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Genesis: Twelve Eyewitness Reports and Genealogies

by Thomas Patrick Arnold, Ph.D., November 2008

Typeset and Comments by David Sielaff, December 2020

Read first the December 1, 2020 Commentary “[Tablets and Genesis](#)”

Then read the “[December 2020 Newsletter](#)”

Genesis: Twelve Eyewitness Reports and Geneologies

The Book of Genesis is a collection of eyewitness historical accounts of select individuals and follows their descendants, leading to the people of Israel. Genesis ends with the death of Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob, renamed Israel. The writings of the authors of the documents were compiled by Moses, who masterfully edited them to teach the Israelite people their history in a single written work beginning with creation. The text tells us whose histories are inside. Evidence of the reliability of Genesis is found in the text itself, no matter the translation. Once this information is understood, the Book of Genesis becomes more interesting than ever.

Background by David Sielaff

I met the author of this article, Dr. Thomas Patrick Arnold, at the 2008 meeting of the Society for Biblical Literature. He had a book table in the exhibits hall promoting his (then) new book, *Two Stage Biblical Creation: Uniting Biblical Insights Uncovered by Ten Notable Creation Theories* (Arlington Heights, IL: Thomas Arnold Publishing, 2007). I featured information from his book in the supplement to the expanded ASK article for August 2017, “[The Story of Creation](#).” I found later that at a different conference around the same time he presented the article reprinted below.

In this article Dr. Arnold explains and updates the evidence of an earlier writer P.J. Wiseman who died in 1948. Wiseman spent much of his life in Iraq and surrounding lands.¹

I believe Dr. Arnold’s updated perspective makes the book by Wiseman even more useful to understand the pattern of the Scriptures. Much credit for what Arnold presents below goes to Wiseman’s landmark work.

¹ P.J. Wiseman’s son, Dr. Donald Wiseman, became a highly regarded Old Testament scholar, curator of Assyriology at the British Museum and author of numerous articles and books on various Old Testament subjects. His work has been useful in my “Israel and Judah” series where I cite his work.

But in my opinion, Arnold improved on Wiseman's evidence as you will read and understand.

The article is in three sections. In the first two sections Arnold presents a background about the two best known theories of the development of the Book of Genesis, and he then shows how each is lacking. In the third section Arnold analyzes P.J. Wiseman's theory. In his analysis Arnold presents his own conclusions as to how Wiseman's theory can be improved to more ideally fit the information in Genesis.

Arnold concludes with his analysis and suggested improvements on Wiseman's theory, which I think are useful and correct. Thomas Arnold is a very concise and detailed writer, so it is necessary for me to explain some terms and clarify some of his points.

Of course, I reformatted the article to the ASK style, and added some footnotes of my own. My information in the footnotes are prefixed by my initials in brackets: [DWS]. All footnotes without prefixes are Dr. Arnold's. I also expand on Arnold's text of the article by adding words [in brackets] for clarification. The full original title of Arnold's work is below:²

Genesis: Twelve Generational Eyewitness Reports and Genealogies

The book *Band of Brothers* is the account of Easy Company of the 101st Airborne Division from boot camp to the capture of Hitler's Eagle's Nest at Berchtesgaden. **"Drawing on hours of interviews with survivors as well as the soldiers' journals and letters, Stephen Ambrose recounts the stories, often in the men's own words, of these American heroes."**³ Ambrose was not there. He compiled the account from the men who were there.

Scripture also emphasizes eyewitness reports. Peter said,

"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

• **2 Peter 1:16, NASB, emphasis added**

Physician and gospel historian Luke was not present at the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Luke interviewed **"those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses"** (Luke 1:2), starting with Mary.⁴

Our Lord identified the whole Torah as from Moses. Moses was an eyewitness of the events of Exodus through Deuteronomy (except his death in Deuteronomy 34:5–12). But Moses was not an eyewitness of any of Genesis. Since Genesis was from Moses, but he was not an eyewitness, what was the source of Genesis?

Three Competing Sources of Genesis Proposed

Three proposed sources of Genesis are (1) the documentary hypothesis, (2) dictation theory, and (3) tablet theory.

² [DWS] **Note:** See my April 2016 Commentary "[Bible Genealogies](#)" and May 2016 Commentary "[Bible Genealogies 2](#)" which give related information on genealogies in general, particularly in Genesis. They exist for a purpose and they have meaning.

³ Stephen Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), back cover of 2001 paperback edition.

⁴ [DWS] **Note:** Luke wrote down the information they gave to him verbally or in writing. I supply greater detail to this idea in my 2019 article "[Memory in Luke](#)." Note again Luke 1:1–3:

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto you in order, most excellent Theophilus ..."

The earliest Old Testament writers before and after the flood, up to the time of Moses, could do the same as Luke did. They could remember or compile documents containing their own family history. These helped descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to understand their lineage and history up to God's chosen people Israel at the time of the Exodus. Moses puts it all together for Israel.

A. The Documentary Hypothesis — Weak on Hard Evidence

Jean Astruc (1684–1766) began, and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) developed, the JEPD documentary hypothesis. Several evidences were adduced: Different names were used for God, and even for Mount Horeb or Sinai. Doublets (Sarah and the king) suggest different sources. [Portions written by] prophets, judges, and priests seem to be in different sections. Writing was unknown at the time of Moses. And camels, mentioned in Genesis, were not domesticated until 1100 BC. So, [supposedly] the Pentateuch was from four late non-eyewitness documents — J, E, P, and D:

- The J, or Jahwist (Yahweh), source document, was written c. 950 BC in Judah, the southern kingdom.
- The E, or Elohist (Elohim), source document, was written c. 850 BC in Israel, the northern kingdom.
- The P, or Priestly, source document, was written c. 450 BC by Aaronic priests who claimed Yahweh was the patron god of Israel, as Chemosh was the patron god of Moab. (Friedman says 715–687 BC.⁵)
- The D, or Deuteronomist, source document, was written c. 621 BC in Jerusalem during the Josiah revival, with additions in the post-captivity 5th century BC Persian period.⁶ Finally, all was pieced together during 550–450 BC by a Redactor.

Fully answering this hypothesis is beyond the purview of this paper.⁷ But I offer a few observations on the documentary hypothesis before moving to my suggested modification of the third option, the tablet theory.

First, contra Wellhausen, writing was common in Moses' time. Since Wellhausen's time 7,000 Ebla, 5,000 Nuzi, and 23,000 Mari tablets (3rd–2nd millennium BC) have been unearthed. In Egypt, the *Biography of Weni* was composed by Weni the Elder, who served three pharaohs, centuries before Moses was trained in the court of Egypt. The hard evidence of ancient writing opposes the JEPD documentary hypothesis.

Second, archaeology shows that texts from both P and D were used together before Wellhausen's supposed redactor put them together. Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay unearthed at Ketef Hinnom two small 7th century BC silver scrolls. They were a blessing from Numbers 6:24–26⁸ (P) and Deuteronomy 7:21–22 (D). Genesis 12:16 says Pharaoh gave Abraham camels. Contra the documentary hypothesis, which originally claimed camels were not domesticated until 1100 BC, Free and Ripinsky describe first dynasty dromedary shaped terra cotta of men riding a camel (c. 3000 BC), a camel-hair string (c. 2500 BC), and a rock drawing of a man with a rope to a dromedary dated to the 6th dynasty (c. 2200 BC), all before Abraham.⁹

Genesis customs match the Ebla, Nuzi, and Mari tablets. For example, the Joseph price of 20 shekels was an early second millennium rate, compared to 30 shekels later. The JEPD hypothesis does not match well with archaeological findings.

Third, Genesis has structural unity. The narratives (except Joseph's) each end with a **colophon or *tôl^e dôt* phrase**: **“These are the generations of”**¹⁰ Kikawada and Quinn conclude [about Genesis], **“We found an**

⁵ [DWS] **Note:** Arnold is referring to Richard Elliot Friedman's book *Who Wrote the Bible?*

⁶ Gordon Wenham, ed., *Exploring the Old Testament: Volume 1, A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

⁷ Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 4th ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); also [see the works of] William F. Albright, Kenneth Kitchen, Kikawada and Quinn, and Bryant G. Wood.

⁸ “[Jerusalem—Silver Plaques Inscribed with the Biblical Priestly Benediction](#),” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archaeological Sites in Israel – Jerusalem – Silver Plaques. Accessed November 3, 2020.

⁹ Joseph P. Free, “Abraham's Camels,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, July 1944, 3:187–193; M. Ripinsky, “[The Camel in Dynastic Egypt](#),” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 71, 1985, 134–141; Randall W. Younker, “Late Bronze Age Camel Petroglyphs in the Wadi Nasib, Sinai,” *Near East Archaeological Society Bulletin*, 1997, 42:47–54.

[DWS] **Note:** For a recent article, see Renato Sala “[The Domestication of Camel in the Literary, Archaeological and Petroglyph Records](#)” in the *Journal of Arid Land Studies*, (2017) 26-4, 205–211.

¹⁰ P.J. Wiseman, *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis: A Case for Literary Unity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977). [DWS] **Note:** The link is to the complete PDF of the 1977 reprint. Forward by Donald Wiseman. The latest reprint is 1985.]

author with such complete mastery over his materials (whatever their source) that it makes no literary sense to speak of him as an editor.” [And,] **“Genesis 1–11 is a literary masterpiece by an author of extraordinary skill and subtlety.”**¹¹ The unity of the narratives and of Genesis as a whole oppose Wellhausen’s JEPD documentary hypothesis.

Fourth, philologically, the Genesis narrative fits an ancient out-of-Egypt source. Abraham Yahuda demonstrated that the Pentateuch, especially Joseph’s narrative, is **“saturated with Egyptian language.”**¹² For example, the word for “ark” is not the Akkadian or even Canaanite word, but תֵּבָה, *tēbāh* [Genesis 6:14], from the Egyptian “box, coffer, chest.”¹³

Wellhausen’s proposed redactor was from the post-Babylonian captivity, so [it had] neo-Babylonian influence. However, **“The Babylonian influence in the language** [of the Pentateuch] **is so minute as to be almost non-existent.”**¹⁴ Also, archaic Hebrew is evident (e.g., the blessings by Jacob in Genesis chapter 49). The Egyptian influence and archaic Hebrew of the Pentateuch oppose Wellhausen’s JEPD documentary hypothesis.

Fifth, Genesis has semantic unity characteristic of a single writer. Hebrew Bible Scholar Yehuda Radday of Haifa’s Israel Institute of Technology reports that a five-year **“study of Genesis shows that it is the work of a single writer and that the J.E.P.D. theory must be ‘rejected or at least thoroughly revised.’”**¹⁵ He concludes that it **“seems likely that a sole author was responsible”** for Genesis.¹⁶ If Moses both translated cuneiform source documents of the patriarchs from cuneiform and then composed them into Genesis, he was that sole translator/editor/composer responsible for the vocabulary of Genesis. The semantic unity of Genesis is against Wellhausen’s JEPD documentary hypothesis.

Sixth, Jesus based arguments on the earliest events of Genesis. **“But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and the two shall become one flesh”** (Mark 10:6–8a, NASB). Jesus was quoting Genesis 2:24 from the LXX [the Greek Old Testament]. Jesus argued that from the beginning time period, namely the creation time, God made Adam and Eve. Therefore, do not divorce.

But if Genesis is a 550–450 BC “patchwork” by a redactor, then it was written millennia later. In that case,

What Is a Colophon?

A colophon or *tôledôt* (in Genesis) is text within an ancient document that identifies the person responsible for originating the document. In Mesopotamia tablets were kept in temple libraries. Only qualified people could access the documents. The tablets often had colophons saying they were sacred property of the temple. [Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 238] Modern books have a title page that also includes the name of the author, publisher, and year of publication. Toorn tells the difference between modern and ancient writing in Mesopotamia cuneiform tablets. Toorn points out (p. 32):

“The cuneiform equivalent of our title page is the colophon. The colophon is a scribal note at the end of a text, separated from its main body by a single or double marking. It generally includes the title of the work, an indication of the total number of lines on the tablet, and a reference to the master copy that was used. The only personal names that appear in the Babylonian and Assyrian colophons are those of the copyist (‘by the hand of So-and-so’) and the owner (‘belonging to So-and-so’). What is conspicuously lacking is the name of the author.”

¹¹ Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: A Provocative Challenge to the Documentary Hypothesis* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1985), 180; quoted by Damien Mackey, in [“Tracing the Hand of Moses in Genesis.”](#)

[DWS] **Note:** Mackey wrote an 8-page supplement to his main article: [“Tracing the Hand of Moses in Genesis. Part Two.”](#)

¹² Abraham S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

¹³ Yahuda, *Language of the Pentateuch*, 115; Mackey, “Hand of Moses.”

¹⁴ Mackey, “Hand of Moses.”

¹⁵ *Time*, Dec. 7, 1981, “Religion by One Hand?”

¹⁶ *Omni*, Aug. 1982; and in Mackey, “Hand of Moses.”

the narrative is myth. If Adam and Eve are myth, then did Jesus deceive us by His teaching? Paul responds that we are not **“to pay attention to myths”** (1 Timothy 1:4, NASB). I respond that if the [Egyptian] Weni autobiography was from Weni, why not the Adam creation narrative and autobiography from Adam, at least originally in oral form?

Seventh, Genesis 1, carefully understood, matches the findings of science far too precisely to have been merely ancient Near East myth. For a fuller treatment of this, see Hugh Ross’s theory in the author’s book, *Two Stage Biblical Creation: Uniting Biblical Insights Uncovered by Ten Notable Creation Theories*.

Thomas Kuhn popularized the concept of a “paradigm shift.” The documentary hypothesis lacks substantial hard evidence. There is a viable alternative, but accepting it requires a paradigm shift.

B. The Dictation Theory — Weak on Internal Bible Evidence

Some reacted against the JEPD documentary hypothesis by suggesting that the family histories and genealogies of Genesis were dictated by God to Moses without Moses using any written source documents. The *tôlê dôt* units were seen as introductions beginning each narrative about the descendants of the named person. However, the text after the *tôlê dôt* was after the death of the person named therein. The dictation theory’s solution is that if God dictated the text, then it is irrelevant that the ancestor did not know the events in “his” narrative.

In response, later parts of the Torah directly from God are clearly identified. For example, in Exodus 4:22 God spoke to Moses, who is identified in the second person, “you” (qal, 2nd), not in the third person, “he”:

“Then you [Moses] shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says YHWH, Israel is My son, My first-born.’”

• ***Exodus 4:22, NASB***

In Genesis, in contrast, nowhere is God said to have spoken any of the words to Moses. And nowhere in Genesis is Moses identified as the original author of the narratives and genealogies.

The idea that the *tôlê dôt* began each unit does not fit. The narrative after Adam’s *tôlê dôt* is not about Adam but about Noah. The narrative after Jacob’s *tôlê dôt* is not about Jacob but about Joseph.

When God dictates, that is indicated by the text, but Genesis has no such indication. The alternative to the documentary hypothesis and the dictation theory of Genesis is the Wiseman tablet theory.

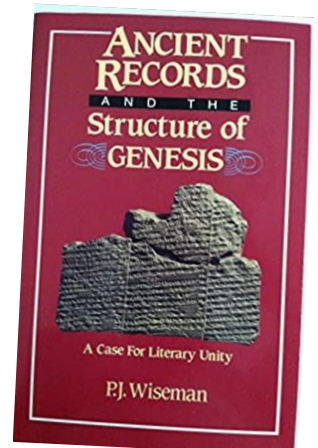
C. The Wiseman Tablet Theory Fits Culture and the Genesis Text, but It Requires a Paradigm Shift

Wiseman suggests Genesis is from tablets written by the patriarchs. Other cultures in the ancient Near East kept written tablets of origin and flood narratives (with added fanciful elements). Ancient Near East flood narratives include the Sumerian tale (third millennium BC) of Ziusuddu, and the famous Babylonian Gilgamesh epic.

Were the people of God before Moses — Joseph, Jacob, Isaac, etc. — alone unable to record on tablets their treasured narratives and genealogies? Are the Biblical creation and flood narratives only a late patchwork?

- ***The Narratives Have Personal Details Only the Patriarchs Themselves Could Have Known***

Patriarchs in Genesis reported prayers, messages from God, and events they alone could have known. If these were not myths nor revealed by God to Moses, then they were from each patriarch named in his *tôlê dôt*.



• ***Yet Genesis as a Whole Is from Moses***

On the one hand, the later Hebrew Bible, from Joshua 1:7 to Malachi 4:4, identifies the Pentateuch as from Moses. Jesus also identified the Pentateuch as a whole as being from Moses (Matthew 8:4; Mark 7:10, 10:3–4, 12:26; Luke 16:29–31, 24:27, 44; John 5:46–47, 7:19).

On the other hand, the New Testament never attributes specific quotes from Genesis to Moses, whereas quotes from Numbers through Deuteronomy are attributed to Moses.¹⁷

Wiseman¹⁸ suggests, and others concur,¹⁹ that Moses was the translator, compiler, and final editor of Genesis from eyewitness narratives and genealogy records handed down to him on tablets. Moses used the same method used by Luke, the compiler and final editor of his Gospel.

***Wiseman Tablet Theory:
Eleven Documents from Patriarchs*** [in Genesis]

P.J. Wiseman discovered a number of important ancient Near East clay tablets while he was British Air Commodore in the Middle East. He suggested that Genesis was composed from eleven such tablets. Here is Wiseman's outline according to Sewell,²⁰ followed by Wiseman's five claims:

Tablet	Starting Verse	Ending Verse	Owner or Writer
1	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 2:4a	God Himself (?)
2	Genesis 2:4b	Genesis 5:1a	Adam
3	Genesis 5:1b	Genesis 6:9a	Noah
4	Genesis 6:9b	Genesis 10:1a	Shem, Ham, & Japheth
5	Genesis 10:1b	Genesis 11:10a	Shem
6	Genesis 11:10b	Genesis 11:27a	Terah
7	Genesis 11:27b	Genesis 25:19a	Isaac
8	Genesis 25:12	Genesis 25:18	Ishmael, through Isaac
9	Genesis 25:19b	Genesis 37:2a	Jacob
10	Genesis 36:1	Genesis 36:43	Esau, through Jacob
11	Genesis 37:2b	Exodus 1:6	Joseph's 12 sons

[**Note:** Wiseman's Five Claims according to Arnold ... *DWS*]

1. Each Narrative Was From the Patriarch Listed [identified] ***in His Ending Tôl'êdôt***

First, each narrative was a successive family history from the patriarch who signed his name at the end in his *tôl'êdôt*. This follows the quite common ancient Near East practice of ending a tablet with a colophon listing the author.

Wiseman gives two supporting evidences:

¹⁷ Henry Morris, *Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 26. Several websites offer a free PDF of this book, if you sign up for it.

¹⁸ P.J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis*, 56–74.

¹⁹ Morris, *Record*, 26.

²⁰ [DWS]] **Note:** Arnold refers to Curt Sewell, "[The Tablet Theory of Genesis Authorship](#)" in *Bible and Spade* (Vol. 7, No. 1).

“(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 [italics are Wiseman’s].”²¹

The narratives were autobiographies by each patriarch named at the end of his account.

2. Genesis Is Compiled from Eleven Narratives and Genealogies on Tablets

Second, ancient Near East documents, except for Egyptian papyri, were tablets, most of clay, a few of stone. The *tôl^edôt* of Adam says it was a *sēpher*, an inscription. In the ancient Near East, that meant a tablet, perhaps inscribed by Noah.

Successive ancient Near East tablets, according to Wiseman, were joined by the last line of one tablet being similar to the first line of the next tablet.²² This method kept the tablets in order. The otherwise puzzling repeated lines in Genesis are easily explained as tablet breaks. For example, the creation narrative’s last line, Genesis 2:4a, is similar to the Adam narrative’s first line in 2:4b (NIV):

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

2:4b **“When the LORD [YHWH] God made the earth and the heavens.”**

God ended His narrative of the creation in Genesis 2:4a. In Genesis 2:4b, Adam began his narrative with a similar line so the hearer/reader would know that the creation narrative was followed by Adam’s narrative. These repeated lines give weight to the tablet theory as the connections between tablets. Moses so honored these ancient tablets that he included both lines in the Scripture text of Genesis.

3. The Tôl^edôt Ends — Does Not Begin — Each Narrative Tablet

Third, Wiseman saw that ancient Near East tablets ended in a colophon. The *tôl^edôt* phrase means, **“These are the origins [birth] of ...”** — so it refers back, not forward. For example, the origin of the heavens and earth was the subject of Genesis 1:1–2:4. The colophon ends, rather than begins, the creation narrative in Genesis 2:4a: **“These are the *tôl^edôt* [= generational origins] of the heavens and the earth when they were created.”**

4. The Narratives Were Eyewitness Reports

Fourth, Wiseman emphasized that the narratives were eyewitness reports by the listed patriarch. Only what that patriarch could have known from personal knowledge or learned reliably from another eyewitness was included in his narrative.

5. The Inspired General Editor of Genesis Was Moses

Fifth, Wiseman concluded that Moses compiled Genesis from eleven tablets. Genesis has been regarded as from Moses by later references in the Hebrew Bible, by strong and uniform early Jewish tradition,²³ and by the Christian New Testament. In its Scriptural form, Genesis is from Moses.²⁴

²¹ Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis*, 43.

²² Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis*, 33.

²³ Jubilees 2:1 affirms that Moses was told to write down the creation account.

“And the angel of the presence spoke to Moses according to the word of the Lord, saying: ‘Write the complete history of the creation, how in six days the Lord God finished all His works and all that He created, and kept Sabbath on the seventh day and hallowed it for all ages, and appointed it as a sign for all His works.’”

The Book of Jubilees apparently was authored around 130–105 BC. It is Pseudepigrapha, so its claim that Moses was told to write down the creation account should be considered tradition.

²⁴ [DWS] **Note:** Perhaps with later modernizations of names, i.e., “Ur of the Chaldeans” [Genesis 11:28, 31, 15:7].

A Proposed Modified Tablet Theory: Twelve Patriarchal Narratives and Genealogies Edited by Moses

6. Three Different Tôl^edôt Uses Clarify the Structure of Genesis

Earlier commentators divided Genesis as if the *tôl^edôt* statements began the narratives. They did this because the Genesis 10 listing descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth begins with the ancestor — Shem, Ham, or Japheth. The same is true for the list of descendants of Ishmael in Genesis 25 and of Esau in Genesis 36. Finally, the Joseph narrative at the end has no concluding *tôl^edôt*. So it was thought that the *tôl^edôt* statements began the narratives. But this earlier commentary idea was misguided.

6a. The Narratives End With the Patriarch's Tôl^edôt

Wiseman correctly recognized that the family-narrative *tôl^edôt* statements end, rather than begin, that narrative. Adam's narrative begins with Genesis 2:4b and ends in Genesis 5:1a: **"This is the written account [*tôl^edôt*] of Adam's line"** (NIV). The Joseph narrative has no concluding *tôl^edôt*, probably because it was Egyptian style papyrus rather than an ancient Near East tablet. The Egyptian papyrus document lacked a colophon.

6b. A Promised-line Genealogy Ends With the Name/Tôl^edôt of the Next Patriarch

The genealogy to Noah ends with Noah. After the genealogy is the narrative of Noah ending with his *tôl^edôt* statement in Genesis 6:9a. I suggest Genesis 6:9b begins the first part of the narrative by Shem.

Noah: **"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah"**
(Genesis 6:8–9a, NIV).

Shem: **"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth"**
(Genesis 6:9b–10, NIV).

Noah wrote of himself in Genesis 6:8 that he had **"found favor in the eyes of the Lord,"** the kind of statement a godly person would say. Then 6:9b says Noah was **"righteous"** and **"blameless."** What God-fearing man would say that of himself? A son honoring his father would. Genesis 6:9b begins the narrative by Shem, next in the promised line. The genealogy to Terah (and Abram) ends in the *tôl^edôt* of Terah. Next is Abram's narrative.

6c. But a List of Descendants From a Subsidiary Person Begins With his Tôl^edôt

In contrast, the *tôl^edôt* of the list of descendants in Genesis [chapter] 10 from Shem, Ham, and Japheth begin with Shem, Ham, or Japheth. The list of descendants of Ishmael in Genesis [chapter] 25 and of Esau in Genesis [chapter] 36, also begin with Ishmael and Esau.

The list of descendants from Ham, Japheth, Ishmael, and Esau led away from the promised line (Genesis 3:15) of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So these subsidiary lists of descendants do not conclude with main character *tôl^edôt* statements. They are the only units in Genesis that begin with *tôl^edôt* statements.²⁵

7. The Patriarch Inserted a Subsidiary List of Descendants into His Narrative When He Received the List

These lists of descendants seem best understood as inserts into the patriarchs' narratives. **"Ancient Near**

²⁵ [DWS] **Note:** These are the exceptions to the rule that the *tôl^edôt* statements do not begin but end the narratives.

Eastern genealogies generally appear within broader literary contexts as brief insertions.”²⁶

I am suggesting that Shem had the names of the descendants of Ham and Japheth up to the dispersion from Babel.²⁷ [See “Tablet 5” in the chart below. DWS] The lists of Japheth and Ham include only their sons and grandsons. In contrast, some of Shem’s descendants are listed to five generations, presumably the ones who lived near him after the Babel dispersion. Shem inserted all three lists of descendants between his flood narrative and his Babel narrative. After Babel, the people groups were scattered, so Shem had no more names of further descendants from Ham and Japheth.

Genesis [chapter] 25 begins with the death of Abraham. Then the text says, **“his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah”** (verse 25:9, NIV). The next text is Ishmael’s list of descendants. It seems evident that Ishmael gave to Isaac his list of descendants while the two were together at Abraham’s funeral. Then Isaac inserted Ishmael’s list of descendants to the end of his own narrative.

Genesis [chapter] 35 ends with the death of Isaac. **“And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him”** (verse 29, NIV). Again, the next text is Esau’s list of descendants inserted by Jacob almost at the end of his narrative. Presumably, Jacob received that list while he and Esau were together at Isaac’s funeral.

8. The Creation in Genesis chapter 1 Was an Eyewitness Narrative by the Spirit [of Christ, DWS] from the Stated Location

The creation narrative of Genesis 1:1–2:4a had no human eyewitness. It is widely concluded that the narrative was from God, because God alone was there.

- Hebrews 1:2 says the creation was from the Father and Son: **“But in these last days he [the Father] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe [eons in Greek]”** (NIV).
- Colossians 1:16 says **“For by Him [the Son] all things were created”** (NASB).
- John 1:3 says, **“All things were created through Him”** (ESV)

Not one mentions the Spirit. However, in Genesis chapter 1, only the Spirit is stated to have been on location: **“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters”** (Genesis 1:2c). The Father through the Son created. The Spirit, who was given a stated location, was the eyewitness Divine Narrator.²⁸

It follows that the narrative of Genesis 1:3–2:4a was from the perspective location of the Spirit of God just above the planet’s surface. A narrative from this perspective would make sense to successive generations. A narrative from this perspective also matches what science has discovered. (See [Arnold’s book] *Two Stage Biblical Creation*.)

9. The Final Narrative From Joseph Was Egyptian Style, Possibly Redacted by Judah

Abraham Yahuda showed many Egyptian influences in the Pentateuch, especially in Joseph’s narrative.²⁹ His narrative may have been on a papyrus scroll, which could contain his longer account, and has no ending

²⁶ John W. Wright, “Genealogies,” in T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament, Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 346.

²⁷ [DWS] **Note:** Frank DeRemer in [“Structure, Toledoths, and Sources of Genesis.”](#) *Journal of Creation* 28(1) 2014, p. 54:

“Noah and Shem (and probably Shem’s two brothers) and many of their descendants, lived to see the division of languages at Babel (11:1–9). It explains the dispersion to different lands reported in chapter 10 ... he likely also recorded the story of Babel.”

²⁸ [DWS] **Note:** The Spirit in Genesis chapter 1 acted as a power directed by YHWH, not as a distinct personality or part of a trinity. The role of God’s Spirit is just as the angel told Mary when it announced the future birth of Jesus. It was **“The Holy Ghost [Spirit] shall come upon you, and THE POWER OF THE HIGHEST shall overshadow you”** (Luke 1:35).

²⁹ Abraham Yahuda, *Language of the Pentateuch*.

tôl^edôt.³⁰ Judah inserted sub-narratives (Tamar, Joseph's death?), suggesting Judah redacted Joseph's narrative.

The Thomas Arnold Proposed Amended Tablet Theory Arrangement

Tablet	Begins	Ends (with <i>tôl^edôt</i>)	Subject	Author
1	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 2:4a	Creation	Holy Spirit [Christ ³¹]
2	Genesis 2:4b	Genesis 5:1a	Eden, Fall	Adam
3	Genesis 5:1b	Genesis 6:9a	Genealogy to Noah	Noah
4a	Genesis 6:9b	Genesis 9:29	Flood	Shem
5	<i>Genesis 10:1a</i>	Genesis 10:32	Shem, Ham, Japheth descendants	Inserted by Shem
4b	Genesis 11:1	Genesis 11:10a	Babel	Shem
6	Genesis 11:10b	Genesis 11:27a	Genealogy to Terah	Terah
7	Genesis 11:27b	<i>Genesis 25:19a</i>	Abraham	Abraham, Isaac
8	<i>Genesis 25:12</i>	Genesis 25:18	Ishmael descendants	Inserted by Isaac
9	<i>Genesis 25:19b</i>	Genesis 26:35	Isaac	Isaac
10	Genesis 27:1	<i>Genesis 37:2a</i>	Jacob	Jacob
11	<i>Genesis 36:1</i>	Genesis 36:43	Esau descendants	Inserted by Jacob
12	<i>Genesis 37:2b</i>	Genesis 50:26 (no <i>tôl^edôt</i>)	Joseph (Judah inserts)	Joseph (& Judah)

10. Conclusion: Moses Composed Genesis From Twelve Eyewitness Narratives and Genealogies

Evidence suggests that the twelve Genesis units were eyewitness narrative accounts and genealogies by Adam (likely oral), Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Esau, Judah, and Joseph. These were translated and edited by Moses, inspired by the Spirit, into the book of Genesis.

(To Ph.D. students: Many of the narratives are short enough to fit on a tablet. But several are longer. I suggest the Joseph narrative (and possibly the Jacob narrative) was likely on a papyrus scroll. Perhaps a good dissertation topic could be to determine if the longer narratives have breaks that would be consistent with tablet length sub-narratives. Dissertations should be quite limited in scope so a subject might be the Abraham narrative or the Jacob narrative, or perhaps the Adam narrative and Shem narrative.

A comparison could be made to see if the Joseph narrative (and possibly the Jacob narrative, if composed at the end of his life when he settled in Egypt) lacks such breaks. Or perhaps Joseph followed his family tradition and the Joseph narrative was on tablets and has tablet breaks. Judah inserts into the Joseph narrative could indicate that Judah was a redactor of the Joseph narrative, which could be another dissertation topic. I am not claiming whether or not any of these projects will work — that is up to the student to determine before he or she does the proposal. I am merely suggesting questions.)

Thomas P. Arnold, 2008
David Sielaff, December 2020

³⁰ R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 552.

³¹ [DWS]] **Note:** See note 27 above. God the Father designated Christ to use the power of His Father's Spirit to create the heavens and the earth — everything that was created (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15–17) including the eons Hebrews 1:2).

Addendum: “Thoughts About Babel or ... Babel Thoughts”

By David Sielaff

Originally published as the July 16, 2015 Commentary by the same title

The confusion of tongues at Babel told in Genesis 11:1–9 still affects us today. Wiseman and Arnold both indicate that the pattern of events occurred during the time of Shem, son of Noah, before the time of Abraham. I quote the Concordant Literal Old Testament so you will read a text that gives a different perspective on familiar information. Note the use of phrases by the people on one hand and how YHWH repeats the words and phrases on the other. This is truly a strong example of the adage, “Man proposes, God disposes.”:

“Now the entire earth continued to have one language and the same words for all of them. It came to pass when they journeyed from the east, that they found a valley in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.

They said, ‘Each man to his associate: Grant attention! [1] Do let us mold bricks, and [2] do let us burn them with a burning process. So the brick served as stone for them, and asphalt [naptha, petroleum] served as mortar for them.’

And they said: ‘Grant attention! [1] Let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens. [2] Let us make a name for ourselves, [Why?] lest we be scattered over the surface of the entire earth.’

Then Yahweh descended to see the city and the tower that the sons of humanity had built. Yahweh said:

‘Behold, they are one people with one language for all of them; and this is what they start to do. Now anything they plan to do will not be restricted for them.

Grant attention! [1] Do let us descend, and [2] do let us disintegrate their language there, [why?] so that each man may not hearken to the language of his associate.’

Then Yahweh scattered them from there over the surface of the entire earth, and they left off building the city and the tower. Therefore one called its name Babel, because there

[1] Yahweh disintegrated the language of the entire earth, and

[2] Yahweh scattered them from there over the surface of the entire earth.”

• *Genesis 11:1–9, Concordant Old Testament*

The next verse, verse 10 has two separate functions and the verse should have been split in two.

Verse 11:10a is the *tôl^edôt* announcing the end of Shem’s narrative: **“These are the genealogical records of Shem.”**

Verse 11:10b changes the topic to the descendants of Shem to the time of Terah: **“Two years after the deluge, when Shem was a hundred years old, he begot Arphaxad”** leading to the *tôl^edôt* of Terah in verse 27a where it says, **“These are the genealogical records of Terah.”** Wiseman, Arnold, and others understand this began Terah’s genealogical narrative.

After the dispersion of languages, the genealogical narratives continue the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, down to Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and end with Joseph.

Below I want to focus on how the Babel event may have led to the development of writing. I also want to examine the horrors the confusion of tongues must have had upon individuals. The effects must have shattered lives emotionally. What kind of post-traumatic trauma did that event have on people?

This all began after speaking with a friend about the events at Babel. Several ideas came to mind. I doubt

any of my propositions can be proven this side of the resurrection, but the questions themselves might yield some insights. I consider human behavior, including the depth of human depravity. While I am wary to use human reasoning and I will apply it to Scripture, so bear with me.

Was There Writing Before the Flood?

Have you ever asked yourself if there was writing before the flood? I am no longer sure there was. Consider Adam and Eve, and the generations of their descendants for the first 1,600+ years of human history until the flood. They had the capability and strength to lead lives lasting several hundred years. The longest-living person recorded in the Bible was Methuselah and he lived 969 years (Genesis 5:27).

We have accounts written for us about God's creation from Genesis 1:1, including the genealogies of Noah's ancestors, sin in the Garden of Eden, and the ever-increasing evil of Genesis chapter 6 necessitating that God act, leading to the flood. All this pre-flood information was transmitted from Noah, his sons, and their wives, to their descendants. We learn about it from Scripture set down in writing.

All pre-flood people were nearly perfect physical and mental specimens. Adam and Eve were created to God's rigorous specifications. Their descendants need to be genetically viable up to Christ's return.³² Their immediate descendants had no noticeable genetic deterioration, but after hundreds of generations, accumulated genetic mutations will have an extremely negative effect on the human population.³³

Pre-flood Memory, Did They Need to Write?

Because of their powerful genetics, I postulate that pre-flood people had near perfectly functioning minds and memories every bit as sharp and vital as their physical prowess that allowed them to live hundreds of years. If their memories were near perfect, would they need writing? If they had total recall, why develop a system to write things down? Why would you or anyone need such a system?

I have one daughter who "understands" things she is taught pretty much the first time she learns them. How much more would the pre-flood people "understand" things? I have another daughter who can memorize great quantities of information quickly and easily. (They get these traits from their mother, of course.) How much more would pre-flood people remember everything? In fact, forgetting might even have been a problem for them.

Some can memorize entire books. I witnessed a demonstration of Koran memorization at a World Affairs Council conference over 15 years ago [2020 now] in Bakersfield, California. Koran students were challenged to cite extended passages, including textual variants, showing their devotion of Muslim believers. (Perhaps another purpose was to shame Christians, who know little about their own holy book, the Bible.)

A few people today have perfect memories of events in their personal lives. American actress Marilu Henner (from the situation comedy *Taxi*) reportedly has a perfect memory, which she uses to her professional advantage; she never forgets her lines. Her condition is called hyperthymesia, which means, "**possessing an extremely detailed autobiographical memory. Hyperthymesiacs remember an abnormally vast number of their life experiences.**" From the Wikipedia article,

"Individuals with hyperthymesia can recall almost every day of their lives in near perfect detail, as well as public events that hold some personal significance to them. Those affected describe their memories as uncontrollable associations, when they encounter a date, they 'see' a vivid

³² After Christ's return, the genetics of mankind will apparently be healed and long life equivalent to pre-flood longevity will return as Isaiah 65:20 says:

"There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed."

God can do such things, just as He extended the life of King Hezekiah of Judah in Isaiah chapter 38. During the great white throne judgment in New Jerusalem the restorative properties of the tree of life will be available to all who will go and eat (Revelation 22:2, 14).

³³ See John Sanford, Ph.D., *Genetic Entropy*, 4th ed. (FMS Publications, 2014).

depiction of that day in their heads. Recollection occurs without hesitation or conscious effort.”

• **Wikipedia article, “[Hyperthymesia](#),” accessed November 13, 2020**

In fact, people who have such perfect memories about their own experiences can have severe problems in life. This was dramatically portrayed in the 12th episode of season 7 (You Must Remember This) of the medical drama *House*. Dr. House’s patient was a waitress who had hyperthymesia. She alienated everyone around her because she could not forgive anyone. Memories of how relatives and friends hurt her emotionally were so vivid and real, it was as if they happened that same day. The fictional waitress, and some real people who have hyperthymesia, find it exceedingly difficult to forgive others because they cannot put the faults of others “behind them.” They literally cannot “forgive and forget.”³⁴ Did this happen before the flood?

Imagine that everyone, all people before the flood, were incapable of forgetting any slight, any wrong, any sin, or attack (emotional or physical). Would that lead to violence? Would it be a society where evil would increase, yet people live hundreds of years, forgetting nothing? This seems to be how the pre-flood society is described:

“Yahweh saw that the evil of humanity was multiplying on earth, and every form of the devisings of its heart was surely evil all the day. Yahweh regretted that He had made humanity on earth, and He grieved in His heart.”

• **Genesis 6:5–6 (Concordant Literal Version), see also Jeremiah 7:9–10**

Every child of Adam and Eve remembered everything — and forgot nothing. They probably forgave little if ever. Evil multiplied. God felt that situation must end and said, He **“... shall wipe out humanity that I have created, off the surface of the ground, ... for I regret that I have made them”** (Genesis 6:7, CLV).

On the positive side, it would have been easy for pre-flood people to know their lineage and cite long genealogies of hundreds of people in their extended family, all descended from Adam. A child would ask an elder, “Who was my great-grandfather’s second cousin on my mother’s side?” A parent would only have to tell their child the facts one time and the child would remember. If this were so, would writing be necessary in such a world? I do not think writing would be necessary, or even desirable.

So ... When Did Writing Start?

I propose that writing began after God confused the languages at Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). With some background in mind, reread Genesis 11:1–9, or refresh your memory!!!

Considering the text, note again what God did. He limited mankind by (1) **“confounding their language,”** (2) diminishing their lifespan,³⁵ and (3) choosing to **“scatter them abroad.”**³⁶ Also, God may have (4) limited their memory. Memory plays an important part in language. Yet, they could not remember their former **“one language.”** By doing so, God postponed another worldwide judgment (Genesis 11:6).

Horrific Social Problems after Babel

Before the flood, there was one language³⁷; after the flood, God separated languages according to families. After YHWH confused the languages, what “link” determined the family relationships? Were families divided

³⁴ YHWH cannot forget, so King Hezekiah prayed his sins be put behind YHWH’s back (Isaiah 38:17).

³⁵ Consider Genesis 6:3, which may refer to the time before the flood only, but also read Psalm 90:10:

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet [in] their strength [is] labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”

³⁶ The confusion of languages took place a short time before the “earth” was divided, in the days of Peleg (Genesis 10:25; 1 Chronicles 1:19).

³⁷ Some scholars believe Hebrew was the original language, but there is no solid evidence for this. While numbers vary among scholars, the Old Testament is composed of 419,687 Hebrew words formed from a vocabulary of 8,679 unique words, as Blair Kasfeldt notes in his internet article, [“Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary: How Much is Enough? The Law of Diminishing Returns.”](#)

according to the lineage of the fathers or the mothers? I speculate that families were divided according to fathers. After Babel, mothers might not be able to speak to their own sisters, brothers, and perhaps not even speak with their own mothers, because they and their husbands spoke a different language from the wife's mother. Imagine the emotional heartbreak, confusion, and frustration that events at Babel must have had. It broke up their society. Everyone knew that God did it and they knew why God did it.³⁸

Beginning to Write

How could people begin to communicate again after the confusion of tongues? Through the development of writing. I propose writing began to develop after Babel. People were still clever after the flood, but diminishing physical vitality, mental acuity, and a shortening life trending to 70 years plus some, all limited the ability to learn other languages, or recreate a one-world language, which is exactly what God intended.

The first priority dealing with a sudden new language would be to expand the vocabulary. God must have given everyone a basic vocabulary "instantly." Beyond those basic words, the first words to re-learn among your "group" would be to all agree on words for names of various foods, animals, objects, tools, as well as body parts and functions. Common objects had to be renamed according to the current ability to communicate.

The Chinese writing system may give us a clue to how things progressed in the post-flood world. The two major Chinese spoken languages are Mandarin and Cantonese. The two language groups are not able to speak to each other, but the Chinese written language is readable by Mandarin and Cantonese speakers:

"The Chinese writing system developed more than 4,000 years ago; the oldest extant examples of written Chinese are from the 14th or 15th cent. B.C. ... Chinese writing consists of an individual character or ideogram for every syllable, each character representing a word or idea rather than a sound; thus, problems caused by homonyms in spoken Chinese are not a difficulty in written Chinese. The written language is a unifying factor culturally, for although the spoken languages and dialects may not be mutually comprehensible in many instances, the written form is universal."

• **Information Please, "[Chinese: Chinese Writing System](#)"**

This boggles my mind. The Chinese written language has some 4,000 characters. How does one recall 4,000 characters? A good memory! There must be some system to aid learning, such as some characters are derived from others. Alphabetic writing greatly diminished the need for so many characters.

Since ancient times commercial languages developed such as Aramaic, Greek, and Latin. Three centuries after Alexander the Great, Aramaic was still the everyday language in Palestine, spoken by Jesus and His disciples. Latin became *lingua franca* (the common language) of most of Europe during the Roman empire and widened its use in the Middle Ages through the dominance of the Roman Catholic church. European languages became isolated and separated. Latin became a scholarly language in Europe for 1,000+ years. English today is a *lingua franca* of science, technology, business, and travel (all airline pilots speak English), yet the most-spoken languages are Mandarin Chinese, then Hindi, Spanish, while English is fourth. Then come Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian, Japanese, and German.³⁹

Conclusion

So, my theory is this: writing developed after Babel so people could learn to communicate across time and space. When you read the Book of Romans, you are reading the thoughts of God — through Paul. Knowledge and understanding accumulate. The Gospel spread without being preached so people can learn on their own. Next will come the teachers ... soon. Preaching the truth of God's Word will begin again worldwide. Nothing will stop it. May God speed the day we can help fulfill that mission.

David Sielaff

³⁸ Peleg (Genesis 10:22–25), the grandson of Shem, was born at the time of Babel. His name means "division."

³⁹ "[Top 30 Languages in the World](#)" at "Vistawide.com."