buildings, and a space separated from God. The fact that the city (עיר) replaced the woman (עזר) may also lend itself to the earlier-mentioned idea that cities were the source of life and nurture for their inhabitants. The original woman had now been replaced by this “woman” of brick and mortar, a man-made creation inferior to God’s original creation. Scott Noegel asserts that if the reader wants to claim that there is a case of paronomasia (word-play/a pun) in use, the reader should look for a high density of the same groupings of letters showing up and a connection of meaning in their context.⁹³ This is by no means the ultimate leg on which this thesis stands, but there is a case to be made for the linguistic connection. If it is truly what Moses meant to do, it unfolds the complexity of Cain’s substitution of the stability God provided for the stability that he provided.

Besides this, however, there is enough in the context of the story and from the definition of a city to incriminate Cain. Cain was told that he would be a restless wanderer on the earth (Gen 4:16). When he expressed his worry about the danger of being a restless wanderer, God assured him and gave him protection in the form of a sign. When this plays out, Cain is described as going “out from the Lord’s presence” (Gen 4:16), a description that doesn’t speak well of him. Immediately after Cain’s departure from the Lord’s presence, he builds the first city which he names after his son Enoch (Gen 4:17). It is important to remember that the primary characteristic of a city is a wall. Walls keep good things in, and they defend against what the citizens don’t want to let in. To boil his actions down, Cain walks away from God, ignores God’s promise for protection and his command that he would be a restless wanderer, and shuts God out of his walls.

93. Mackie and Collins, “Why Cain Builds a City.”

“For God’s Eden, he substitutes his own.”⁹⁴ Ellul elaborates on this by noting that the city's name, Enoch, means “dedication.” This new city was the dedication of a whole new world and way of living. God created the first world, and now Cain had created a second one. Instead of counting on the protection and peace of God, he created his own. The Garden of Eden was filled with God’s protection, but Cain’s city aimed to be its own protection. What God so freely provided in the garden, man had now taken upon himself to provide. This is supposed to make us sad.⁹⁵ Cain building his own city apart from God is an attempt to provide the stability, protection, and life that only God can truly bestow on human beings. In the garden, there was no need for walls because God was present. It was safe. But beyond the presence of the Lord (Gen 4:16), walls took the place of God’s protection. So began the city of man.

Cain’s story starts with a murder, progresses to his city isolated from God, and ends with another murderer: Lamech (Gen 4:22–24). After this bleak beginning, Klink sees a ray of hope. “If Genesis 4 introduced the origin of the city of humanity, then Genesis 5 introduces the origin of the city of God.”⁹⁶ In Gen 5, the line of Seth shows that there were still people who trusted and relied on the Lord rather than themselves. However, in the beginning chapters of Genesis, the reader encounters many examples of the prideful city of man.

Commentators see significance in Cain’s building project, but some make more out of it than others. Ellul, whose stance against technology seeps into his writing, asserts that “the city is the direct consequence of Cain’s murderous act and of his refusal to accept God’s protection.”⁹⁷

94. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 5.

95. Mackie and Collins, “Why Cain Builds a City.”

96. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 58.

97. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 5.

For Ellul, the city was not just another deed of a sinful human being, it was an act inseparable from sin, the manifestation of sin itself. In Ellul's interpretation, the city was the natural result of sin and intimately connected with the first murder. This is putting it too strongly. Unlike Ellul, who is bent on showing the reader that the city is innately evil, the Bible is intent on showing that the city is neutral. When man uses it for evil, it is very evil. When it is used for good, it can be very good.

Nonetheless, this episode in the life of Cain depicts the beginning of the city of man. Augustine says the city of man is a city "at ease amid its temporal peace and happiness,"⁹⁸ a city with citizens who "live according to man,"⁹⁹ and a city which "will undergo eternal punishment with the devil."¹⁰⁰ For Augustine, the city of man becomes a symbolic representation of those who do not seek God, but themselves. The city of man becomes the symbol of man's pride and rejection of God. Cain starts the city of man in his attempts to provide for himself without God. The Bible continues to spell out that cities (and people) who wish to keep God outside of their hearts and walls will fall on the last day (Rev 18:2). So far, the Garden of Eden and the city of Cain lie diametrically opposed to one another.

98. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. George E. McCracken, William M. Green, David S. Wiesen, Philip Levine, Eva Matthews Sanford, and William Chase Greene, 7 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 4:511.

99. Augustine, *The City of God*, 4:413.

100. Augustine, *The City of God*, 4:413.

The Cities of Nimrod

There are many events in the generations following the life of Noah that remind the reader of what befell the generations following Adam and Eve. In both cases, there was an incidence that involved the shame of nakedness (Gen 3:7; 9:22), a curse (Gen 3:14–19; 9:24–25), the recounting of genealogies (Gen 4:18–22; 10:1–32), an ancestor who had a reputation for something prideful (Gen 4:23–24; 10:8–12), and then a massive event that changes the world (Gen 7:17–24; 11:8–9). When the reader comes to Gen 10:8–12, Nimrod is then parallel to Lamech, the infamous murderer. This doesn't cast the best light on his city-building. What began with Cain's city was only scaled up in Nimrod's cities. Josephus claimed that Nimrod was the mastermind of Babel.¹⁰¹ He is attributed with being the founder of empires that terrorized the people of God in the OT. Micah 5:6 reflects this, calling Assyria the "land of Nimrod."

Assyria and Babylon were cities dedicated to foreign, false gods. However, Babylon's name makes claims that it was special to the realm of the divine. "In Accadian it was *Bâb-ili*, taken to mean 'Gate of God.'"¹⁰² Nimrod builds his cities and empires with the same attitude as Cain and Lamech, who boasted that he could do just fine without God. "Ultimately, Genesis 10 continues to reveal the developing contrast between the city of humanity and the city of God. All that remains in this introduction to the city of humanity is the formal establishment of this international polis."¹⁰³ As he lists many empires together,

the author has opened the way for an association and identification of any city with the city of Babylon. These appear to be the initial stirrings of a "larger than life" symbolic value for the city of Babylon, one known in the Book of Isaiah (chs. 13–14, where

101. Lawrenz and Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, 311.

102. Martin Noth, *The Old Testament World*, 4th ed., trans. Victor I. Gruhn (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 265.

103. Klink III, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 61.

Assyria is identified with Babylon) and fully developed in the image of “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT” in Revelation 17:5.¹⁰⁴

The construction of Nimrod’s empire is fully fleshed out in the following chapter (Gen 11) as the reader meets the citizens of what becomes the symbol of the ultimate, evil, archetypal city of man in Scripture: Babylon.

The City of Babylon

The theme of the city in Scripture continues in Gen 11 with the construction of a city that represented the height of human pride. “The rebellion of humankind is epitomized by their attempt to build the Tower of Babel.”¹⁰⁵ Once again, Moses reports that the people moved eastward (Gen 11:2), the same direction that Adam and Eve (Gen 2:24) and Cain (Gen 4:16) moved. Mathews claims that this is more than just a direction. “The language ‘east(ward)’ marks events of *separation* in Genesis. By this spatial term, the narrative also conveys a metaphorical sphere, meaning the Babelites are outside God’s blessing.”¹⁰⁶ The Babelites wanted to provide for themselves, just as Cain did. Outside the blessing of God, the people of Babel attempted to regain their rights to the realm of the divine,¹⁰⁷ but this time by building up.

The overarching motivation for building Babel is what condemns it as a city of man. They said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, *so that*

104. Frank E. Gaebelien and J. D. Douglas, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: With The New International Version of The Holy Bible*, 12 vols (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 2:100.

105. Yamauchi and Wilson, “Cities,” 1:291.

106. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 478.

107. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 62.

we may make a name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4, emphasis added). This is the critical point that reveals this city’s true identity as the city of man; the city that wants to make a name for itself instead of praising the name of the Lord. In the grand theme of the city in the Bible, Gen 11 shows the origin of the city that comes to represent every city that is against God. In Gen 4:17, the reader can clue into the subtle hints that Cain was building a city away from God. In Gen 11, the reader is bombarded by the blatantly sinful ambition that defined Babel.¹⁰⁸ The people thought that they could make it on their own. As the second city in the line of the city of man, the connection to Cain’s city is clear. Both desired to create a life that was independent and separate from God, but in Gen 11, that desire is amplified to the maximum.

What makes this even more evident is the contrast Abraham provides in the following chapter. Abraham was not looking to make a name for himself. Abraham trusted in the Lord and the *Lord promised to make his name great* (Gen 12:2). There is no coincidence that Babel’s desire to make its own name great is immediately contrasted by Abraham, a man renowned for his faith (Heb 11:8–19), a man whose family takes up the rest of the book of Genesis. He depended on the Lord for his name, which directly contrasts the evil, selfish desire of Babel to make its own name. Abraham demonstrates that “the future experience of all believers involves a city”¹⁰⁹ by “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). The faithful people of God did not stop short in the cities of man but looked forward to the city that God would reveal for them.

Klink provides another argument based on the word גוֹי. He wonders why this word for “nation” is used in a promise about the children of Abraham (Gen 12:2) when גוֹי typically refers

108. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 554.

109. Alexander, “The City of God,” 2666.

to outside nations. As his answer, he asserts that יִלָּא “in the ancient mind would be more like what moderns would consider a ‘city.’”¹¹⁰ A יִלָּא was an “organized community of people having governmental, political, and social structure.”¹¹¹ This adds a dimension to what God promised to Abraham. God promised him something that resembles a city, a multi-cultural community living together under God. This is “the kingdom of God. And this kingdom-city of God stands in redemptive opposition to the city of humanity.”¹¹² The modern reader has the privilege of looking back along the arc of the theme of the city in the Bible and seeing that what God promised Abraham was, in part, the glorious new city of Revelation.

This contrast increases the reader’s disdain and distrust of Babel, the city that opposes believers throughout the Bible. The story of Babel points both backward and forward. The reader remembers how Moses introduced God’s creation of mankind in a shortened way in Gen 1:26–31 and then expanded on it in Gen 2. In a similar way, Babel is announced in Gen 10:8–12 and then examined in Gen 11:1–9. However, the contrasts are clearly drawn between God’s creation that he called “very good” (Gen 1:31), and man’s creation of Babel, the purpose of which was to call *themselves* a good name (Gen 11:4). The reader may also compare the boasting of Lamech the murderer with the boasting of the people of Babel. This connection to murder continues through Scripture in all the cities against God that are represented by Babel, “the great anti-God system of idolatry.”¹¹³ The result of this episode was the separation of people by language and distance. The deep rift that Babel brought into the world between people and deepened between

110. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 74.

111. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 74.

112. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 75.

113. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12:541.

people and God will not be resolved for a long time. At Pentecost, the reader sees a reversal of Babel in the fact that people who spoke different languages could then understand one another. But as far as the distance Babel brought, humanity will have to wait until God brings his new creation, the eternal city, at the end of all time. Then, all people will be gathered under the banner of one city, the city of God. It will be perfect because it was not brought about by man's sinful boasting, but by the perfect will of God. However, on this earth, the influence of Babel on the course of biblical history and the theme of the biblical city cannot be understated. The section entitled "The Cities of Jerusalem and Babylon Continued" will demonstrate that Babel did not remain in the first pages of the Bible, but took on a symbolic nature that pervades Scripture until the last pages.

The Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

Sodom and Gomorrah are the first and the most egregious examples of what follows in the line of the city of man. They are a localized Babel/Babylon. In the grand scheme of the Bible, these cities are almost as bad, but not as universal. However, immediately, they come off worse than Babel. At this point, the reader is suspicious of the theme of the city, and this narrative continues the trend downward. The anti-creation of man (the city so far) has continued its downward spiral and plummets to the depths of the atrocities committed in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:4–5, 9). Despite the moral depravity seen in Sodom and Gomorrah, another essential aspect of the Bible's message about cities arises. Even amidst the destruction, the sin, and the question of whether the righteous in the cities are worth saving, God "speaks his response—'yes, I would

save the city,’ and he demonstrates his response—Lot is salvaged from certain death.”¹¹⁴ It is yet another example of the complicated clash between God’s justice and his mercy.

In many ways, the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah continues the theme of the city from earlier narratives. Originally, Lot chooses the plot of land that looks like the Garden of Eden (Gen 13:10). The reader immediately sees the value not only in the practicality of the fertile land, but also in the perfection, stability, and morality that is associated with the Garden of Eden. However, he pitches his tents near the *cities* of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:12), which were sinning greatly against the Lord (Gen 13:13). The readers’ apprehension of the city increases, and rightly so. The “outcry” (תַּעֲרָוּ) against Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20) refers the reader back to the blood of Cain’s murder, “crying out” (צִעֲקָה) to God for justice.¹¹⁵ As the force of Sodom and Gomorrah’s sin increases, God steps into the scene with his divine power. His powerful intervention reminds the reader of God’s sovereignty. City walls were meant to keep out the unwanted, but those rules don’t apply to God. When the almighty God is against that city, no walls can keep him out. For the first time, “safety now lies ‘out[side] of the city.’”¹¹⁶ The meta-message to the reader here seems to be: flee the city! In the flood, the previous event of destruction, people were the casualty. In this case, God shows the above-mentioned truth that the city can have its own identity by making it the target of this destruction.¹¹⁷

114. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 49.

115. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary 1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 225.

116. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 239.

117. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 41.

Consequently, Sodom and Gomorrah “became proverbial types for societal evil and divine destruction.”¹¹⁸ The prophets and apostles compare the sin of the Israelites with Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:9–10; Jer 23:14; Ezek 16:46–49; Amos 4:11). The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah is also compared to that of Jerusalem (Lam 4:11). In the NT, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah also becomes a pattern for divine punishment (Matt 10:15; 11:23; Luke 10:12; 2 Pet 2:6). Though this is one example of cities which defy God, someone who reads Genesis straight through may consciously or unconsciously be skeptical of the city. For the people of Israel who heard about these examples, the trajectory of the city did not look good.

The Cities of Refuge

Before the Israelites entered the promised land, God promised to provide them with cities that were already built by the Canaanites as a gift (Deut 6:10). This demonstrates a positive city connection previously unseen. Moreover, God promised to designate some of these to be cities to which a person could run if they had accidentally killed someone (Exod 21:12–14). Later, the Lord elaborated on those instructions in Num 35:6–34 and Deut 19:1–13. From these passages, it is understood that the killer could wait in that city, safe from the man who may have wanted to seek revenge (the avenger of blood). The person responsible for killing would have to wait in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest (Num 35:28), at which point they would be free. They were equally accessible to all. “No city was more than 30 mi. away from a city of refuge—a distance that could be covered in one day.”¹¹⁹ God made sure that his people had a way to find

118. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 137.

119. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “cities of refuge.”

safety in the case of something that was not their fault. What is noteworthy is that this safety comes in the form of a city surrounded by walls. Unlike the previously mentioned cities that man formed for his own safety without God, “the provision of the cities of asylum was another instance of the mercy of the Lord in his provisions for the needs of his people.”¹²⁰ Now, God was the one providing cities. Ellul celebrates this positive turn: “Finally, we may note that the city is called at least once to play a positive role in the order of preservation which is a part of God’s plan for the world.”¹²¹

The significance of these cities to the biblical theme of the city cannot be overlooked. First of all, the city and its walls afford the refugee protection against the known danger of the avenger of blood. They protect what is inside from what is outside, but in this case, it is for justice. This city and its walls directly function to uphold life and the law of God. On the other hand, this function of harboring fugitives calls the reader back to Cain’s city. Cain feared the punishment for his sin, and so he built the city as his own protection. Ellul notes this connection and says of the cities of refuge that “their election was limited to transforming the meaning and doubtlessly the spiritual power of the city (although nothing is said of this) without modifying the function that man had originally prescribed for it.”¹²² He makes too much of the spiritual power of the cities. Cities in the Bible are not objects that are inherently good or evil. They are neutral, even though more than often, man uses them for evil. What is useful is that he notes how God used cities in a way that was very different from how mankind did. God takes these human

120. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 2:1002.

121. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 90.

122. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 92.

cities and uses them for the same protective qualities they originally had, but this time for his purposes.

The death of the High Priest, which allowed the safe release of the refugee, is another significant aspect of the cities of refuge. It is not explicitly stated, but it is hard to miss the picture of redemption that God paints with the cities of refuge. The fact that the death of the High Priest (and not the ascension of a new one¹²³) freed a prisoner from a man-made city can't help but remind the reader immersed in Scripture of Jesus. While we want to be careful about drawing connections where they don't exist, this seems like one that the reader can't pass by. "This is a portrait of redemption—a picture of remission of sin."¹²⁴ Jesus, the Great High Priest (Heb 4:14–15), has died for sinners of all kinds (John 3:16; Rom 5:8), setting them free from the captivity and imprisonment of sin (Rom 6:18; Gal 5:1). The death of the High Priest meant freedom from a manmade city—a blessing from God, but never a permanent home. The death of Jesus also frees believers from the city of man that praises itself and promises a permanent future home. This is yet another picture that the biblical theme of the city provides that points believers toward their eternal home—the heavenly, God-made city that comes down from above. Amidst the negative connotations that the first biblical cities brought, the cities of refuge show that God can even use the city to carry out his will.

123. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 654.

124. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 2:1002–3.

The City Through Moses' Eyes

This paper has chronologically progressed to the end of the Pentateuch. At this point, many commentators have been quick to assert that Moses does not appear to have a very high view of the city. For Geminn, “It is hard not to see Genesis as a subversive commentary on the empires around them, whether Egypt or Babylon.”¹²⁵ There are others who feel even more strongly about this. “In the first telling, those cities do not come off as nice places. The early Hebrews, in fact, took a decidedly negative view of city life. Had you been present when that history was taking shape, you would have understood their deep-rooted suspicion of the ‘big city.’”¹²⁶ For some, the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah “enshrines the criticism of the city by the countryside.”¹²⁷ It is here that “the first anti-urban traditions were committed to writing.”¹²⁸ We must be careful not to put opinions into Moses’ mouth. He does not give an explicit statement on the matter, and so this paper will not speak directly about his opinion of cities. While it does appear that cities were less than favorable, we can’t say anything with absolute certainty.

With this in mind, the reader patiently wades through the rest of Scripture, awaiting the Holy Spirit to fill in the biblical theology of the city. However, for the moment, the stories of the Pentateuch do matter. We can’t say for certain what the OT people may have thought, but “how the rest of us are told this history took place shapes our view of it and, concomitantly, our

125. Scott Geminn, “Another Reflection on the City,” *Lutheran Forum* 57.2 (2024): 38.

126. Donald W. Shriver Jr. and Karl A. Ostrom, *Is There Hope for the City?*, 1st ed, Biblical Perspectives on Current Issues, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 24.

127. E. Otto, “עִיר.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 11:62.

128. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 204.

outlook for the future.”¹²⁹ What Lowery means by this is that, as Moses tells the stories of these cities, *how* he tells them is very important. Lowery compares this to a portrait. “What is of essential importance in a portrait by a great master, the subject itself as a historical person or the masterful interpretation of the subject?... Surely both are important. Even to ask the question in this way is to assume a false dichotomy.”¹³⁰ Through Moses, the Holy Spirit was crafting a masterpiece. The reader should be careful not to fill gaps inappropriately, but he waits with eyes wide, prepared by how the narrative has unfolded so far, to see where the theme will continue.

So far, the city has been a violent place where man shuts himself off from God. This is not due to any inherent evil in the city, but rather because of man’s evil use of the city. The city attacks believers, corrupts good characters, and harbors killers. Nonetheless, God has demonstrated his gracious desire to save cities and to dwell with mankind as he did in the Garden of Eden. The following account demonstrates an improvement in the biblical theme of the city as God establishes his saving presence in the midst of his people.

The City of Jerusalem

God exhibits his love for his people as he re-attempts a “Garden of Eden,” a place of his presence on earth. Only this time, instead of a garden and trees, he founds it amid a tabernacle, a palace, and walls: The City of Jerusalem. The function of the Garden of Eden returns as a city. That was the hope. In many ways, Jerusalem lived up to the significance that it was supposed to

129. Daniel DeWitt Lowery, *Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1–11: Reading Genesis 4:17–22 in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplements 7 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 1.

130. Lowery, *Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1–11*, 19.

have had. It was the “most important city on earth in the history of God’s revelation and redemption.”¹³¹ As can be seen from its establishment onward, “geographically and theologically it is located ‘in the center of the nations’ (Ezek 5:5).”¹³² Jerusalem was already a famous city in their time,¹³³ but now this city would become the center of politics and religion for the chosen people of God.¹³⁴ In 2 Sam 6, Jerusalem, the city of God, is established, and Jerusalem is God’s city until the end of time (Rev 21:2). “For David and the Israelite people, the procession of the ark into Jerusalem was the procession of the real king into his holy city.”¹³⁵

God had promised to establish his name somewhere in the promised land for his chosen people (Deut 12:5). After all the corrupt stories of cities in Genesis, the reader may expect God to make some sort of return to the garden, or at least to his creation. What comes as a surprise is that he chooses a recently gentile city as his residence on earth. Whether the reader expects it or not, this development adds to the biblical theme of the city in a big way. God did not abandon the city. He redeemed it and made it his own; it was the place where he put his name. In the most tangible way since the Garden of Eden, God dwelt with his people in the city of Jerusalem.

In the account of Jerusalem’s establishment in 2 Sam 6, there are some hyperlinks that take the reader back to Eden. As has been mentioned, this is a major instance of God choosing a certain place to meet with his people. In this way, Jerusalem is intimately connected with the Garden of Eden. Another narrative thread that connects these two distant stories is the sins of

131. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Jerusalem.”

132. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 3:853.

133. A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 81.

134. David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 106.

135. Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 114.

Eve and Uzzah. In close connection with God's presence, their disregard for a direct command of God (Gen 2:17; Exod 25:14–15) led to a punishment (Gen 3:16; 2 Sam 6:7). This only supports the primary thought that both places were special, the central location of God and man.

Here, the “royal city becomes the holy city of Zion, where the Lord's presence is assured by the visible presence of the ark in the *tent*.”¹³⁶ This points the reader forward to the New Jerusalem of Revelation, which will ultimately fulfill the purpose of this earthly Jerusalem and the longing of all the OT people, as is demonstrated by Abraham (Heb 11:10). The founding of Jerusalem establishes hope in the theme of the city. God can make it into something beautiful by his presence therein. Unfortunately, the joy at Jerusalem's founding disappears as Jerusalem strays further from God. “Jerusalem became the gateway through which foreign influences could flow into Israelite life and religion.”¹³⁷ While this was by no means God's design, this does not illustrate the complete depravity of the city. It illustrates that as long as humankind is involved in something, it will be flawed and have a potential for “good or ill.”¹³⁸ The original bliss of Jerusalem and its lamentable downfall increase the longing of all God's people for the city without flaws, the New Jerusalem of which God is the sole builder.

The Cities of Jerusalem and Babylon Continued

The city was already and continued to become an object of comparison in the OT in general. The city's walls were an object of trust (Deut 28:52). They were regarded as a source of life, without

136. Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 118.

137. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 108.

138. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, 108.

which people easily perish (Ps 107:4–8). The control within city walls contrasts the wild, erratic behavior of a man without control (Prov 25:28). At times, cities receive condemnation as places that replace God, thus meriting his destruction (Hos 8:14).

However, what occupies the minds of OT writers is the holy city: Jerusalem. As important events and people from the Bible have connections with Jerusalem, and as prophecy and psalms write about Jerusalem, it becomes a symbolically charged place. This symbolic language takes on a theological nature while still being firmly founded on the historical Jerusalem. Now that God’s presence was connected with Jerusalem, it was fitting to use city imagery to talk about heaven and the reign and rule of God.¹³⁹ The writers of the OT were drawn into the imagery of the only city that God calls “my city” (Isa 45:13).¹⁴⁰

The Psalms dig into the rich imagery that Jerusalem provides. Zion came to stand for the whole of Jerusalem (Ps 48), and Jerusalem was the center of redemption for all nations (Ps 87). The Psalms recall the ark going up to Jerusalem and the blessings that abound because of it (Ps 24; 132:13–18), including imagery contained in the new Jerusalem (Ps 46:4–5).

Nehemiah demonstrates the importance of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, without which Jerusalem could not function as a city. The prophets latch onto Jerusalem as the center of God’s rule. Daniel unmistakably appeals to the mountain imagery of Zion when he speaks of a kingdom that will fill the whole earth (Dan 2:34–35, 45). Ezekiel foresees the new temple of Jerusalem in a prominent place in God’s universe, from which water would flow out to all the nations (Ezek 47:1–12). Most notably, Isaiah explores themes of Jerusalem. Motyer even calls

139. Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, hosts, *BibleProject Podcast*, The City, episode 13, “The Heavenly City,” BibleProject, July 17, 2023, 65 min., 17 sec., <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts>.

140. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Jerusalem.”

Isaiah “the book of the city.”¹⁴¹ Not only will the glory of Jerusalem shine out to the world (Isa 60:2), but then all nations will be drawn to this central light that God lights up over Jerusalem (Isa 60:3). Even though Jerusalem faces captivity in Babylon, God promises not to forget Zion/Jerusalem, his favored city (Isa 49:14–15). He elevates Jerusalem as a mother, protecting her children within its walls (Isa 49). But ultimately, this all funnels into the overarching summary that Jerusalem will be the place all God’s people will gather one day in perfection (Isa 65:17–25; Zech 14:16–21). In the minds of the OT prophets, there would be a day when Jerusalem would be a city without walls that defined its protection and identity. On that day, the Lord will be a wall of fire that surpasses and fulfills the use of walls in a man-made city (Zech 2:4–5).

While Jerusalem was the object of admiration because of God’s presence within, it often received criticism. Jerusalem was meant to rely on the protection of God, but it often resembled Babylon in the way that it turned from God and relied on itself. Ellul remarks, “Jerusalem is a holy city. But she is still a city. She carries man’s mark, even in her election, even in her adoption by God.”¹⁴² He attributes this to Jerusalem’s very nature as a city. Although this states it too strongly, it is true that the holy city meant to be the new Eden of God’s presence on earth too often replicated the morals of Babylon, the “archetypal godless city.”¹⁴³ “From Genesis to Revelation, Babel/Babylon features prominently as the symbol of humanity’s attempt to govern

141. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 16.

142. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 97.

143. Alexander, “The City of God,” 2666.

themselves without reference to and in defiance of God.”¹⁴⁴ This characteristic of man’s city weaseled its way into God’s holy city.

Jerusalem became unfaithful (Isa 1:21–23). Violence and destruction abounded (Jer 6:7). Jerusalem’s unfaithfulness increased and surpassed that of the nations, even making the deeds of Sodom look righteous (Ezek 16:51). Jerusalem became known as the “bloody city” (Ezek 22:1–13; Mic 3:9–11). “The city thus became an object of prophetic criticism as a social institution which was a part of a corrupt whole.”¹⁴⁵ In the city, evil reached its most intense form. The sin of Jerusalem leads some to conclude that “Jerusalem is meaningless except as a proclamation of the city to come.”¹⁴⁶ Babylon, whose trust was in itself and its gods (Isa 47), flaunted its own strength in God’s face. Babylon showed that it was the true city of humanity, the anti-church that was opposed to the people of God.¹⁴⁷ They desired to infiltrate the city of God by any means possible. Because of the spiritual infiltration and destruction of Babylon in Jerusalem, God allowed Babylon to physically infiltrate (2 Kgs 20:13–19) and destroy the city of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:1–21). Nevertheless, “just as the destruction of a great city was the climax of divine judgment, so the restoration of that city would be the climax of divine blessing.”¹⁴⁸ God’s use of the city of man to destroy the city of God lifted the eyes of OT believers all the more to the eschatological city that cannot fall, because God lives within (Ps 46:5a).

144. Alexander, “The City of God,” 2666.

145. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 210.

146. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 109.

147. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 65.

148. Shriver and Ostrom, *Is There Hope for the City?*, 34.

Thus, once again, the OT presents a view of the city that is altogether neutral. “The Bible teaches that the city is simply a magnifying glass for the human heart. It brings out whatever is already inside.”¹⁴⁹ From the foundation of the historical cities, these cities’ symbolic meanings permeated OT cosmology. Cities were clearly a man-made creation, even the best of which had the potential to fall away from God. This is particularly evident at the beginning of the Bible. Cain’s city, Babel/Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Nineveh certainly represented humanity’s bent away from God.

However, the OT reader senses that God has big plans to redeem the city. He cares about it. God listens to Abraham’s prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:23–33). God sends Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance and forgiveness to them. Jeremiah advises the Israelites to settle down and pray for Babylon.¹⁵⁰ God does not condemn the city outright, in favor of his original garden. “The city as a symbol of man’s attempt to provide for his own material security, stands condemned,”¹⁵¹ but the city (Jerusalem) as a symbol of God’s dwelling with his people begins to show the redemption of the biblical theme of the city. God’s promise of a city-like heaven has the last word in the theme of the city in the OT. It prepares the reader for NT city allusions and the fulfillment of the new Jerusalem: the inherent, long-awaited destination of the biblical theme of the city.

149. Keller, *Loving the City*, 157.

150. Shriver and Ostrom, *Is There Hope for the City?*, 59.

151. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel*, 230.

The City and Jesus

Jesus' interactions with Jerusalem demonstrate that Jerusalem was no longer a main focus of God's kingdom. Jesus was the main focus, and his interactions with the city of Jerusalem don't speak well of it. Jerusalem had not lived up to what it ideally was supposed to have been. Where Jerusalem failed, Jesus stepped in perfectly. It is fitting to mention that the hyperlinks discussed in the next paragraph concerning the star and the magi cannot and should not hold much theological weight because the Bible does not explicitly state them. Nonetheless, they may be useful thoughts for a believer who properly uses them to admire the beauty of God's storytelling, with the possibility that these hyperlinks were intentional.

The synoptic gospels, especially Matthew, make it clear that Jesus is "Israel reduced to one."¹⁵² A case could be made that Jesus is also Jerusalem reduced to one. Jesus received gold and incense (Matt 2:11) that Jerusalem was prophesied to receive (Isa 60:6). The "nations" as represented by the Magi were prophesied to stream to Jerusalem's light (Isa 60:3). Yet, Matthew shows them streaming to see Jesus (Matt 2:11).¹⁵³ Most prominently, Hosea's prophecy that Israel would return from Egypt (Hos 11:1) was clearly applied to Jesus (Matt 2:15). It is interesting to note that upon seeing the star, the Magi "make the natural assumption that the new king was to be born in the capital city"¹⁵⁴ of Jerusalem. But they do not find the object of their faith in Jerusalem. After a brief pause in Jerusalem, the star "went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was" (Matt 2:9). The star led them not to Jerusalem, but to Jerusalem reduced to one. Matthew's use of Hos 11:1 and the thought that Jesus is Jerusalem

152. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 208.

153. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 8:83.

154. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 27.

reduced to one is “an example of *sensus plenior*, a ‘fuller sense’ than what was in the prophet’s mind, but ‘something nevertheless in the mind of God.’... Had he [Hosea] been able to see Matthew’s use of 11:1, he would not have disapproved.”¹⁵⁵ Jesus was the city of God.

Connected with this notion, Jesus was not shy in making the failure of Jerusalem clear to his followers. When Jesus confronted Jerusalem, emotional outbursts often came with. Ellul makes the observation that “when he speaks to cities, he never has anything but words of rejection and condemnation.”¹⁵⁶ This is prominent in his interactions with Jerusalem. He was born outside of Jerusalem and conducted his ministry outside of Jerusalem. After all, no prophet can die outside Jerusalem (Luke 13:33). Matthew 23:37–39 sums up Jesus’ relationship with Jerusalem well. He denounced Jerusalem for its tendency towards bloodlust, which likened it to all the other cities so closely linked to murder (Cain’s city, the cities of refuge, Babylon, Nineveh). Yet he loved Jerusalem and wanted Jerusalem to be saved. He knew that Jerusalem would be destroyed and would not look to him until the last day, when the perfect Jerusalem became the home of believers, where bloodshed is not possible. In the meantime, he rebuked the spiritual leaders who led the city astray. Ultimately, Jesus’ relationship with earthly Jerusalem ended during Holy Week. Completely contrary to a city’s intended purpose, Jesus didn’t enter into the walls of Jerusalem to find safety, but to die. A city’s walls afford the residents the opportunity to protect and control life, but God entered in and destroyed the way of life that seeks its own good.¹⁵⁷ Earthly Jerusalem went head-to-head with Jerusalem reduced to one and

155. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:92.

156. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, 113.

157. Tim Mackie and Jon Collins, hosts, *BibleProject Podcast*, The City, episode 12, “Jesus, The New Jerusalem,” BibleProject, July 10, 2023, 63 min., 42 sec., <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts>.

lost. As Jesus walked outside the “safety” of those Jerusalem walls, he did so knowing that one day all believers will dwell in a city that has no need of walls, because God would be its safety.

Jesus, the embodiment of what Jerusalem was supposed to be, also passed this honor on to his disciples. Away from any physical walls or towers, on a mountain, Jesus gave his disciples the responsibility of carrying on what Jerusalem was supposed to be. In Jesus’ programmatic Sermon on the Mount, he says, “a town (πόλις) built on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt 5:14). This was an example to illustrate that they should let their light shine. The city “is meant to be seen by those pilgrims traveling to it.”¹⁵⁸ They were to be Jerusalem, the place where God reigns and the place to which the nations would stream. In Matt 5:3–7:27, Jesus was calling his followers to live a life devoid of walls that characterize the city man. In this way, they would reflect God’s image of heaven, a city *without* walls (because the gate is always open). While Jesus may only have been speaking of a general city, some have seen the “city set on a hill” as “a metaphor that has unavoidable associations with Jerusalem on Mount Zion.”¹⁵⁹ This link brings grand conclusions for believers. “If valid it insists that Jesus’ disciples constitute the true locus of the people of God, the outpost of the consummated kingdom, and the means of witness to the world—all themes central to Matthew’s thought.”¹⁶⁰ Jesus’ disciples are the city of God.

158. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 261.

159. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 100.

160. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 8:140.

The City in the New Testament

As the NT writers thought about life now and in eternity, it continued to be defined by belonging to a city. Not a physical city, but a heavenly city. Paul, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews wanted people to focus on their citizenship above. Abraham looked forward to the better city that God had prepared for him (Heb 11:16). In line with this, the writer to the Hebrews points his readers to the city of the living God (Heb 12:22). Believers' heavenly citizenship (Phil 3:20) comes from the Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:26). That is why believers take courage in looking not ultimately to cities that fail, but to the city that will endure (Heb 13:14). Peter rounds out the concept of citizenship above in the new Jerusalem by describing life on this earth as exilic (1 Pet 1:1). While disciples of Christ occupy the cities of man on earth, they look forward to dwelling in the city of God. Within every city of man, believers function as mini cities of God, shining their light, drawing people in, and serving God. Believers are already citizens of the city of God both now and in eternity.

The City of Babylon the Great

In Revelation, the symbolic nature that Babylon has assumed materializes as "Babylon the Great" (Rev 17:5). Aptly described as a prostitute, Babel/Babylon for the duration of the Bible has attempted to substitute herself for God. This is starkly contrasted to the beautifully adorned bride of the lamb (Rev 21:9–27). Babylon is said to be the "Mother of Prostitutes" (Rev 17:5) while the new Jerusalem is said to be the mother of freedom (Gal 4:26). From her very inception at the tower of Babel, Babylon has been focused on the glory that she can have. (Gen 11:4; Rev 18:7). The merchants who trade goods may bring the reader back to the trades that developed in

Cain's city. The sway that she has over the world shows itself in the grief that many feel (Rev 18:15, 17–19) as Babylon is proclaimed “fallen” (Rev 18:2).

For many commentators, one of the mysteries surrounding Babylon the Great is her identity. Against the view that she represents something broader, “most commentators see Rome as fulfilling all the characteristics of the Babylon of Revelation.”¹⁶¹ Drawing from the fact that the beast had seven heads, Aune compares this image of Babylon to an ancient Roman coin depicting a woman sitting on the seven hills of Rome.¹⁶² Babylon and Rome are certainly also connected since they both entered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The “only Rome” interpretation would be a stronger possibility if this image of Babylon was not preceded by a wealth of hyperlinks that connect Babylon to a much more extensive image.

“‘Babylon’ is a term used in the OT and Judaism for the earthly power opposed to God.”¹⁶³ And so, with all its previous history, it must be much more than Rome.

The ancient Babylon is better understood here as the archetypal head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God. Babylon is a trans-historical reality including idolatrous kingdoms as diverse as Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh, and Rome. Babylon is an eschatological symbol of satanic deception and power; it is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. It may be said that Babylon represents the total culture of the world apart from God, while the divine system is depicted by the New Jerusalem. Rome is simply one manifestation of the total system.¹⁶⁴

161. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Babylon.”

162. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 920.

163. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 985.

164. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:554.

In the midst of prosperity, overabundance, luxury, self-trust, boastfulness, power, oppression, injustice, and violence: “Wherever and whenever these characteristics have been manifested historically, *there* is the appearance of Babylon.”¹⁶⁵

This great city of Satan that was always an abomination of the original intention of God to provide protection in the Garden of Eden is finally cast down. The reader can look back along the trajectory of Scripture to see that Jeremiah predicted this (Jer 51:63–64). Babylon, which was first a historical city, and then a theologically rich symbol, began and ended as a prideful venture. Babylon rose above its station and brought Cain’s original desire to provide his own protection and way of life to its ultimate fulfillment. Most importantly, Babylon sought to lead God’s people astray through worthless idols (Isa 46:1–2), to defy God by its wickedness (Jer 51:7), and they served in executing the worst destruction in Israel’s history (2 Kgs 25:1–21). But God always planned to end the reign of this prideful, earthly queen that was detestable to what God had originally made. This discussion now turns to the *Garden-City*. God cast aside this dark, prideful, counterfeit city of death in exchange for the true, light-filled, peaceful city of life.

The City of God

The surprise of the biblical theme of the city is that it ends in a city. After the theme of the city of man vs. the city of God has been done away with in the destruction of Babylon, it is surprising that God would present heaven as a city. Not only was it a city, but it was the namesake of the city that turned against God constantly in the Bible (Isa 3:8), that stoned those sent to it (Matt 23:37), and that crucified the Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2:8). Jerusalem was a city that had been

165. Gaebelein and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12:555.

affected by the ideals of the city of man. This “twist” ending in the biblical theme of the city presents God’s redemption in a radical new way. God didn’t just do away with the man-made concept of the city. He *redeemed* it and restored it to the God-filled center of life that it always should have been. This city was now a truly safe environment for the preservation of life. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the people reading this account of Jerusalem in the NT era look forward to the place of their citizenship with fervor. God never forgot Jerusalem’s walls (Isa 49:16). Believers wait for the ultimate consummation of God dwelling with man in the city etched into believers’ palms (Rev 3:12). But the other surprise is that this city is also a garden.

Immediately, connections to the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:5–17) leap off the page. Isaiah’s description of heaven (Isa 65:17–25) and other portrayals of heaven fill out the trajectory of the biblical theme of the city as well. There is a river that flows through this heavenly city (Gen 2:10–14; Ps 46:4; Rev 22:1–2a). A tree is pictured as a prominent feature (Gen 2:17, 3:22; Isa 65:22; Rev 22:2). Revelation 2:7 notes that the tree of life is in paradise, demonstrating further that this is a description of heaven. Bird also notes that the LXX version of Isa 65:22 reads, “They will live like the days of the tree of *life*”¹⁶⁶ (“life” being an addition to the original Hebrew). There is perfection (Gen 1:31; Isa 65:17–25; Rev 21:1–8; 22:5). The first woman, who was a gift to man (Gen 2:22), parallels the bride coming down from heaven (Rev 21:10). Angels stood guard (Gen 3:24; Rev 21:12), though for very different reasons. The similarities to Eden are undeniable.

The most important similarity is the intimate presence of God. “By climaxing his prophecy with the image of a city, the ‘new Jerusalem,’ John implies that this renovated universe

166. Chad Bird, *The Christ Key*, 74.

is particularly focused on the intimate eternal fellowship of God with his people.”¹⁶⁷ John unmistakably depicts this fellowship as he describes the whole city as the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelled in the temple among his people. However, “in Revelation 21–22 there will be no temple ... because the whole city will be a Holy of Holies.”¹⁶⁸ The shape of the city, “the cube reminds us of the dimensions of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle.”¹⁶⁹ The jewels that decorated the priestly garments (Exod 28:15–21) were now the foundation of the new city (Rev 21:19–20). John makes it clear to the reader that this massive city, with walls stretching 1,500 miles in each direction¹⁷⁰, was the eschatological counterpart of Eden. In Ps 46:4, the “city of God” is explained as “the holy place” where God dwells. There is no mistake that God has brought the perfection of Eden, his dwelling in the temple, and the city that is the church into one grand image. God has brought the biblical theme of the city to a close in a marvelous way.

What is more, this had always been the plan. The conclusion in the new Jerusalem “summarizes the progressive construction of the city of God over and against the city of humanity from the beginning of the biblical story.”¹⁷¹ The fact that it is a garden-city “reflects the cultivation of Eden as commanded by God, and the temple imagery reflects that creation is now fully realized as the dwelling place of God.”¹⁷² This new Eden is “the fulfillment of the purposes

167. Douglas J. Moo, “The Consummation,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2696.

168. Van Pelt, *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 245.

169. Gaebelien and Douglas, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12:596.

170. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1161.

171. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 159.

172. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 151.

of the Eden of God.”¹⁷³ It was where God was leading all creation from the very beginning. To satisfy the longing of all believers for the love and presence of God, God gives to John “an awesome view of what it will mean for Christians to live with him in his holy presence (Jerusalem) under his perpetual care and blessings (Eden).”¹⁷⁴

This new city is the final result of God dwelling with man. The apparent purpose of shutting God out that Cain had for his first city will be transcended in the new heavens and earth. No longer will walls define the city, because there will be nothing that can harm anyone. No longer will people fearfully shut themselves in walls, for God will dwell amid those walls perfectly. No longer will the wall serve any purpose. In God’s city, the gate remains wide open because there will be no more night (Rev 22:5). In that day, the city will no longer be defined by its walls, but by God. “And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE” (Ezek 48:35).

173. Klink, *The Beginning and End of All Things*, 10.

174. Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 631.

CONCLUSION

Just as humanity built cities to escape the trials of wilderness, God brings the history of the universe to its culmination in a city. This life is a wilderness, and in the end, we will rest in the Edenic City of God.¹⁷⁵ This city is the ultimate home of Christians “because of the love that its Founder has inspired in us.”¹⁷⁶ It is the end of everything, and God has beautifully orchestrated this movement of all creation since the beginning of time. “Cain thought he could get away from God by creating the city, yet God decided to create a new city and dwell in full relationship with humans there. It should strike us as powerful that God fully restores the creator/creature relationship not in a garden but in a city of his own making.”¹⁷⁷ God redeems the biblical theme of the city despite its rough history in the Bible. I can hardly summarize this biblical meta-narrative better than Keller:

The city is an intrinsically positive social form with a checkered past and a beautiful future. As redemptive history progresses, we see that God’s people begin as wanderers and nomads outside of cities, and as city rebels (Babel). Then God directs them to be city builders and rebuilders (Jerusalem) and city-loving exiles (Babylon). In New Testament times, the people of God become city missionaries.... Finally, when God’s future arrives in the form of a city, his people can finally be fully at home. The fallen nature of the city—the warping of its potential due to the power of sin—is finally overcome and resolved.... All of God’s people serve him in his Holy City.¹⁷⁸

175. Staneck, “Reflection on the City,” 19.

176. Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, 3:426.

177. Geminn, “Another Reflection on the City,” 40.

178. Keller, *Loving the City*, 134.

Readers of Scripture will naturally contemplate the vast complexity of the intertextualities and the immense beauty of the biblical theme of the city. As they do, they cannot help but lift their eyes to the end of the trajectory, where believers will forever dwell with God in the *Garden-City*.

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