

Genesis 1-50

Evidence of Tablets in the Text of Genesis

P. J. Wiseman noted¹ that the Genesis records were originally written on clay tablets in the usual manner of ancient Near Eastern records. If more than one tablet was necessary due to the length of the account, it was customary for the tablets to include the following elements:

1. **Title** for each series of tablets.
2. **Catch-lines** to keep the tablets in proper order.
3. **Colophon** at the end of the writing—often including...
4. **Name** of the writer or owner of the tablet or tablet series.
5. **Date** indicating when it was written.

Wiseman listed the following repetition of words and phrases in Genesis (catch-lines), which usually occur at the beginning and ending of a series of tablets in order to connect the tablets:

- 1.1 God created the heavens and the earth.
- 2.4 Lord God made earth and heaven.
- 2.4 When they were created
- 5.2 When they were created
- 6.10 Shem, Ham, and Japheth
- 10.1 Shem, Ham, and Japheth
- 10.32 After the Flood
- 11.10 After the Flood
- 11.26 Abram, Nahor, and Haran
- 11.27 Abram, Nahor, and Haran
- 25.12 Abraham's son
- 25.19 Abraham's son
- 36.1 Who is Edom
- 36.8 Who is Edom
- 36.9 Father of the Edomites (lit., father Edom)
- 36.43 Father of the Edomites (lit., father Edom)

See chart, next page:
"Key to the Structure of Genesis"

Literary Structure of the Pentateuch

Universal

Creation prologue
Adam narratives
Noahic narratives
(Noah and his sons)

Genesis 1.1-11.27a

1.1-2.4a
2.4b-5.1a
5.1b-11.27a

Patriarchal

Abraham narratives
Isaac and Jacob narratives
Joseph narratives

Genesis 11.27b-50.26

11.27b-25.19a
25.19b-37.2a
37.2b-50.26

National: Israel

Exodus narratives
Sinai narratives
(Laws)
Wilderness narratives
(Book of Deuteronomy)

Exodus–Deuteronomy

Exodus 1.1-18.27
Exodus 19.1–Numbers 10.10
Numbers 10.11-36.13

¹Wiseman, P. J. *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1985 (pp. 79-80).
Outline at right, "Literary Structure of the Pentateuch," by M. Sperou, ncBc. Chart on next page, "Key to the Structure of Genesis," by J. Sperou, ncBc.

Key to the Structure of Genesis¹

Tablet Series	Reference	Titles	Catch-lines ²	Colophon Writer/Owner	Colophon Dating	Contents
1	1.1-2.4a	God created the heavens and the earth 1.1	...heavens and the earth when they were created. 2.4a	These are the origins (toledot) of the heavens and the earth. 2.4a		Creation of the heavens and the earth
2	2.4b-5.1a	In the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven 2.4b	...made earth and heaven. 2.4b	This is the book of the origins (toledot) of Adam. 5.1a		Creation of humans. The temptation and fall, and God's judgment. Murder of Abel; beginning of civilization by Cain and his descendants. Birth of Seth; men call upon the name of the Lord.
3	5.1b-6.9a	Man 5.1b	...when they were created 5.2	These are the origins (toledot) of Noah. 6.9b		Death of Adam. Genealogy from Seth to Noah and his sons. Causes of the Flood: apostasy of sons of God, wickedness of mankind.
4	6.9.b-10.1a	Noah 6.9b	Shem, Ham and Japheth 6.10 10.1a	These are the origins (toledot) of... the sons of Noah. 10.1a		Noah's righteousness and the corruption of mankind; God's decision to judge, and instructions to Noah. The flood, the Noachic Covenant, and Ham's sin. Death of Noah.
5	10.1b-11.10a	The sons of Noah 10.1	... after the flood 10.32b	These are the origins (toledot) of Shem. 11.10a	after the flood 10.1b	The Table of Nations: genealogies of Japheth, Ham, and Shem; and the tower of Babel
6	11.10b-11.27a	Shem 11.10b	... after the flood. Abram, Nahor, and Haran. 11.26	These are the origins (toledot) of Terah. 11.27a	Terah lived seventy years 11.26	Genealogy from Shem to Terah and his sons.
7-8	11.27b-	Abram 11.27b 12.1	Abram, Nahor, and Haran 11.27b Abraham's son. 25.12a 25.19a	These are the origins (toledot) of Ishmael. 25.12 ... of Isaac. 25.19a ³	Isaac lived by Beer-lahai-roi 25.11	Birth, call and journeys of Abram. The Abrahamic Covenant. Birth of Ishmael. Promise and birth of Isaac; offering and marriage of Isaac. Death of Abraham. (25.12) Descendants and death of Ishmael. (25.19a)
9-11	25.19a	Isaac 25.19b	Esau is Edom 36.1 36.8 father of the Edomites 36.9 36.43	These are the origins (toledot) of Esau. 36.1 36.9 ... of Jacob. 37.2a ³	Esau lived... in Seir 36.8 Jacob lived... in Canaan 37.1	Isaac marries; birth of Esau and Jacob. Birthright and blessing of Jacob; who flees to Haran, marries, fathers children, returns to Canaan. Death of Isaac. (36.1) Esau marries, and moves away. (36.9) Esau's genealogy and kings of Edom. (37.2a)
	37.2b-50.26	(Recorded in Egypt on papyrus)				Joseph sold into slavery. Judah and Tamar. Joseph is imprisoned, interprets dreams, and is promoted. His brothers visit, and he reveals his identity. Jacob moves to Egypt, blesses sons and dies. Joseph dies.

¹ Based on: Wiseman, P.J. *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis*. Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1985; Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969, 1991. ² The catch-lines may not be exact from tablet to tablet, but remnants that Moses retained. See list by P.J. Wiseman. ³ One explanation concerning the tablets of Ishmael and Isaac, and Esau and Jacob: the tablets were owned by the oldest son and passed to the chosen son who included the last information regarding the oldest son, then signed off the series with his own colophon.