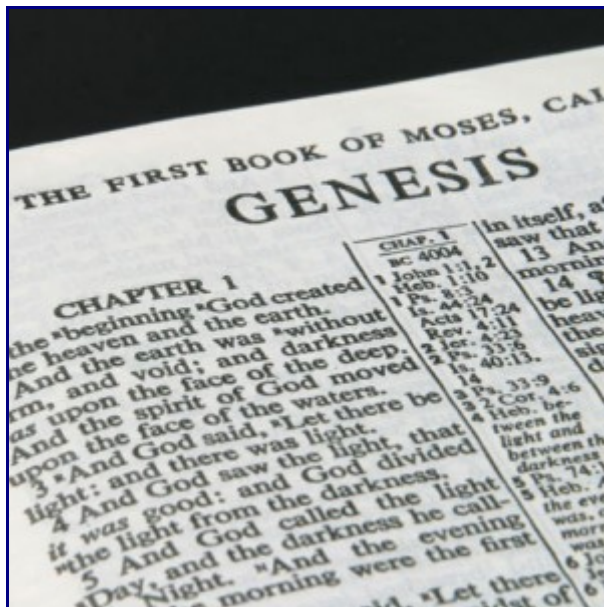


The Origins of Genesis: Solving the Toledoth Mystery

- [By admin](#)
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Abstract

How did the book of Genesis come to be? We know Moses wrote it, but where did he get it? All the events in Genesis were history to him. Every story occurred before he was born. Did he have access to historical records? Did written records exist back then? Or, did he write Genesis from oral tradition? Or, perhaps he got it directly from God by dictation on Mt. Sinai?

These questions and others may be answered, in part, by recent archeological finds and some seemingly peculiar phrases that occur all throughout the book of Genesis.

Part I: Introduction to Genesis toledoth phrases

There is little doubt among Bible scholars and commentators that the *toledoth* statements in the book of Genesis are an important key to its literary structure. The Hebrew term, *toledoth* means *account, record, genealogy, family line* (KM Hebrew Dictionary). It's often translated *history, generations, or account*. It occurs several times in Genesis and always seems to mark a major account division when found in particular phrases—"These are the **generations** of...", "This is the **account** of...", "This is the **history** of..." etc. In addition, in most cases, a name of a patriarch is attached—for example, "This is the account of Noah." The following is a list of every *toledoth* phrase found in the book of Genesis (NIV). (words translated from *toledoth* are bolded)

This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created.... (Gen. 2:4a)

This is the written **account** of Adam's line.... (Gen. 5:1a)

This is the **account** of Noah. (Gen. 6:9a)

This is the **account** of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons

after the flood. (Gen. 10:1)

These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their **lines of descent**, within their nations. (Gen. 10:32a)

This is the **account** of Shem. (Gen. 11:10a)

This is the **account** of Terah. (Gen. 11:27a)

This is the **account** of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. (Gen. 25:12)

This is the **account** of Abraham's son Isaac. (Gen. 25:19a)

This is the **account** of Esau (that is, Edom). (Gen. 36:1)

This is the **account** of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. (Gen. 36:9)

This is the **account** of Jacob. (Gen. 37:2a)

It's also significant that the word *genesis*, itself, is derived from the greek translation of *toledoth*. It would appear the jewish scribes, who translated Genesis into greek (The Septuagint (LXX)), believed this word to be so significant, they chose it as the title for the book.¹ Had they translated it to english, it may have been known today as The Book of *Accounts*, or The Book of *Histories*.

The Toledoth Mystery

That said, some mystery also surrounds this term. To the modern reader, the most natural way to look at a *toledoth* phrase would be as a subject introduction. One would expect a phrase like the "account of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (2:4) to introduce an account of the creation of the heavens and the earth. One would expect the "book of the account of Adam" (5:1) to introduce an account about Adam. One would expect the "account of Jacob" (37:2) to introduce an account about Jacob. The problem is, they don't.

The first occurrence of a *toledoth* phrase is found in Genesis 2:4. "**This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created....**" But rather than introducing a creation account, it introduces the account about the Garden of Eden. So why isn't it called the *account of Eden*? Another example is the account of Terah (11:27). One might expect it to introduce an account of Terah's life, but what follows is an account of Abraham's life, with only insignificant mentions of Terah. One might wonder why it wasn't called the *account of Abraham*. And perhaps the most obvious example is found in Gen. 37:2. It reads,

"This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers...."

After the initial introduction of Jacob, a long narrative about Joseph's life begins. So why not "the account of Joseph."? Why would a large account of Joseph's life be titled as Jacob's account?

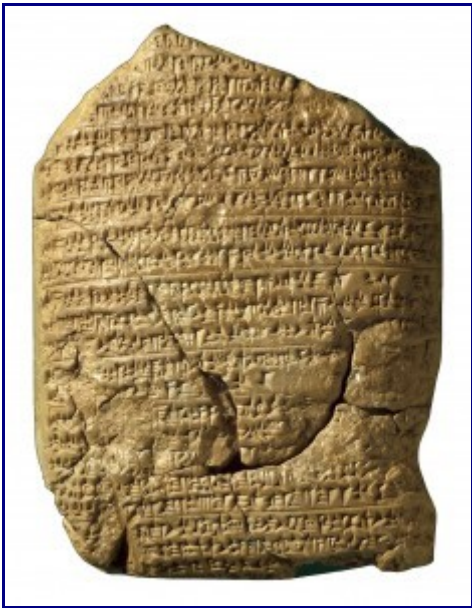
Some commentators explain this by preferring the translation "generations." Perhaps the *toledoth* statements are introductions of the generations which come from the patriarchs mentioned. Thus the *toledoth* of Terah would be about one or more of his descendants, as would the *toledoth* of Jacob. But this explanation doesn't work consistently. The *toledoth* of Noah (6:9a), for instance, is followed by an actual account of Noah (with only

insignificant mentions of his sons).

Other commentators understand the *toledoth* as introductions to genealogies. Both Adam's and Shem's *toledoth* phrases are followed by genealogies (5:1, 11:10), and the *toldedoth* of Noah's sons is followed by the Table of Nations (10:1). But the majority are *not* followed by genealogies, in fact, most precede narratives.

And, perhaps, most puzzling of all, why doesn't Abraham have a *toledoth* introduction? He is, without question, the most significant patriarch in Genesis. The mystery deepens.

Archeology To The Rescue



Thankfully, a much better solution has come to light, particularly in the last century, thanks to archeological discoveries. British Air Commodore PJ Wiseman deserves a debt of gratitude for looking closely at these discoveries and putting forth a new theory known commonly as the *Genesis Tablet Theory* or *Wiseman Hypothesis*.

While touring Mesopotamia in the Royal Air Force in the early 1900s, Wiseman developed a strong interest in ancient civilizations and archeology. During this time, he visited several archeological dig sites where thousands of ancient written documents in the form of clay tablets had been unearthed. Though, not an archeologist himself, he did manage to gain access to some of the greatest archeologists of his day and attain invaluable insights from them. Damien Mackey comments:

He had the privilege of being *in situ* at times during Sir Leonard Woolley's excavations at Ur and Professor S. Langdon's at Kish and Jemdet Nasr. Though he could not actually read the cuneiform tablets being unearthed in their thousands by these legends of archaeology, P.J. Wiseman took a vital interest in all that was going on and was able to cross check his own ideas with these experts.²

It was during this time Wiseman became familiar with some of the literary practices of ancient scribes—in particular, their use of *colophons*. Put simply, *colophons* are concluding remarks found at the end of written documents which identify the author or owner of the document, along with other important information. Wiseman noticed that most of the tablets discovered contained these concluding signatures and soon made the connection between them and the Genesis *toledoth*. What if these phrases were not titles? What if they were concluding remarks per the literary customs of that era, and what

if the names attached were not in reference to subject-matter, but rather owner/authorship?

Wiseman was particularly intrigued with *the book of the account of Adam* found in Genesis 5:1. Literally from the hebrew, "This [is] the account of the book of Adam." A modern reader would tend to view this as an introduction to the genealogy that followed, but an ancient reader may have done just the opposite. He may have looked backward, connecting it to the preceding account which started all the way back in the Garden of Eden. And he may have looked at the name attached—Adam—as the original author/owner of that account. Wiseman comments,

...a careful examination of the use of the name of the person stated at the end of "These are the origins of . . ." makes it clear that it refers to the owner or writer of the tablet, rather than to the history of the person named, i.e. "These are the origins of Noah," does not necessarily mean "This is the history about Noah," but the history written or possessed by Noah. When in Gen 11.27, we read: "These are the generations of Terah," we do not read much about Terah, for it simply records that he was the son of Nahor. The phrase is intended to indicate that Terah either wrote or had written for him the list of his ancestors found in verses 10 to 27.³

This is the basic essence of Wiseman's hypothesis. He proposed that the individual patriarchs attached to *toledoth* phrases were the original authors of the source documents Moses used. Thus, the "book of the account of Adam" was actually an account originally written down by Adam—the same with Noah, Shem, Terah, etc.

Genesis Authorship

Now one might immediately object that if Adam wrote a portion of Genesis how can it also be considered a book of Moses? Doesn't this cast doubt on Mosaic authorship? Not at all, in fact, it supports it. For while the Bible is clear Moses was the author of Genesis, one might wonder where he got his information? The entire book was history to him. None of it happened during his lifetime. The only way he could have received it was from passed down historical records, or by direct revelation.

And while both options are possible, it should be noted that there are some difficulties with direct revelation. Had Moses received Genesis this way, it would be the only instance in Scripture where a narrative of this type was received by that method. Henry Morris points out:

"Visions and revelations of the Lord" normally have to do with prophetic revelations of the future (as in Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation, etc.). The direct dictation method of inspiration was used mainly for promulgation of specific laws and ordinances (as in the Ten Commandments, the Book of Leviticus, etc.). The Book of Genesis, however, is entirely in the form of narrative records of historical events. Biblical parallels to Genesis are found in such books as Kings, Chronicles, Acts, and so forth. In all of these, the writer either collected previous documents and edited them (e.g., I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles), or else recorded the events which he had either seen himself or had ascertained from others who were witnesses (e.g., Luke, Acts).⁴

And what do we make of this reference to a book in chapter 5? "[This is the book of the generations of Adam.](#)" *Sepher*, in hebrew means *book (as a scroll or tablet), scroll, letter, certificate, deed, dispatch* (KM Hebrew Dictionary). If Genesis was really given directly to

Moses from God, why would God reference another written account? But, if Moses used source material (under God's supernatural guidance), it makes perfect sense. Moses was merely citing his source.

Antediluvian Writings?

But wait! Moses was using a document originally authored by Adam? Did writing even exist then?

Interestingly, a little more than a century ago, most critics believed writing didn't even exist during Moses' time. As Wiseman pointed out,

Until the beginning of last century, the only known contemporary history which had been written earlier than 1000 B.C. was the earlier part of the Old Testament....

It was because the earlier books of the Bible stood alone and unique in this claim to have been written centuries before any other piece of writing then known to the world, that a century ago critics endeavored to prove that they must have been written at a date much later than Moses.⁵

This belief, of course, was overturned by the very tablets Wiseman was examining. Wiseman goes on to say,

ONE of the most remarkable facts which has emerged from archaeological research, is that the art of writing began in the earliest historical times known to man. It is now generally admitted that history first dawned in the land known as Babylonia, and that the civilization there is older than that of Egypt, yet, however far the excavator in Babylonia digs down into the past, he finds written records to illuminate his discoveries.⁵

The idea that Moses or his ancestors didn't keep historical records now flies in the face of what we know of that region and time. Record keeping not only existed, it was extant long before Israel came into existence.

But Adam was the first human and lived before the flood!

So what! Adam was created with the ability to speak the very first day of his creation. He was advanced enough to name all the animals of Eden and even uttered the first line of poetry ever recorded!

"This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man." (Gen. 2:23)

Hebrew poetry is based on parallelism, rather than rhyming words, and we first see this practice—bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh—the day Adam was created. In addition, Adam lived over 900 years (Gen. 5:5) as did most other antediluvians. Is it really hard to believe a form of writing was developed in his lifetime?

Unlocking the Mystery

According to Wiseman's hypothesis, Moses composed Genesis from historical documents passed down to him from the specific ancestors named in the *toledoth* phrases.

The Book of Genesis was originally written on tablets in the ancient script of the time, by the Patriarchs who were intimately concerned with the events related, and whose names are clearly stated. Moreover, Moses, the compiler and editor of the Book, as we now have it, plainly directs attention to the source of his information.⁶

Wiseman also points out that, in each instance where a patriarch's name concludes an account, the events of that account fall within his lifetime, making him a reliable eyewitness, or giving him access to reliable eyewitnesses. Furthermore, he points out the events recorded always end prior to the death of that patriarch, just as we would expect.

(1) In no instance is an event recorded, which the person or persons named could not have written from his own intimate knowledge, or have obtained absolutely reliable information.

(2) It is most significant that the history recorded in the sections outlined above, ceases in all instances before the death of the person named, yet in most cases it is continued almost up to the date of death, or the date on which it is stated that the tablets were written.⁷

These are the basic keys Wiseman offers to finally unlock the *toledoth* mystery that has confounded commentators for centuries. I'll offer my assessments at the conclusion of this article, but only after we've examined each *toledoth* phrase against Wiseman's claims to see if his theory holds true.

The Tablet Theory vs. JEDP

Is this the same as JEDP? Absolutely not, in fact, it's just the opposite. JEDP, also known as the Documentary Hypothesis, was first developed by critics of the Bible about 250 years ago, and then later made popular in the 19th century by Karl Heinrich Graf and his student Julius Wellhausen. For this reason, it's also known as the *Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis*. It asserts that Genesis was not authored by Moses at all, but was composed hundreds of years later from 4 separate documents represented in the JEDP acronym. This of course flies in the face of numerous references to Mosaic authorship in the Bible, as well as solid Jewish tradition which establishes Moses as the author.

The Genesis Tablet Theory, on the other hand, affirms Mosaic authorship and defends the authority and antiquity of Genesis. Terry Mortenson and Bodie Hodge of Answers in Genesis, comment,

Unlike the JEDP model, the Tablet model shows a reverence for the text of Genesis and attention to these explicit divisions provided by the book itself. These divisions represent either oral tradition or written texts passed down by the Genesis patriarchs to their descendants, which Moses then used to put Genesis into its final form under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁸

For more on contrasts between the Tablet Theory and JEDP, see, [Did Moses Write Genesis](#), and [The Tablet Theory of Genesis Authorship](#).

Part II: The Genesis Toledoth in Context

In this next section, we'll scrutinize Wiseman's hypothesis by the text of Genesis, itself.

We'll examine each *toledoth* phrase, in context, to see if Wiseman's claims can be validated.

Chapter and verse markers

Before we begin, a brief discussion of chapter and verse markers is necessary. Wiseman suggests (and most would agree) that chapter/verse markers should not play any role in discerning where accounts begin and end. They are not inspired and were not part of the original manuscripts (For more on the origins of chapters and verses, see: [Where Do Bible Chapter and Verse Numbers Come From?](#)). They were added to the Bible much later for referencing purposes, but carry no hermeneutical value, in and of themselves. In fact, some chapter/verse divisions may contribute to confusion. For example, at the close of chapter 4 and beginning of 5, we read,

Gen. 4:26 And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Gen. 5:1 **This is the book of the generations of Adam.** In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created. (NASB)

If the reader is under the impression chapter-verse markers are part of the original text, it would only be natural for him to read the book of Adam as a title phrase. But what if the paragraph break is slightly adjusted?

Gen. 4:26 And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD. Gen. 5:1a **This is the book of the generations of Adam.**

1b In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created.

In the latter, the book of Adam (1a) appears to be a concluding remark at the end of an account, while the second half the verse (1b) starts a new account. And both of these arrangements are perfectly acceptable renderings from the original Hebrew. Only context can tell us which should be preferred, and this is our goal in examining these phrases carefully. In each instance, I'll provide 3 translations (NIV, NASB, NKJV).

Toledoth #1

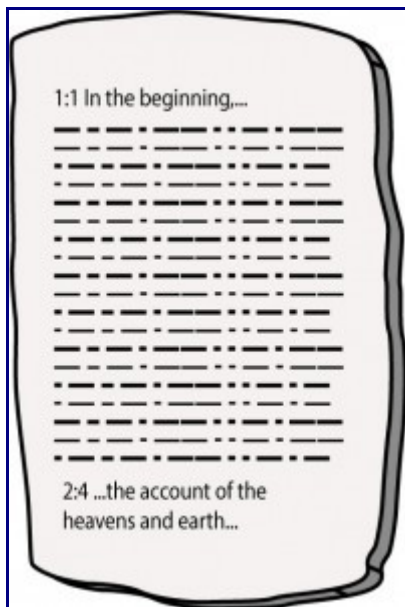
Gen. 2:4 This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens— (NIV)

Gen. 2:4 This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. (NASB)

Gen. 2:4 This is the **history** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, (NKJV)

This is perhaps the easiest *toledoth* statement to decipher. It seems very likely this is a concluding statement. What precedes it, is an account of the creation of the heavens and earth. What follows it, is not a creation account, at all, but, rather, the account of the Garden of Eden. If this was meant to be a title, it should have been called by another name, perhaps “the account of Eden” or something pertaining to the subject matter that follows.



This particular *toledoth* is unique in that it does not have a patriarch’s name attached. This is probably because the majority of the account that precedes it—the creation account—contains events no man could have witnessed. If Wiseman’s theory is true, each *toledoth* patriarch would have been an eyewitnesses, or had access to eyewitnesses of the events recorded. It would have been *his* account that *he, himself*, compiled and documented.

But no man witnessed the creation. The whole story must have come from God who, perhaps, gave it to Adam or Enoch to write down. And since these did not produce it, themselves, perhaps they felt it should not bear their names and, instead, be named after the subject matter.

All things considered, it would seem this *toledoth* affirms Wiseman’s claims, being a colophon that refers backward to the account that precedes it, starting in Gen. 1:1 and ending with this *toledoth* signature in Gen. 2:4.

Toledoth #2

Gen. 5:1 This is the written **account** of Adam’s line.

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. (NIV)

Gen. 5:1 This is the book of the **generations** of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. (NASB)

Gen. 5:1 This is the book of the **genealogy** of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. (NKJV)

This *toledoth* phrase, at fist glance, appears to be a subject title, introducing the genealogy that follows. Notice the NKJV prefers the translation *genealogy*, seeming to link it to the genealogy that follows. Notice, also, this *toledoth* appears in the first sentence of chapter

5, giving it the appearance of being linked to the contents of chapter 5.

But, there are problems with this being a title. First, why would a genealogy from Adam to Noah, be called the genealogy of Adam? Genealogies are lists of ancestors not descendants. They, normally, are the property of the last descendant on the list, not the first ancestor. Take a look at the genealogy of Jesus Christ mentioned in Matthew 1.

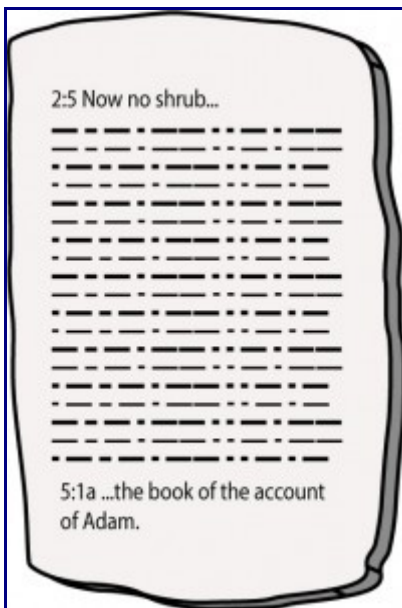
Matt. 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

What follows is *not* a list of Jesus' descendants, but ancestors all the way up to Abraham. Abraham is the first ancestor, and Jesus the last descendant. Thus, it is rightly called the genealogy of Jesus Christ, not the genealogy of Abraham.

If the genealogy in Gen. 5 belongs to Adam, we would expect to see a list of his ancestors, which, of course, he did not have. Instead it's a list of Noah's ancestors, and for this reason, it likely has nothing to do with the "book of Adam" *toledoth*.

You'll notice, also, the NIV translation places a paragraph break between Gen. 5:1a and 1b. While they may not have had Wiseman's hypothesis in mind, this, at least, shows that a paragraph break is possible immediately after this *toledoth* phrase, meaning it's not necessarily linked to what follows.

Note, also, that "family line," per the NIV translation, is not in the Hebrew, but was added by the translators. The passage literally reads, "This [is] the book of the accounts of Adam."



So let's look, now, to the preceding account, which Wiseman believes is linked to this *toledoth*. The account that precedes contains the planting of the Garden of Eden, the Fall, and the murder of Abel. It, also, contains a list of Cain's descendants, 6 generations deep, and the birth of Seth who replaced Abel. Just as Wiseman asserts, all of these events would have occurred during Adam's 930 year lifespan. All of it could have been witnessed by Adam himself, or someone he had access to. And he was the only man to directly witness events before the Fall. The few events that happened prior to his creation (or while he slept), could have been made known to him by God whom he, originally, had direct access to.

All things considered, it fits well with Wiseman's hypothesis. *The book of the account of Adam* may, very well, be the colophon signature of Adam, himself, pointing back to the preceding account which spans from Gen. 2:5 to Gen. 5:1a.

Toledoth #3

Gen. 6:9 This is the **account** of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (NIV)

Gen. 6:9 These are *the records of the **generations*** of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. (NASB)

Gen. 6:9 This is the **genealogy** of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. (NKJV)

This account, also, would seem to work as an introductory subject title, with content about Noah following directly after it. But it would also work as a closing signature in accord with Wiseman's hypothesis. The preceding account begins with a genealogy list that should be considered Noah's, as he the last individual descendant listed (the mention of Noah's sons breaks the pattern, and seems to be an addendum). Also, preceding this *toledoth*, is the account of the sons of god, the announcement of God's coming judgement, and His extended grace to Noah. Having lived 600 years before the flood, all of this likely occurred during Noah's lifetime, making him an ideal chronicler.

Of note, also, is the opening line of the account that follows this *toledoth*.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. (Gen. 6:9b)



If Noah was the author, this would be a peculiar way to begin his account. Righteous men, generally, don't tout their own righteousness. But if Wiseman is correct, this is not Noah's account, but the beginning of a new account written by his sons. It's much more natural for sons to speak of their father's righteousness.

Note also, in the NIV translation, the paragraph break in the middle of verse (just as in the previous example), showing this phrase is not necessarily linked to what follows.

All things considered, this also works well with Wiseman's hypothesis. The account spans from Gen. 5:1b to Gen. 6:9a. All events likely happened during Noah's lifetime, and he was, likely, the owner of the genealogy that linked him to Adam. Noah may have written this account, himself (perhaps on a clay tablet), and preserved it on the Ark, with

Adam's tablet and the Creation tablet.

Toledoth #4

Gen. 10:1 This is the **account** of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the flood. (NIV)

Gen. 10:1 Now these are **the records of the generations** of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. (NASB)

Gen. 10:1 Now this *is* the **genealogy** of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And sons were born to them after the flood. (NKJV)

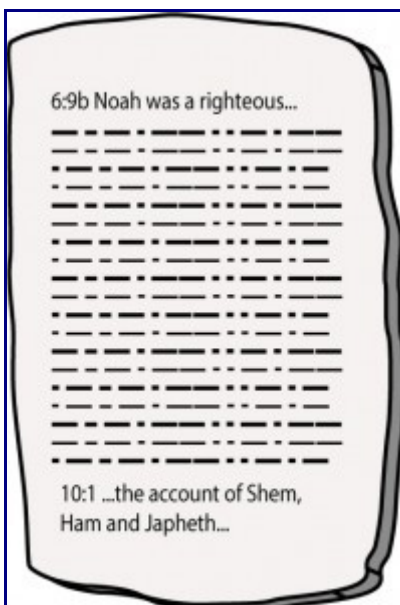
This toledoth is unique in that it has 3 names attached, instead of just 1. All 3 of Noah's sons are listed, possibly indicating a joint effort. All 3 would have witnessed the events preceding this *toledoth*. They each lived approximately 100 years before the Flood, and, presumably many centuries after. They were eyewitnesses to the construction of the Ark, to events onboard, and to events that occurred after the Flood. And, as mentioned, it would seem appropriate for them to open the account declaring their father's righteousness. "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."

In fairness, it could also be an introductory title. The NKJV uses the translation, *genealogy*, no doubt with the Table of Nations in mind, which immediately follows.

Descendants of all three sons are mentioned in this table, seeming to link it to this *toledoth*. And it's not technically a genealogy in the same sense as the ones in chapters 5 and 11, so perhaps the title could bear the ancestors names.

The problem is, the Table of Nations already have a closing *toledoth* phrase.

Gen. 10:32 These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their **lines of descent**, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood. (NIV)



Literally, this reads, "These [are] the clans of the sons of Noah according to their **accounts** by their nations." And unlike other *toledoth* phrases, nobody believes this one to be introductory. It is, without a doubt, a concluding remark, which suggests the prior *toledoth* is not needed, and is not linked to these records.

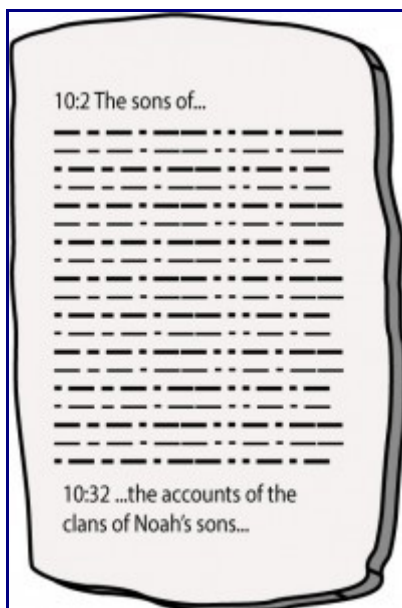
All things considered, it seems the *account of Shem, Ham and Japheth* is still better understood as a concluding signature that points back to the previous narrative, which spans from Gen. 6:9b to Gen. 10:1. It covering God's calling of Noah, the construction of the Ark, the Flood, events that took place on the Ark, and the many events that took place after the Flood. Shem, Ham and Japheth would have been eyewitnesses to all of these events, and the perfect candidates to chronicle them, just as Wiseman suggested.

Toledoth #5

Gen. 10:32 These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood. (NIV)

Gen. 10:32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood. (NASB)

Gen. 10:32 These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their nations; and from these the nations were divided on the earth after the flood. (NKJV)



As discussed above, there can be no debate about the nature of this *toledoth* statement. It is clearly a concluding remark as context leaves no other option.

Literally, it reads, "These [are] the clans of the sons of Noah according to their accounts by their nations."

Record keeping was common among the early postdiluvians, and perhaps someone in antiquity (like Shem who lived 500 years after the Flood) collected this data from the various clans of the earth and compiled them into the master account we now know as the Table of Nations. Ownership is attributed to the "clans of the Son's of Noah." The account spans from Gen. 10:2 to Gen. 10:32, ending with this *toledoth* phrase. It definitely supports Wiseman's hypothesis as a concluding colophon signature.

Toledoth #6

Gen. 11:10 This is the account of Shem.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. (NIV)

Gen. 11:10 These are *the records of the generations* of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arphaxad two years after the flood; (NASB)

Gen. 11:10 This *is* the genealogy of Shem: Shem was one hundred years old, and begot Arphaxad two years after the flood. (NKJV)

This *toledoth* has the name Shem (alone) attached to it. It is preceded by the Tower of Babel account, and followed by a genealogy which shows him to be the ancestor of Terah. Again, it may seem appropriate to link this to the genealogy that follows, but, as discussed in *toledoth 2*, genealogies are generally lists of ancestors, not descendants. Since the last individual descendant mentioned is Terah, it should logically be considered his genealogy. And it just so happens that the *toledoth* signature of Terah is listed at the conclusion of this genealogy.

What precedes this *toledoth*, on the other hand, is the Tower of Babel account where God confused the languages of the early postdiluvians who were building a city.

Could this event possibly have been recorded by Shem? Didn't this happen hundreds of years after the Flood?

Actually, Shem would have been the perfect chronicler of this event. Many don't realize that he lived an amazing 500 years after the Flood, and outlived several generations of his descendants. He outlived Arphaxad (who lived 438 years), Shelah (who lived 433 years), Peleg (who lived 239 years), Reu (who lived 239 years), Serug (who lived 230 years), Nahor (who lived 148 years) and Terah (who lived 205 years). In fact, amazingly, if the genealogical data is accurate (and I believe it is), he was still alive when Isaac was born. Some believe Shem may have been *Melchizedek*, the righteous king, whom Abraham paid tithes to (Gen. 14:18-20), but that's a different discussion.



Shem was a very unique character in human history, not only living on both sides of the Flood, but also on both sides of Babel when the languages were

confused. He also witnessed the dramatic decrease in lifespans after the flood. We would be hard pressed to find a better chronicler of ancient events.

Note also, in the NIV translation, that a paragraph break is inserted in the middle of verse 10, showing this *toledoth* is not necessarily linked to the genealogy that follows.

All things considered, this *toledoth* statement, also, fits well with Wiseman's hypothesis. It may be a concluding signature, linked to the preceding account of the Tower of Babel, which spans from Gen. 11:1 to Gen. 11:10a, and happened during Shem's lifetime.

Toledoth #7

Gen. 11:27 This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. (NIV)

Gen. 11:27 Now these are *the records of the generations* of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot. (NASB)

Gen. 11:27 This *is the genealogy* of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran begot Lot. (NKJV)

As mentioned above, genealogies are generally lists of ancestors belonging to their descendants. Their purpose is to show a link to a certain ancestor, often for legal purposes. Terah is the last individual descendant mentioned in the preceding genealogy, and so it, likely, belongs to him (as with Noah's genealogy, the mention of Terah's sons breaks the pattern and should be considered an addendum).



The account that follows Terah's *toledoth* mentions the 3 sons of Terah, and then begins the long narrative of Abraham's life. If it is a title, it's a peculiar one. Why name it the account of Terah? Why not the account of Abraham?

It could, however, merely be indicating that these are the accounts of the descendants of Terah, as the NASB "*generations*" translation suggests. But why does it ignore the other 2 sons, and focusses only on Abraham?

Note also, the NIV, here again, places a paragraph break in the middle of verse 27, showing it is not necessarily linked to the narrative that follows.

All things considered, the *toledoth* of Terah seems much more likely to be a concluding signature, in accord with Wiseman's hypothesis. The preceding genealogy spans from Gen. 11:10b to Gen. 11:27a. It links Terah to his ancestor Shem, and it's likely Terah would have owned a record like this.

Toledoth #8

Gen. 25:12 This is the **account** of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham. (NIV)

Gen. 25:12 Now these are *the records of the generations* of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham; (NASB)

Gen. 25:12 Now this *is the genealogy* of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. (NKJV)

Up to this point, the Genesis *toledoth* phrases are proving to be compatible with Wiseman's hypothesis. All of them could be the concluding signatures of the patriarchs who wrote or owned them. And all of them follow narratives that happened within their lifetimes', making them ideal witnesses to chronicle these events.

But that pattern is about to end. We now come to the very long account of Abraham's life. Unlike the relatively brief narratives that precede it, this one spans more than 13 chapters. We can only speculate, but this may mark an advancement in writing techniques. Perhaps the original source of this account had access superior mediums, such as parchment paper instead of clay. We know the early Egyptians developed writing parchment. Perhaps Abraham picked up on these new methods during his time in Egypt, and passed them to his descendants.

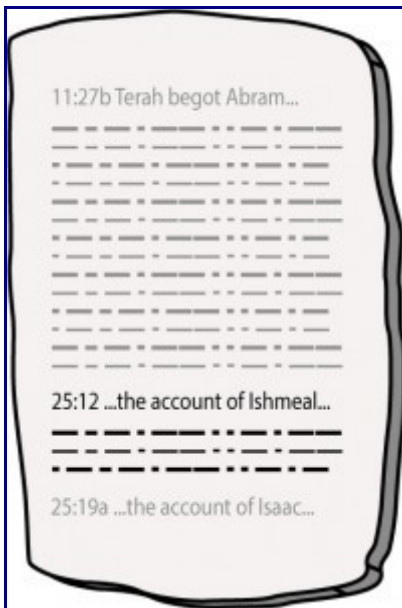
Regardless, at the end of this long account, we might expect to see the *toledoth* signature of Abraham, or, better yet, Isaac who had good access to him. Instead we see Ishmael. *Huh?*

Unlike the other *toledoth*, where the patriarchs mentioned would have been ideal witnesses, this one doesn't work. Ishmael was banished from Abraham's household as a child and would not have had the access, nor proper motivation to undertake such a task. There is precedence for sons writing their father's accounts, but not estranged sons who barely knew their fathers.

To further complicate things, the account that immediately follows Ishmael's *toledoth* is composed of 6 short verses about his family who settled near the eastern border of Egypt (Gen. 25:12 to 18). There is no question, therefore, this *toledoth* serves as a title or introductory signature for what follows, which breaks the pattern we've observed so far.

I would refrain, though, from throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as many commentators do. Curt Sewell has offered a theory that deserves consideration. He considers this account of Ishmael to be a *sub-tablet*, which has been embedded into Isaac's tablet (which we'll look at next). Sewell theorizes that, instead of Moses working with separate tablets, perhaps Isaac's very large tablet (or scroll) included this short embedded account from Ishmael.

We know Isaac had contact with his brother after Abraham's death (Gen. 25:9). This would have been the perfect opportunity for them to exchange histories, and it would seem appropriate for Isaac to include Ishmael's family history in their father's account.



If Isaac was writing Abraham's account on a clay tablet or scroll, and he wanted to insert Ishmael's information at the end, he would need a way to signal to the readers where the new account started. Perhaps placing Ishmael's *toledoth* signature as a heading before his account made the most sense. Perhaps this is why the embedded *toledoth* accounts in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Ruth and 1 Chronicles serve as titles. I'll discuss those, more, toward the end of this article.

Isaac's signature would be at the very bottom of the entire account, indicating him to be the master chronicler, while Ishmael's title signature would appear before his family information (see tablet diagram to the right).

It is undeniable that Ishmael's *toledoth* is an introductory statement. It definitely deviates from Wiseman's hypothesis, but, if it's an embedded account, added to Isaac's larger account (a big "if"), its basic tenants are preserved. I'll discuss this more in the next section.

Toledoth #9

Gen. 25:19 This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, (NIV)

Gen. 25:19 Now these are the records of the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; (NASB)

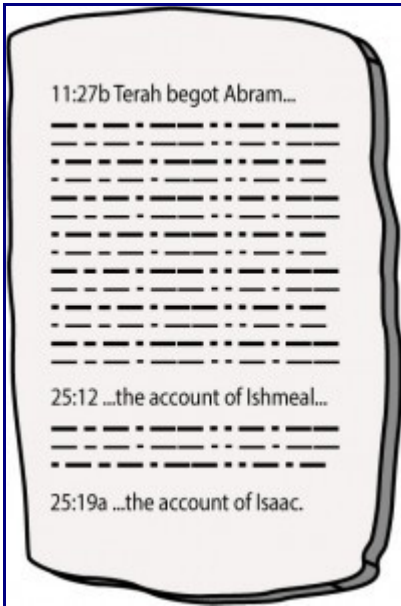
Gen. 25:19 This *is* the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. (NKJV)

As discussed in the previous section, this *toledoth* fits well as a concluding signature, if it is linked to Abraham's account with Ishmael's embedded account at the very end.

Abraham's account starts in Genesis 11:27b and ends in 25:11. Ishmael's starts in 25:12 and ends in 25:18, and Isaac's signature is at the end of the entire account in 25:19a.

While this is a modification of Wiseman's hypothesis, it still fits with his basic idea that *toledoth* phrases in Genesis can be concluding colophons and bear the signatures of the accounts' original authors/owners. Isaac would have had direct access to his father and would have witnessed large portions of the events recorded, himself. And he had contact

with Ishmael at his father's funeral, where he could have obtained his brother's records.



In fairness, Isaac's *toledoth* could also be considered a subject title, as an account of Isaac's life does follow. But, it also covers Jacob's life, and eventually records Isaac's death (ruling him out as the author). But if it is merely a subject introduction, one might still wonder why Jacob's name isn't included in the title, considering how much of the narrative is dedicated to him.

All things considered, I like Sewell's explanation better. I think Isaac's *toledoth* is a concluding signature, linked to the preceding account of Abraham's life, spanning from Gen. 11:27b to Gen. 25:19a. Isaac, indeed, could have been the author, and could have embedded the small account of Ishmael's history, from Gen. 25:12 to 25:18, creating a very large master tablet or scroll (see diagram to the right).

Toledoth #10 & #11

Gen. 36:1 This is the account of Esau (that is, Edom). (NIV)

Gen. 36:1 Now these are *the records of the generations* of Esau (that is, Edom). (NASB)

Gen. 36:1 Now this *is the genealogy* of Esau, who is Edom. (NKJV)

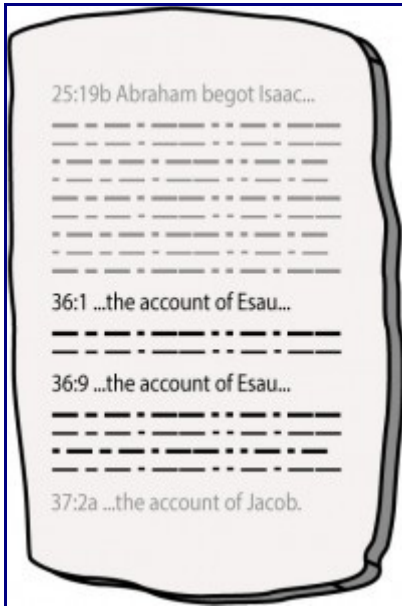
Gen. 36:9 This is the account of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. (NIV)

Gen. 36:9 These then are *the records of the generations* of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. (NASB)

Gen. 36:9 And this *is the genealogy* of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir. (NKJV)

If the previous modification to Wiseman's hypothesis is valid, these next 2 *toledoth* would also have to be considered embedded accounts. It is highly unlikely Esau would undertake the task of chronicling his father and brother's lives, just as it was unlikely for Ishmael. Curt Sewell suggests these 2 accounts, also, were embedded into a larger account—Jacob's account. And just as Ishmael's *toledoth* served as a title signature to indicate where it

started, so do these.



Just like Isaac, Jacob inserted these 2 accounts of Esau right at the end of his long detailed account which starts in Gen. 25:19b (we'll discuss Jacob's *toledoth*, in detail, in the next section). The first account of Esau is found in Gen. 36:1. It is a narrative of him taking wives and moving his family to hill country of Seir. The second begins in Gen. 36:9 and is a list of his descendants, and others that lived in his land.

We know that later in life, Jacob and Esau reconciled (Gen. 33), just prior to Isaac's passing. Though Esau moved away, correspondence could have taken place, and written histories exchanged.

Without question, both *toledoth* of Esau are introductory. But if they were embedded accounts and placed at the end of Jacob's larger account, it makes sense why they would need to be introductory (see diagram to the right).

Toledoth #12

Gen. 37:2 This is the account of Jacob.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. (NIV)

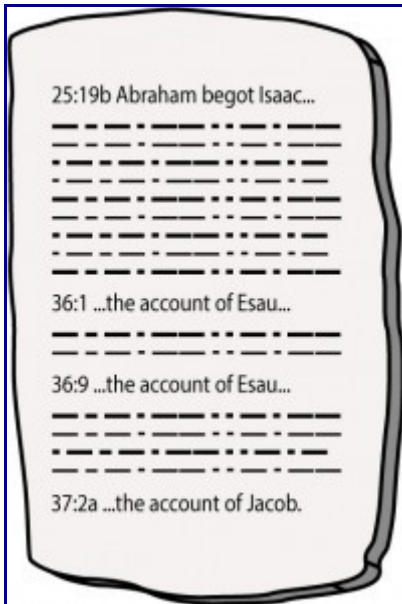
Gen. 37:2 These are *the records of the* generations of Jacob.

Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was *still* a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father. (NASB)

Gen. 37:2 This *is* the history of Jacob.

Joseph, *being* seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brothers. And the lad *was* with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to his father. (NKJV)

In this last *toledoth* of Genesis, we see Jacob's signature at the end of a large account, spanning from Gen. 25:19b to 37:2a. This account includes narratives of his father Isaac's life, as well as his own. As with Shem, Ham, Japheth and Isaac, Jacob would have been the perfect witness to record all the events of his father's life. His authorship of the preceding account fits well with Wiseman's hypothesis, if the 2 accounts of Esau had been embedded into a master tablet (or scroll).



Could Jacob's *toledoth* be an introductory statement? Notice, in the translations above, all three (not just the NIV) place a paragraph break in the middle of verse 2, indicating it need not be linked to the account that follows. That's likely because what follows is not a narrative about Jacob's at all. It's, almost exclusively, a narrative of Joseph's life.

To me, it's impossible to consider this phrase as introductory, whether a signature or subject title. The textual evidence indicates it is best understood as a concluding signature linked to the preceding account which spans from Gen. 25:19b to Gen. 37:2a and includes the two small embedded accounts of Esau (Gen. 36:1 to 36:8, and 36:9 to 37:1). It all could have been authored by Jacob, as he would be an ideal chronicler and collector of this information.

Joseph's Account

Perhaps the biggest difficulty with Wiseman's Tablet Theory is the fact that Genesis does not end with a *toledoth* phrase. The final verse reads, "So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt." How wonderful it would have been for this to end with, "this is the account of X, Joseph's son." But, no such luck.

There are several explanations that have been put forth for the absence of a closing *toledoth* phrase. Sewell speculates that a colophon of sorts appears in Ex. 1:6.

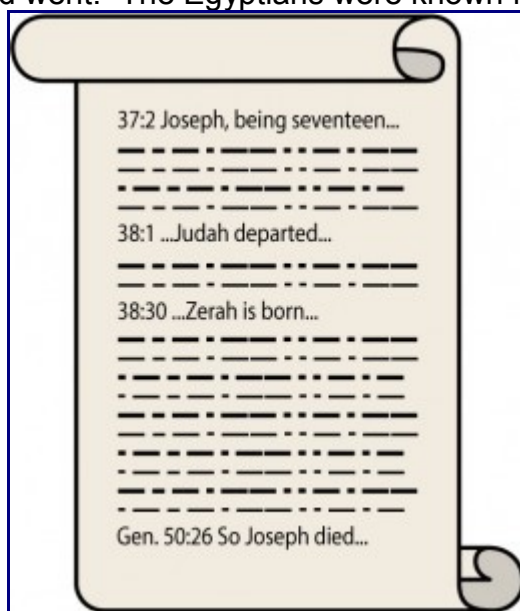
This must be a conjecture, but I think that Exodus 1:6, "And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." could form this closure. It may have been added by Moses, after he inherited all the tablets, and began to combine them.

Those last chapters of Genesis must have been primarily written by Joseph, but of course he couldn't have recorded his own death. These few verses may have been written by one of his surviving brothers.

While possible, there might be simpler explanation. Maybe times changed, and colophons

were no longer a standard literary practice. Think about how much history the book of Genesis covers. From creation to Joseph's death, more than 2,300 years passed.

Dozens of generations and cultures came and went, and it would seem likely that literary practices, also, came and went. The Egyptians were known for engraving stone, but also



wrote on papyrus scrolls.

It may be that this last document was written on a different medium, and the original chronicler remained anonymous.

Regardless, this last section in the book of Genesis does not include an introductory or concluding *toledoth*. The account spans from Gen. 37:2 to Gen. 50:26, starting with Joseph at age 17, and ending with his death and burial at 110. There is a possible embedded account in chapter 38 that seems to have no connection to the main story. It's the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar, in Gen. 38:1-30. No markers are used to identify the author of this account either, which, also, suggests literary practices had changed. Or it could be that the author of this account, received the account directly from Judah and not from records he needed to cite.

Other Toledoth in The Old Testament

In addition to the *toledoth* phrases found in Genesis, we see them elsewhere in the Old Testament (Ex. 6:16, 19, Ex. 28:10, Num.

1:20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 3:1, Ruth 4:18, 1Chr. 1:29, 5:7, 7:2, 4, 9, 8:28, 9:9, 34, 26:31).

The biggest arguments against Wiseman's assertion that *toledoth* phrases are concluding signatures, are these other occurrences, which, virtually always, are introductory. This casts doubt on his colophon theory for many commentators.

But a very good explanation for this may be eluding them. As mentioned earlier, Curt Sewell offers the compelling theory that some accounts may have been embedded into larger accounts, making a title necessary for them to indicate where they start. He made the case that Ishmael's *toledoth* was a title to indicate where it started in Isaac's larger account, and that Esau's 2 *toledoth* were titles to indicate where they started in Jacob's account.

This would seem, also, to explain why other *toledoth* phrases outside of Genesis appear as titles. The other books in the Old Testament read as singular accounts. They are not a compilation of smaller accounts like we see in Genesis. They are, rather, large singular accounts. Thus, any outside account added to these, such as the records of a

particular clan, would have to be considered embedded, and would need a title to indicate where they begin.

Conclusion

The Genesis Tablet Theory (Wiseman Hypothesis) shows a lot of promise, in my opinion. It's not perfect, but, at the very least, it provides good textual evidence that Moses used preexisting documents to compile the Genesis record. The mention of the *book of Adam* in Genesis 5 seems to preclude any other alternative.

I, also, find his colophon theory compelling. In all but 3 cases in Genesis, *toledoth* phrases work well as concluding signatures, referring back to preceding accounts. Only Ishmael's and Esau's *toledoth* deviate, but I find Curt Sewell's sub-tablet explanation to be compelling. Ishmael and Esau would be very out of place as major contributors, but if their small accounts were embedded into the larger accounts of their brothers, everything works out perfectly. Sewell's theory, also, sheds light on other *toledoth* occurrences in the Old Testament, explaining why they appear as titles.

The biggest difficulty is the missing *toledoth* at the end of the book of Genesis. It would have made this study a lot easier. But it's very possible changes in literary practices might be the best explanation for this.

All in all, Wiseman has made a valuable discovery and contribution. Thanks to him, we're much closer to solving the *toledoth* mystery, and understanding the origins of Genesis.

Further reading:

[The Tablet Theory of Genesis Authorship](#)

True Origin

Curt Sewell © 1998-2001 by Curt Sewell

[CreationWiki: Tablet theory](#)

[Did Moses Write Genesis?](#)

Answers in Genesis

by Dr. Terry Mortenson and Bodie Hodge AiG—U.S. June 28, 2011

[Who Wrote Genesis? Are the Toledoth Colophons?](#)

Creation Ministries International

by Charles V Taylor, M.A., Ph.D., PGCE, LRAM, FIL, Cert. Theol.

[The First Book of Moses and The 'Toledoth' of Genesis](#)

By Damien F. Mackey

[Tracing the Hand of Moses in Genesis](#)

By Damien F. Mackey

[Who Wrote Genesis?](#)

Northwest Creation Network

Excerpted from Henry M. Morris, the Genesis Record, pp. 25-30

[Who Wrote Genesis?](#)

A Third Theory

by Paul A. Hughes

[New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis](#) (pdf)

Original book by Air Commodore P. J. Wiseman, C.B.E.

Footnotes:

1. The original Hebrew name for the book of Genesis is *b-ray'sheeth*, "in the beginning" named after the first word in the account.
2. Damien Mackey, [Tracing the Hand of Moses in Genesis](http://www.specialtyinterests.net/Tracing_the_hand_of_moses_in_genesis.html), (March 2005) http://www.specialtyinterests.net/Tracing_the_hand_of_moses_in_genesis.html
3. Air Commodore P. J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*, (Zondervan Publishing House, N.W. Grand Rapids, MI, 1946), 47-48
4. Henry M. Morris, *the Genesis Record*, (Creation-Life., San Deigo, CA, 1976), 25-30
5. Air Commodore P. J. Wiseman, [New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis](#), (Zondervan Publishing House, N.W. Grand Rapids, MI, 1946)
6. Air Commodore P. J. Wiseman, [New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis](#), (Zondervan Publishing House, N.W. Grand Rapids, MI, 1946)
7. Air Commodore P. J. Wiseman, [New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis](#), (Zondervan Publishing House, N.W. Grand Rapids, MI, 1946), 53-54
8. Bodie Hodge and Dr. Terry Mortenson, [Did Moses Write Genesis?](https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/moses/did-moses-write-genesis/), (June, 2011) <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/moses/did-moses-write-genesis/>