



Who Wrote Genesis?

A Third Theory

by Paul A. Hughes

Previously entitled: *The Third Theory of Genesis' Composition: The Wiseman Hypothesis*

For over a century, there have been two main, and opposing, theories for the composition of Genesis.

The Foundations of Source Criticism

The first theory began with the speculations of Jean Astruc (1684-1766), who maintained that Moses, the traditional writer of the Pentateuch, must have used existing written or oral sources in constructing Genesis. Astruc proposed the names of God, *Yahweh* (Ger. *Jahweh*, Heb. *YHWH*) and *Elohim* (generic "God") as the key to Genesis' composition. He divided the book into two main "sources," the Jahwist and the Elohist.

Later, Astruc decided his source theory was too simplistic. However, scholars such as DeWette built upon Astruc's ideas. The work of K. Graf and Julius Wellhausen culminated in the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis, now commonly called JEDP Theory, in which:

J=Jahwist

E=Elohist

D=Deuteronomistic History

P=Priestly Code

Modern versions of JEDP Theory dominate higher criticism today. The theory assumes Genesis to be composed of fragmented myths and legends of Creation, the Flood, early man, and Hebrew origins. These isolated tales were loosely assembled, and were modified ("redacted") through the centuries by various redactors. These redactors (or schools of redactors) worked according to the diverse sectarian or personal views, purposes, and concerns of each. Later redactions can be separated, say the critics, by using scientific methods to divide Genesis into its Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly sources.

The critics believe that "myths" such as Creation, the Flood, and Babel were borrowed and adapted from ancient Mesopotamian mythology. Legends of the Patriarchs, Moses, and the Exodus arose among a distinct Canaanite minority as an attempt to explain and perhaps sanctify their origins.¹ The Pentateuch reached its final form sometime in the Kingdom Era (1050-586 B.C.) or perhaps as late as the Post-Exilic Period (538-432 B.C.).

The Traditional View

A second theory, with more ancient origins, has been advanced in conservative religious circles all the more in the face of more divisive concepts. Tradition ascribes authorship of Genesis to Moses. Many references to Mosaic authorship do

appear within the *Pentateuch*, also known as the "Five Books of Moses" and the Jewish *Torah*.

In Exodus 17:14, the Lord tells Moses to record the defeat of Amalek in a book. In two other instances, Moses is told to write down the ordinances of the Covenant (Exodus 24:4, 34:27).

Leviticus does not specifically name Moses as its author, but repeatedly introduces new information with the formula, "And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying . . ." (1:1 f., 4:1, 6:8, 24, etc.) His brother Aaron, the high priest, is sometimes included in the formula, as well. The book is finally capped with the statement, "These are the commandments which YHWH commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai" (27:34).

Numbers 33:2 mentions Moses making a written record of Israel's wanderings.

In Deuteronomy, Moses records the Law and the curses pronounced upon those who disobey (28:58, 61; 29:20, 21, 27; 31:9-12). Moses places the Book of the Law inside the Ark of the Covenant to bear witness to future generations (31:24-27).

Deuteronomy purports itself to be a series of five discourses Moses delivered before the people just before they entered Canaan. Moses recaps major events of the exodus from Egypt, and reviews the articles of God's Covenant. At the end is supplementary material regarding Moses' death, obviously recorded by another hand (34:5-12).

The claim of Mosaic authorship of Pentateuchal writings is also found in the book of Joshua (hence the modern theories of a "Hexateuch"). The Book of the Law written by Moses is referred to in Joshua 1:8, 8:31, and 23:6. Joshua carved the Law of Moses into the stones of the altar on Mount Ebal (8:32 ff.). Later, Joshua added to the Book (24:26).

Explicit, internal statements roundly confirm Moses as the author of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But what does Genesis say?

Conservative traditionalists adduce the claim that God revealed the stories of Creation, the Flood, etc., to Moses on Mount Sinai (i.e., "Dictation Theory"). How else could Moses learn the true history of Creation and other events of pre-history unless God revealed them?

However, one of the things which sets Genesis apart from the rest of the Pentateuch is that it makes no mention of Moses. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly state that Moses wrote the first book, until -- as demonstrated in the New Testament -- Jews by convention began to refer to the entire Torah or Law (exclusive of the Prophets or Writings) as "Moses." Some traditionalists assert that Jesus identified Moses as the author of Genesis, but that is not truly the case.

Mosaic authorship of Genesis is dependent upon tradition and, in turn, upon speculation and assumption. In fact, the most that can be said is that Exodus appears to intentionally pick up where Genesis leaves off: with the transition which takes place from the death of Joseph to the birth of Moses.

Fundamental Disagreement

To date, JEDP and tradition have found no common ground. A strict line of demarcation exists between the two, which has polarized Bible scholars into two camps. Many of the initial details of JEDP theory have been discarded since its initial proposal, yet its basic premises remain. Traditionalists object to the critics' *a priori* rejection of such internal evidence as stated authorship and purpose of the books, and their anti-supernaturalistic bias. They object further to the extirpation of the Creation and Flood accounts, *et al.*, as authoritative Scripture.

The JEDP critics, on the other hand, consider traditionalists to be dogmatic, unscientific, and ingenuous. They often oppose traditional views with evangelistic zeal, as bonds to be broken, ignorance to be purged. Indeed, for more than a century, traditionalists have felt the winds of scholarly opinion blow hard against them.

Wiseman's Research

With these prevailing views of Genesis now in mind, the writer presents a third theory of Genesis' composition, which

he has dubbed the Wiseman Hypothesis.

Percy J. Wiseman (1888-1948) was an officer of the Royal Air Force who spent some years in the Middle East. While there, he made it his business to visit the sites of archaeological digs in progress, and learn as much as he could about ancient history and cultures. He visited the excavation at Ur of Sir Leonard Woolley, visited S. H. Langdon at Kish, and conversed at length with Cyril Gadd and others. In the process, he collected a number of cuneiform inscriptions and tablets, and learned a great deal about ancient Mesopotamian composition.

Wiseman began to formulate his own theory of the composition of Genesis based upon the recent archaeological discoveries and his investigations of ancient writing practices. He presented these in his book, *New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis* (1936). The book has undergone several editions, including two German, and is most recently presented as *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis* (Thomas Nelson, 1985), edited by his son, well-known Assyriologist Donald J. Wiseman (University of London).

Wiseman's theory has been largely dismissed by both higher critics and conservative traditionalists. Yet a thoughtful reading of the work shows it to be worthy of renewed interest.

Many startling new discoveries were made in Mesopotamia in the decades preceding Wiseman's work. Many were even then being made. Some of the most startling pertain to Genesis.

The culture of ancient Mesopotamia was shown to be far more advanced than previously considered. It was proven that writing was practiced before 3000 B.C., a thousand or more years before Abraham. Vast libraries of clay tablets were discovered at Ur, Nippur, and other sites. Epics of Creation and of a universal Flood (in three versions), which parallel the Genesis accounts, were found to be in widespread distribution. The Code of Hammurapi, from roughly the time of Abraham, was found to contain many of the laws by which Abraham governed his actions (see also the Ebla stela).

At the very least, such discoveries confirmed the great antiquity of much of the Genesis material, often placing it within the time-frame it depicts. Moreover, the finds demonstrated that much of the historic material surrounding the life of Abraham could have been passed along in written form.

Ancient Writing Practices

Wiseman studied the standard writing practices of ancient Mesopotamia, as demonstrated in the tablets. The common writing media were raw clay tablets impressed by a wedge-shaped stylus. The tablets were facilitated by the exceptionally fine clay found in the area which was easy to impress with the distinctive cuneiform ("cone-shaped") characters. Inscriptions in stone were also common, but the clay tablets, oven-baked to great hardness, were versatile and durable.

The identification statement of each document, Wiseman noted, was placed *at the end* of the text -- not, as is currently practiced, at the beginning. Thus, the famous Code of Hammurapi closes with the statement, "The righteous laws which Hammurapi, the wise king, has established . . ."

Two books of the Pentateuch identify themselves in this manner: Leviticus closes with the statement, "These are the commandments which YHWH commanded Moses for the children of Israel . . ." (27:34); and Numbers, "These are the commandments and the ordinances which YHWH commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel . . ." (36:13).

The ending statement of an ancient Mesopotamian text is called the *colophon*. The colophon may include (1) the name of the writer, dictator, owner, or perhaps the subject of the book; (2) some means of dating the book or the events recorded; plus (3) any other pertinent information.

The first words of the text usually served as the title. To this day, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible are entitled in this manner: Genesis is *bereshith*, "In the Beginning"; Exodus is *we'elleshemoth*, "These Are the Names," and so on.

The cuneiform script could, to an extent, be compressed or expanded to fit the tablet. Keeping the number of tablets to a minimum was no doubt considered desirable in most cases. But some texts required that two or more tablets be used. In this event, some way in which to identify the intermediate tablets was required. Scribes answered this need by repeating

the title at the end of each tablet. At the close of the final tablet, the colophon appeared along with the title. Wiseman calls this final repetition of the title, along with the colophon, the "title page" of the work.

Wiseman's Theory

Wiseman began to view the book of Genesis in the light of these ancient Mesopotamian practices. He saw similarities and, in his mind, the key to the construction of Genesis. While critical scholars envisioned a progression of myths and legends artificially connected and unevenly edited by diverse hands, Wiseman gained a sense of order and unity from this new perspective. Genesis, he maintained, should not be studied in isolation, in subjective fashion. It should be compared to other ancient texts.

Fundamental to Wiseman's hypothesis is his observation that the *milieu* of the first eleven chapters of Genesis is distinctly Mesopotamian, while the last fourteen chapters (37:2b on) are Egyptian in setting. Moreover, personal names, place-names, and references to law and custom are all appropriate to their cultural, geographic, linguistic, and historic context. The intervening chapters (in Canaan) are quite mixed, as could be expected. The implication is that the various accounts were originally written under the very circumstances they portray.

Also fundamental to Wiseman's case is the formula, "These are the generations of _____" (name inserted). This formula, which occurs eleven times in Genesis, has long been presumed to be a standard introduction to a genealogical list. However, not in all cases does a genealogy accompany the formula. None appears with "the generations of the heavens and the earth" in Genesis 2:4, nor with Jacob's formula in 37:2a. The genealogies of Noah (6:9 f.) and Terah (11:27) are severely limited, and might be incidental. That of Isaac (27:19 ff.) is not a genealogical list at all: the formula seems to introduce the continuing story of Esau and Jacob.

Genealogies in Genesis	
Adam to the sons of Noah	5:3-32
Noah to his sons (incidental)	6:9-10
Shem, Ham, and Japheth (2-5 generations)	10:1/1b-32
Shem to Abram (9 generations)	11:10/10b-26
Terah to his sons (incidental)	11:27/27b (see also 28-30)
Ishmael to his sons	25:12/13-16
Abraham to Isaac's sons (incidental)	25:19, 25, 26
Jacob's sons (incidental)	29:31-30:24, 35:18
Esau to his sons	36:1-5
Esau to his grandsons	36:9-14
Esau to his grandsons who became princes	36:15-19
Seir the Horite to his grandchildren	36:20-28
Other Histories in Genesis	
Sons of Hori (Seir the Horite) who were princes of Edom	36:29-30
Successive kings of Edom	36:31-39
Descendants of Esau who were princes of Edom	36:40-43

The absence of genealogies with the formula in some of its occurrences has in some circles been put forward as a proof that the text has been extensively redacted (in which case the missing passages must have been deleted and lost, but their introductions preserved -- a singularly unlikely occurrence). Wiseman believed that such apparent inconsistencies are due to a basic misunderstanding, even ignorance, of ancient writing practices, or the failure to apply what is known. The various portions of Genesis, he maintained, were recorded close to the time in which the events took place, perhaps by eyewitnesses. The true authority of the Genesis record lies in the fact that its most ancient histories were written down on clay tablets and handed down by Adam's, Noah's, and Abraham's progeny through the ages.

According to Wiseman's hypothesis, the record of Creation was first handed down by Adam in the simple, phenomenological terms in which God had disclosed it to him. The account of Creation was not, then, "demythologized" by later Hebrew or proto-Hebrew scribes. Instead, the original story found in Hebrew Scripture was elsewhere corrupted and expanded by Mesopotamian polytheists.

Later tablets are the family histories of the lineage traced through Noah, down to the Patriarchs of Israel. The only true worshiper of God of his day, Noah is presumed to have preserved the antediluvian texts (copies, perhaps) for posterity. In turn, Abraham -- a monotheist among polytheists and nature-worshippers -- took unadulterated copies with him to Canaan. Jacob took these, along with family histories recorded while in Canaan, to Egypt. The history of Joseph was probably written in Egypt on papyrus, originally in Egyptian.

The land of Canaan was in regular contact with both Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mesopotamian cuneiform, notably the Akkadian language, could be interpreted in Egypt, as testified by the Tell el-Amarna letters (c. 1400-1353 B.C.) sent from Canaan. Clearly, eventual translation of cuneiform tablets of Genesis would not have been a problem. The composition of Genesis would have been, it is supposed, simply a matter of linking the separate accounts to form a single narrative. This was done, says Wiseman, by Moses in the Wilderness -- with some small editing, such as giving "modern" place-names along with the more ancient Canaanite identifications in the original account.

According to Wiseman, the key to separating the original text of the tablets from Genesis in its present form is to identify the colophon, or ending statement, of each. The colophons of the ancient tablets can be identified, says Wiseman, by the formula, "These are the generations of _____".

Wiseman noted that "generations" here is the Hebrew word *toledoth*, not the more common *dor* used regularly with reference to genealogies. Most scholars of Wiseman's time agreed that *toledoth* was better rendered "history" (F. Boettcher, H. Havernick, J. Furst, B. Roberts, S. R. Driver); "origins" (Havernick, H. Ewald); "chronicles" (H. Ryle), or something in that vein. *Toledot Jesu*, Wiseman points out, is translated "History of Jesus." Given the above, the formula should read, "This is the history (origins, chronicles) of _____".

These eleven formulas, if they are colophons, refer to the account which appears *before* the colophon, not a genealogy appearing *after* it. When and if a genealogy follows, it may be considered a postscript to the colophon rather than a genealogy which the formula introduces. The colophon identifies the owner, writer, dictator, or the one who is the subject of the book.

One might question whether the "author" listed in the colophon could himself have written or orally transmitted the record thus attributed to him. Wiseman, however, asserts that "the history recorded in the sections [preceding] the names of the patriarchs ceases in all instances on the date on which the tablet is stated to have been written or, where no date is given, before the death of that person. In most cases it is continued almost up to the date of the patriarch's death" (p. 145).

If the documents were originally written on clay tablets in Mesopotamian style, then each tablet or series of tablets can be expected to have its own title (the first few words). This phrase should also appear at the end of each tablet in a series, and finally will be repeated at the end of the book as a "title page." Wiseman proposes titles for most of the tablets, along with their title pages. In some cases, he identifies the repetitions of the titles which mark the change from one tablet to the next within a series. (Unfortunately, Wiseman only identifies a few of these repetitions, claiming no more than their occasional incidence as "remnants" of the original documents. For example, "after the Flood" (10:1b) is proposed as the title of Tablet V, the history of Shem (10:1b-11:10). Closely following the colophon in 11:10, "after the flood" is repeated. Wiseman identifies this as the title page. But the phrase also occurs within Tablet V at 10:32b, possibly marking the end of a tablet in the original document.

Wiseman's Tablets of Genesis		
Tablet/Series	Author/Subject	Passage
I	Creation	1:1-2:4
II	Adam	2:4-5:2
III	Noah	5:3-6:9a
IV	Sons of Noah	6:9b-10:1
V	Shem	10:1c-11:10
VI	Terah	11:10b-27a
VII & VIII	Ishmael/Isaac	11:27b-25:19a
IX	Esau	25:19b-36:1a
X	Esau	36:1b-9a
XI	Jacob	36:9b-37:2a

A Critical Examination

This hypothesis has both unresolved difficulties and pronounced strengths. What follows are the writer's own observations.

The first document (Tablet I, 1:1-2:4) seems to affirm Wiseman's theory in its consistent use of *Elohim* ("God") as the name or title of God. The single exception, *YHWH Elohim* in 2:4, might be a redaction, especially since the passage is otherwise consistent. Other than this exception, the tetragrammaton *YHWH* (Yahweh) as the name of God does not appear.

Elsewhere in Genesis, usage of these titles is mixed. The consistency of this first passage, however, suggests that it had at some time existed as a document distinct from the rest. Still, mixed usage of the names of God in Genesis will no doubt strike many scholars as evidence of redaction and the mingling of sources. Redaction and source criticism could be in order here, but should operate within the framework of Wiseman's basic premises.

The title of Tablet I is, according to Wiseman, "God (*Elohim*) created the heavens and the earth" (1:1). The "title page" at the end is, "the Lord God (*YHWH Elohim*) made the heavens and the earth" (2:4). Wiseman does not account for the differences in wording: *Elohim* versus *YHWH Elohim*, and "created" (*barah*) versus "made" (*asah*). Nor does he explain why the first words, "In the beginning," do not become the title.

The "date" of Tablet I is also posited in the clause, "in the day the Lord God made the heavens and the earth" (2:4). There is some question whether this clause could have served such a dual purpose, as both title page and date.

The transition from first to second document takes place within 2:4. The beginning of Tablet II, "When (lit. *in the day*) they were created," actually occurs *before* the first tablet's designated ending statement, "the Lord God made the heavens and the earth." The word order here is essentially the same in either the Masoretic Hebrew text or the Greek Septuagint. This overlapping of designated tablets necessitates some theory of redaction, though perhaps not such an overarching theory as JEDP. Any redaction in Genesis need not, at this point, be thought to be as exhaustive as that presumed by that theory.

Again, in 5:2 (Tablet II), "when they were created" is made to serve double duty as both date and title page.

Wiseman assigns 5:3-32 to Tablet III (5:3-6:9). But the passage is a rather disjointed genealogy not directly attached to its supposed introduction in 5:1. The passage could as easily be a postscript to Tablet II, added by a later hand, as it

could a preface to Tablet III. Or it could have originally been a separate document altogether.

Wiseman does not assign a title and title page to Tablet III in his chart (p. 80). This appears to be an editorial oversight. But could not the phrase, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth," which is assigned Tablet IV (at 6:10 and 10:1) serve the same or similar purpose within Tablet III at 5:32 and 6:10? The phrase also occurs within Tablet IV at 7:13 and 9:18, perhaps marking the ends of individual tablets within the series.

Then if Tablet IV was originally a series of individual tablets thus linked, it seems possible that all or part of Tablet III was once a part of the same series, based on the phrase, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth." This premise would, of course, run "Noah's Tablet" (III) together with that of "the sons of Noah" (IV). A possible solution to this dilemma is that Noah's sons had simply added their records onto later copies of their father's book.

The observation, that in every occurrence the phrase "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" seems perfectly in context, militates against its identification as a recurring tablet marker. It might be that Wiseman's hypothetical tablet markers are more apparent than real. On the other hand, perhaps any occurrences of the tablet marker which seemed out of context were deleted by a later copyist. This is quite likely, were the text encountered in another medium, such as papyrus or parchment, where the significance of such markers would not be understood. The fact that in 7:13 and 10:1 the phrase occurs in conjunction with "the sons of Noah," which seems somewhat redundant, further complicates the issue.

The attribution of most of Noah's story to his sons (in Tablet IV) seems odd, unless Noah had it written the tablet for his sons in their name. Ham's own admission of his indiscretion and cursing (9:20-27) likewise seems unlikely.

The transition from the fourth to the fifth document (at 10:1) is awkward. Wiseman's designated title, "After the Flood," evidently interrupts a genealogy which extends through 10:32. In 11:10, "after the Flood" is clearly an attempt to "date" the birth of Arpachshad, Shem's son, rather than a repeat of the title -- unless it serves a dual purpose. Here again the phrase, were it a mere mechanical literary device, would interrupt the genealogy in 11:10-32.

The colophon of Tablet VI, "this is the history of Terah" (11:27a), appears to interrupt the genealogy, 11:10-32, as well. The passage 11:27-32, however, does not follow the same tedious pattern set in the previous section, 11:10-26. Whether the colophon is the ending of the previous section or the introduction to that which follows, only a change of tablet at 11:27 could easily explain the abrupt change in style and the interruption made by the colophon. Wiseman's separation of tablets at this point is well justified.

The seventh and eighth series of tablets (11:27b-25:19a) tell largely of Abraham and Isaac. But the colophon of Ishmael (25:12) occurs near the end of the story, closely followed by that of Isaac (25:19). Does this mean, as Wiseman's theory suggests, that Ishmael wrote all of the material up to his colophon, which mostly concerns his father and brother? In that case, Isaac must have added only a brief supplement. Did Isaac (or a later redactor) incorporate Ishmael's family records into his own? (Ishmael's death, which occurred before Isaac's, is recorded in the Isaac material.) Or did Isaac simply honor his elder half-brother by giving place to him in his book? The evidence remains inconclusive.

How are the tablets of Series VII and VIII linked together? The phrase, "_____ called upon the name of the Lord," recurs at 12:8 and 21:33, possibly denoting tablet changes. But the phrase has previously occurred at 4:26, and appears subsequently at 28:20 and 35:3. Moreover, the phrase seems to be perfectly in context in each instance, militating against its use as a marker. Other repetitive phrases do not immediately present themselves.

Wiseman's IXth through XIth series of tablets presents problems similar to those of Series VII and VIII. Did Esau write 25:19b-36:9, or did Jacob (37:2a) honor his elder twin brother by including him?

The section 36:1 through 37:2a presents a particular difficulty. The statement, "This is the history of _____" seems clearly to *introduce* an historical record, rather than *conclude* it (36:1, 9; see also verses 15, 20, 29, 31, 40). Perhaps the literary style of the Canaan of Jacob and Esau had, by this time, diverged from that of Mesopotamia -- or at least some variety of construction was available to them. Perhaps these records were, unlike those preceding them, written in the style current in Edom -- or of Egypt, which also exerted considerable influence in the region.

A *mixed* usage of *toledoth*, "generations," is suggested here: sometimes the term is applied to a concluding formula, at others to the introduction to a genealogy.

The passages 36:1-8 and 9-14 are markedly parallel and contain duplicate information, though they also supplement one

another. The former observation may indicate their original existence as independent documents; the latter suggests the reason why both were included. The compiler likely wished to include all the information available to him, yet maintain the integrity of the original documents. He was, therefore, loath to write a composite version himself.

Probable "Separate-Source" Documents of Genesis	
Subject	Passage
Creation	1:1-2:4
Sons of God (?)	6:1-2, 4
Babel (?)	11:1-9
Ishmael	25:12-18
Esau	36:1-8
Esau	36:9-14
Princes, sons of Esau	36:15-19
Sons of Seir the Horite	36:20-28
Princes of the Horites	36:29-30
Kings of Edom	36:31-39
Princes of Edom who were descendants of Esau	36:40-43

The above concern of the compiler is also apparent in the remaining records of Esau. The passage 36:15-43 contains records pertaining to Esau, his descendants, and the princes of Edom, which would seem of little concern to the descendants of Jacob, and even less to the Israelites after the exodus. The records bear all the marks of originally isolated documents -- in this case containing no narrative -- later incorporated *in toto* into a larger work of family history. One might suggest that these are records of Esau which his loving brother, Jacob, included near the end of his own narrative, 25:19b-37:2a.

Jacob capped his family history with his own colophon in Mesopotamian style (37:1-2a). Along with his desire to reproduce Esau's records exactly, this fact accounts for the mixed usage of the "generations" formula. If 37:2a were meant instead to introduce a genealogy of Jacob, one must presume the genealogy were somehow deleted. Yet it remains inconceivable that a redactor would delete a genealogy but leave its introduction intact.

Conclusions

Even in this brief examination of Wiseman's hypothesis, one can see both details which recommend it and unresolved difficulties, even apparent inconsistencies, which threaten to undermine the theory before it has received due consideration. Certainly, the problem of Genesis' composition is much more complex than Wiseman envisioned in his scenario.

If Wiseman's hypothesis is to be advanced further, it must remain flexible enough to allow for exceptions and aberrations. Genesis purports itself to be a series of histories which together span a thousand years or more. Differences in writing style and practice, then, must be allowed for, and the possibility of later redaction taken into account. Within the general assumptions of the overall hypothesis, sub-theories must be developed to work out the fine details. The theory should neither be rejected nor finalized prematurely.

The hypothesis has major strengths. Unlike JEDP, it is based upon a knowledge of ancient methods of composition. In this way the theory is objective, while JEDP is based upon a subjective evaluation of the text in isolation. The hypothesis takes Genesis virtually as is, without extensive modifications to fit its presuppositions. Yet it does not make the broad, specious, and for that matter unscriptural assumption -- following tradition alone -- that the book was dictated to Moses by God. The theory not only takes into account, but often explains, the repetitions and duplications found in the text, such as the dual genealogies of Esau in Genesis 36. The absence of genealogies following the "generations" formula, at least in some cases, is also explained.

Wiseman's hypothesis remains in seminal form. But it is worthy of more serious consideration than it has thus far received. Since truth is not subject to majority opinion, nor have the books been closed in its quest, there is certainly room for one more theory on the composition of Genesis.

NOTES

1. On Canaanite origins of the Hebrew nation, see Israel Finkelstein, "Searching for Israelite Origins," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14 (Sept./Oct. 1988), pp. 34-45, 58.

Analysis of the Wiseman Hypothesis

Tablet I (1:1-2:4)

Colophon: "the history of the heavens and the earth" (1:1)

Title: "God Created the Heavens and the Earth" (1:1)

"Title Page": "the Lord God made the heavens and the earth" (2:4)

Date: "in the day the Lord God made the heavens and the earth" (2:4)

Comments:

Genesis 1:1-2:4 -- An initial, "primitive" telling of the Creation story, as yet not "mythologized" by polytheists in Mesopotamia, containing little or no redaction.

Tablet II (2:4-5:2)

Colophon: "the history of Adam" (5:1a)

Title: "When They Were Created" (2:4)

"Title Page": "when they were created" (5:2)

Date: "in the day God created man" (5:1b)

Comments:

Genesis 2:5-6 -- A postscript to Tablet I, the beginning of Tablet II, or a transitional passage designed to add Tablet II to Tablet I.

Genesis 2:7-5:2 -- The story of the creation and life of Adam.

Tablet III (5:3-6:9a)

Colophon: "the history of Noah" (6:9a)

Title: none specified

Comments:

Genesis 5:3-32 -- A family genealogical record, perhaps originally a separate tablet, to which the Flood story (6:1-10:1) was added.

"Title Page": none specified

Genesis 6:1-9a Might be, as Wiseman suggests, "a small tablet of narrative writing added to a genealogical list" (p. 92).

Date: none specified

**Tablet
(Series) IV
(6:9b-10:1)**

Colophon: "the history of the sons of Noah" (10:1a)

Comments:

6:9b-10:1a -- The Flood story, probably originally a document separate from 6:1-9a. The section 9:20-29, recalling the sin and curse of Ham, might also have been a separate document in its original form.

Title: "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (6:10)

"Title Page": "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (10:1b)

10:1b-c -- Might serve to connect a genealogy composed at a later date to an existing record of Noah's life.

Date: "after the Flood" (10:1c)

**Tablet
(Series) V
(10:1c-11:10)**

Colophon: "the history of Shem" (11:10a)

Comments:

10:1b-32 -- A genealogy of Noah's sons (note that the descendents of Shem are placed last).

Title: "After the Flood" (10:32)

11:1-9 -- The story of Babel might originally have existed as a separate historical document.

"Title Page": "after the Flood" (11:10b)

Date: none specified

**Tablet
(Series) VI
(11:10b-12:7a)**

Colophon: "the history of Terah" (11:27a)

Comments:

11:10a (or 10b) -26 -- A genealogy of the direct lineage of Terah from Shem, obviously a separate document or for a different purpose from that of 10:21-32 (traced through Peleg rather than Joktan, his brother).

Title: "Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (11:26)

"Title Page": "Abram, Nahor, and Haran" (11:27b)

Date: when Terah was 70 (11:26)

**Tablet
(Series)
VII and
VIII
(11:27b-
25:12
[25:13-19a
a
postscript])**

Colophons: "the history of Ishmael" (25:12)
"the history of Isaac" (25:19)

Series Title: "Abraham's Sons"
(25:12, 19)

"Title Page": none specified

Date: when Isaac dwelt at Beer-Lahai-
roi (25:11)

Comments:

11:27a or 27b -- Apparently begins a new document, which explains the duplication of material between 11:26 and 27.

11:27-25:19a -- Might have been written largely by Abraham, and concluded by his sons, as an extended episodic account. It is not unlikely that Ishmael had a hand in recording his father's story, esp. since Isaac did not appear until 21:1; or that Isaac included Ishmael in deference to his older brother, attributing the history also to him, with a short genealogy and epitaph (25:12-18).

**Tablet
(Series) IX
(25:29b-
36:1a)**

Colophon: "the history of Esau"
(36:1)

Title: none specified

"Title Page": none specified

Date: none specified

Comments:

25:29b-35:29 -- The stories of Esau and Jacob, similar in texture to that of Abraham. Both stories are quite self-contained and display considerable continuity. Jacob is by far the main character, and likely the source of most or all of the information.

**Tablet X
(36:1b-9a)**

Colophon: "the history of Esau"
(36:9a)

Title: "Who is Edom" (36:1b)

"Title Page": "[who] is Edom" (36:8b)

Comments:

36:1-43 -- Records of Esau which, as a whole, interrupt the story of Jacob, which is resumed and concluded in 37:1-2. Sections 36:1-8 and 36:9-43 appear to be two or more distinct documents, including duplication in Esau's genealogy. 36:9-43 also includes records of the princes of Edom (36:20-39), of little interest to Jacob (or to later Israel) except as a family history. Moreover, the histories of Jacob and Esau here are so intermingled that Wiseman's argument for separating them as he did into Tablets X and XI is weak.

Date: none specified

Tablet XI
(36:9b-
37:2a)

Colophon: "the history of Jacob"
(37:2a)

Title: "Father of the Edomites"
(36:9b)

"Title Page": "father of the Edomites"
(36:43c)

Date: while living in Canaan
(37:1)

Comments:

37:1-2 -- Concludes the story of Jacob.

36:9b, 36:43c -- It is inexplicable that the "history of Jacob" should be entitled, "Father of the Edomites," unless the colophon designates the owner or author of the book, not its subject.

37:2b-50:26 -- The balance of Genesis is story of Joseph -- a separate, continuous document of strong Egyptian influence and motif, ending with Joseph's epitaph (50:22-26).



[Publications](#)
[Index](#)



[Pneumatikos](#)
[Main Page](#)



[Newsletter](#)
[Index](#)

© 1999 Paul A. Hughes

Last updated May 1999. For more information, comments, or suggestions, write <mailto:pneumatikos@geocities.com>