

THE ORIGIN OF GENESIS

by Thomas Schirrmacher

THE ORIGIN OF THE Pentateuch has been disputed for the last four hundred years.¹ The so-called “historical-critical” method has committed itself to the opinion that the material contained in the Pentateuch was collected out of various ancient sources and assembled by several generations of editors. Too many of these theories, however, contradict each other much too often.

Conservative² and Bible believing³ students emphasize that such a pieced-together work would be unique in the context of ancient Middle Eastern literature. Most of them, particularly Bible believing scholars, suggest as an alternative the authorship of Moses, which the Pentateuch itself, as well as the New Testament, confirms.⁴ This is not as easy to prove for Genesis, however, since Genesis does not mention Moses, who could not have been a witness to its events as he was in the other four books (with the exception of Dt. 34:1-12).

It is often assumed that Moses was transmitting a “backwards prophecy.” Such an interpretation should not be rejected out of hand, but it does seem to be a last-ditch attempt to explain the phenomenon of Genesis. Beginning with the conservative position, I would like to try to present a model for a natural origin of Genesis, by using the text of the book itself and contemporary knowledge about ancient Middle Eastern literature, without, however, explaining away the divine inspiration of Genesis.

1. See Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, pp. 5-130; Samuel R. Külling, *Was lehren uns 250 Jahre Quellenforschung* (FETA: Basel), 1961, pp. 1-10 (Fundamental interpretation); Raymond B. Dillard, Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 38-48; Hans Joachim Krau, “Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments” (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982) (historical-critical view), as well as current introductions to the Pentateuch.

2. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1965); Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977); A. R. Millard, *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, GB, 1980).

3. See Samuel R. Külling, *Zur Datierung der Genesis-P-Stücke*, *op. cit.*; Josh McDowell, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975); Wilhelm Möller, *Grundriß für alt testamentliche Einleitung* (Berlin: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958); Wilhelm Möller, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, (Zwickau, 1934); Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

4. See the works above. The opinion of the New Testament is particularly important for believers, because it represents a divinely inspired interpretation. Others believe that Jesus and the New Testament writers only repeat the views typical of their time. Is this opinion not too simple? Is the opinion of Jesus’ contemporaries not of great historical significance?!

Paul J. Wiseman, an archaeologist at the British Museum in London, presented this model for the first time in 1936.⁵ He was a conservative Christian, but did not attempt to refute Biblical Criticism, which he used himself.⁶ Meanwhile, his theory has been disseminated widely, not only in new editions of his own work, but also in various textbooks and in theological journals.⁷ The following study will filter the slack out of his material and present the relevant conclusions.

First, it is important to note that alphabets and writing are older than often supposed. According to the evolutionist interpretation of history, the alphabet must have developed over thousands of years. Earlier historians believed that Moses and his contemporaries did not then know how to write. We know, however, that mankind developed a very complicated alphabet very early in his history. The ancient Middle East produced such a wealth of material that hundreds of researchers are presently involved in reading and evaluating it. If our model fits the facts, it will then be clear that mankind has been able to write ever since his creation, or at least shortly afterwards, just as he was always, according to Scripture, able to speak.

The ancient Middle Eastern scribes wrote on clay tablets and employed many literary conventions, which Wiseman and others have investigated closely. Wiseman discovered certain rules in the collection and arrangement of texts:

1. The tablets were collected in chronological order, (in family chronicles, for example) and sorted, with key words at the beginning and the end of each tablet.
2. Title, author, date and location stood at the end of the text, not at the beginning.
3. Family chronicles, mostly of the royal families, were continued by the successor or the descendant, who took over and added to the narrative.⁸

5. Paul J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis*, 1936, (reprint: Paul J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation*, compiled by D. J. Wiseman (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977).

6. Not in the work cited above, but in the second part of the compilation by D. J. Wiseman, he supports the theory of theistic evolution and the theory of the “Days of Revelation” (i.e. the six days of creation are days of revelation of what came into existence during a long time), as well as other historical-critical views.

7. Not only in the work mentioned above, but in others, as well. In the second part of the new edition, he represents the theistic view and the “Day of Revelation” theory, along with other historical-critical interpretations.

8. This principle, which can be observed in the whole Old Testament, refutes the usual argument against Moses’ or Joshua’s authorship, that they could not have reported their own deaths.

The Toledoth of Genesis

The Hebrew expression *toledoth* occurs eleven times in Genesis. It means “This is the history of,” or “This is the chronicle of.”⁹ This formula apparently structures the whole narrative. Wiseman assumes that the *toledoth* ended each tablet, as he found key words, location and time close to it, material which he believed to be unnecessary in the text itself, unless for literary reasons (see below).

Let us take a look at the individual cases, which we will then evaluate, starting with the end and working backwards.

THE TABLETS AND THE FAMILY CHRONICLES OF GENESIS	
Tablet I: 1:1-2:4a	
Title 2:4a	“This is the history of the heavens and the earth”
Date 2:4a	“when they were created”
Key Word 1:1	“God created” = 2:3
Tablet II: 2:4b-5:1a	
Title 5:1a	“This is the book of the history of Adam”
Date 4:26	“Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”
Key Word 2:3	“God created”
2:4	“In the day that God created” = 5:1
Note:	Adam was a witness to the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of woman, the Fall, and the murder of Abel. He knew Cain’s descendants. (4:17-22)
Tablet III: 5:1b-6:9a	
Title 6:9a	“This is the history of Noah”
Date 5:32	“And Noah was 500 years old” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons).
Key Word 5:32	“Shem, Ham and Japheth” = 6:10
Note:	Noah recorded his account before the Flood and took the tablets with him into the Ark.
Tablet IV: 6:9b-10:1a	
Title 10:1	“This is the history of the sons of Noah”
Date 9:29	Noah dies at the age of 950.
Key Word 6:11-13—6:5-7	
Note:	Is this a combination of three separate accounts or a single one? The individual days were recorded by witnesses.
Tablet V: 10:1b-11:10a	
Title 11:10a	“This is the history of Shem”
Date 11:9	After the desertion of the Tower of Babel
Key Word 10:1	“After the flood” = 10:32
10:32	The nations scatter over the face of the earth. = 11:9
10:31	“in their nations” = 10:32
Note:	Shem added the confusion of language to the account.

Tablet VI: 11:10b-11:27a	
Title 11:27	“This is the history of Terah”
Date 11:26	“Now Terah was 70 years” (hardly his age at the birth of his sons. Compare 5:32).
Key Word 11:26	“Abram, Nahor and Haran” = 11:27
Note:	Terah repeated and continued the account (11:21ff). His father either died at the age of 69, which would fit, or at the age of 119, which would be too late, but is the better documented reading. This is problematic for the model.
Tablet VII: 11:27b-25:12a	
Title 25:12a	“This is the history of Ishmael”
Date 25:12a	“And Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi”
Key Word 25:11	“Abraham’s son” = 25:19
Note:	Ishmael (and Isaac?) wrote about Abraham. They buried him together. = 25:9
Tablet VIII: 25:12b-25:19a	
Title 25:19a	“This is the history of Isaac”
Date 25:18	Ishmael’s descendants lived “from Havila as far as Shur”
25:17	After Ishmael’s death
Key Word 25:19	“his sons” = 25:12
Note:	Isaac added the death of his older brother.
Tablet IX: 25:19b-36:1	
Title 36:1	“This is the history of Esau”
Date 35:29	The death of Isaac
Key Word 35:29	“His sons buried him” = 25:9
Note:	Accounts which include both Jacob and Esau: Chapter 33 and 35:29
Tablet X: 36:2-36:9	
Title 36:9	“This is the history of Edom”
Date 36:8	“Esau dwelt in Mount Seir”
Key Word 36:1	Esau is Edom = 36:8
36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note:	This part was written by Esau after leaving Jacob. It names his new home.
Tablet XI: 36:10-37:2a	
Title 37:2a	“This is the history of Jacob”
Date 37:1	“And Jacob dwelt in . . . Canaan”
Key Word 36:9	“The father of the Edomites”
Note:	Jacob added his brother’s history. Compare Tablet VIII.

Comments on the outline

The story of Joseph (Gen. 37:2b-50), according to Wiseman, contains not Babylonian words, as does the section before it, but Egyptian ones. Its conclusion is also

different. Perhaps it was collected by Moses, in order to create a transition to the events which he had witnessed. Joshua then added Moses' death and continued the account, which had become the chronicle of the people of Israel. Joshua's death was then recorded by another (Joshua 24:29-33), and the history of Israel was then further recorded by other writers.

Tablet XI, written by Jacob ("This is the history of Jacob"), supplements Esau's Tablet X and Tablet IX, which describes Isaac's life and was written by both brothers. The description of location and the time is obvious.

Usually the oldest son wrote the continuation of the family chronicle, which was then taken over by the second son, so that the responsibility for the Genesis account reverts twice to the line of salvation history (Heilsgeschichte). This also occurs in Tablets VII and VIII. Ishmael took over the responsibility for the chronicle directly from his grandfather, Terah. Terah's account poses a problem for our model. If his father died at 119, the better documented reading, he died too late to appear in the account. The age of 69 for his death would fit better. Genesis 11:26 is interesting. The report of Terah's age, 70 years old, can hardly be his age at the birth of his sons, for they would then be triplets. It is mathematically impossible, as well, as Genesis 5:32 demonstrates. According to our model, the text indicates the time at which the chronicle was passed on to the next generation.

In Tablet V, Shem adds the account of the three books (Tablet IV). Tablets III and IV contains the history of the Flood. Noah recorded his account before entering the Ark and passed it on to his sons, who witnessed the Flood themselves. This explains not only the wealth of detail and the exact recording of the days, but also the source of all of the written accounts of the creation and of the Flood. Noah

and his sons passed their accounts on to their children, who later became the ancestors of the nations, who corrupted the reports they had received. In Genesis 5:32, we again find an inexplicable notation of age. As with Terah, 500 years can hardly be Noah's age at the birth of his sons, but it could indicate the date of the tablet, shortly before the Flood, when the sons already had families of their own.

Tablet II is also most interesting, as it deviates from the usual pattern, "This is the book of the history of Adam." It is clear that the *toledoth* formula is a literary method of indicating the transmission of a tradition. Adam wrote a "book" in which he recorded the facts of the creation which he had witnessed: the planting of the Garden of Eden, the creation of Eve, the Fall and the history of his oldest children, as far as he experienced it.

If Tablet II is difficult, Tablet I is explosive. If our model is accurate, the first tablet should be dated "the day of the creation of the heavens and the earth." Who, besides God himself, could have recorded this account? Note that the text names no author, in spite of the definite date. Did God give Adam a written account of the creation, which included all the facts which Adam had not witnessed?

This is, of course, only a model. It explains many of the details of the texts and their circumstances, but its greatest problem is the question of whether the *toledoth* formula belongs to the previous text (according to our model) or to the following one (the theory of most interpretations). It is also possible that Moses modified some aspects, as the description of some locations would seem to indicate. In any case, the model demonstrates that there are indeed scientifically credible alternatives to contemporary theories of multiple sources for Genesis, and that we need not sacrifice belief in the infallibility of Scripture to scientific research. *C&S*

Still believe the earth revolves around State education?

Since my youngest daughter has completed our family's home education programme, I have begun substitute teaching occasionally. I was recently subbing in an elementary classroom in a private school of some reputation. The second grade teacher from the class next door came in and asked me a question, but she prefaced it with, "Now did you always home school, or did you teach in a real school before that?"

"Before I had children I used to teach in a

conventional school," I replied. "OK, I can ask you this question then. Does the sun go around the earth? Or does the earth go around the sun?"

Surprised, I said, "Well, the earth goes around the sun."

"The teacher still needed clarification: "Does the earth go all the way round the sun in just one day?"

"No, no. It takes 365 days for the earth to go round the sun." This answer only puzzled her the more, and so I had to explain that we have night and day because the earth is rotating on its axis.

This was a 25-year old, state certified teacher . . .

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