

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON II : INTRODUCTION

STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS: PRIMEVAL AND PATRIARCHAL HISTORY — It is hardly accidental that four-fifths of Genesis (chaps. 12-50) describe the history of only four generations (Abraham to Joseph) while one-fifth of Genesis (chaps. 1-11) describes the history of at least twenty generations (Adam to Abraham). The clear-cut division between chaps. 11 and 12 has provided sufficient evidence for dividing Genesis into two main bodies:

Genesis 1-11: Primeval History	Genesis 12-50: Patriarchal History
the focus is on mankind; note the Hebrew word <i>'ādām</i> (<i>man, mankind, Adam</i>) occurs 562 times in the OT and 45 of these are found in Genesis, all except one (16:12) are confined to chaps. 1-11	the focus is on one family: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons (esp. Joseph)
we read of individuals who had land but are either losing it or being expelled from it; this group is <i>losing</i>	the rest of Genesis emphasizes individuals who do not have land but are on the way toward it; this group is <i>expecting</i>
the narratives speak of those who are increasingly alienating themselves from God	the solution to chaps. 1-11: the Lord chooses a single family to work His plan of redemption

“Will there be more Adams and more tower builders? Or is there a way out of this dilemma? The obedient model of Abraham contrasts to all the sorry models who have gone before him. He is one not intent on making his name great. Rather, he is one upon whom greatness is bestowed. A covenant with humankind (Gen. 8-9) is now augmented by a covenant with a family. Genesis is moving us progressively from generations (chs. 1-2), to degeneration (chs. 3-11), to regeneration (chs. 12-50).” [Hamilton, 1:11] *“Of the fifty chapters of Genesis only eleven are devoted to the primeval history: this indicates where the book’s main interest lies — with the patriarchs, the forefathers of the nation. Gen 1-11 gives the background to the call of Abraham in two main ways. **First, it discloses the hopeless plight of mankind without the gracious intervention of God. Second, it shows how the promises made to the patriarchs fulfill God’s original plans for humanity.**”* [Wenham, 1:intro li]

OTHER STRUCTURAL OBSERVATIONS: GEOGRAPHICAL — The book of Genesis is set geographically as follows:

Gen 1-11 is geographically set in *Babylonia*

Gen 12-36 is geographically set in *Palestine*

Gen 37-50 is geographically set in *Egypt*

Therefore each part of the Mediterranean world is highlighted in some part of Genesis, with the center section (chaps 12-36) bracketed by the two sections of the Near Eastern world with whose history Israel would be constantly interlocked. *Thus one could consider Genesis a book of world history; even the choosing of Abraham was for the purpose of all the nations of the earth (such as those falling within the geographical areas of chaps. 1-11 and 37-50).*

THE *tôl^edô^t* STRUCTURE — Few books in Scripture reveal the lines of demarcation between their individual units as clearly as does Genesis. This is due to the presence of the word *tôl^edô^t* (also spelled *toledoth*, *toldot* – ‘[this is] the (family) history of..., [these are] the generations of...’) used ten (or eleven, see the double genealogy of Esau in 36:1-37:1) times throughout Genesis. While this is accepted by most, there are two items of which the commentators differ.

***tôl^edô^t* INTRODUCES A NEW SECTION** — The first is if this word *concludes* or *introduces* each section. What makes most sense to me and what is accepted by the majority of the commentaries I am using is that the *tôl^edô^t* is used to introduce each section (for more information regarding why the *tôl^edô^t* being an *introduction* to what follows rather than a *conclusion* of the preceding portion, see Hamilton, 1:3-10).

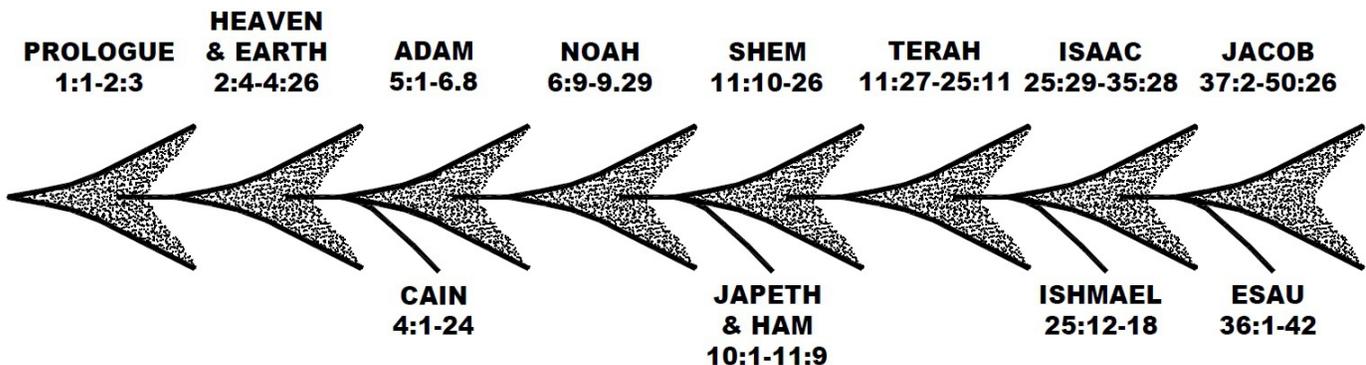
tôl^edô^t* DEFINED** — The second is more complicated and concerns the exact meaning of the term itself. According to BDB the noun *tôl^edô^t* is derived from the Hebrew verb *yālad* which means ‘to give birth, to bear, to bring forth,’ therefore the traditional English translation has been ‘these are the generations.’ Although this is not the usual Hebrew term for ‘generation’ (*dôr*), it does make sense in such passages as Gen 5:1 where it traces the genealogy of Adam to Noah, and 11:10 where it traces the genealogy of Shem to Terah. ***But in other places where it is used, that translation would be forced at best; e.g., Gen 6:9 is not followed by a genealogy but rather the judgment of the flood. The actual genealogy of Noah is not listed until the next section (Gen 10:1-11:9). Some therefore consider the word to be used to ‘announce the historical development from the ancestor (or beginning point)’ (Ross, 72), or mean ‘those things which are begotten;’ in each case *tôl^edô^t* indicating ‘***the result or product; that which is produced; that which came forth.***’ (Young, 59f)

HOW IS *tôl^edô^t* USED? — This term has a threefold function in Genesis:

- it has a narrowing function where it brings into sharp relief the elect line of promise
- it introduces the subject matter that follows the current block of narrative (or genealogical list)
- it looks forward to future progeny

The narrowing takes place in the choice of a single character selected from the record of many; e.g., of Noah’s sons, the story proceeds with Shem; of Terah’s sons, the story proceeds with Abraham, and so on. ***One could think of it as a link, a hinge between the preceding and what follows. “It is also essentially preparatory in function and puts the patriarchs into their cosmic context. The God who called Abraham was no local divinity but the creator of the whole universe. The succession of catastrophes that befell humanity prior to Abraham’s call show just why the election of Abraham, and in him, Israel, was necessary.”*** [Wenham, 1:intro xxii]

Applying this structure to Genesis, it gives us the following diagram:



THE ‘REJECTED’ LINE — *Note the tension between the chosen versus the rejected, especially after Abraham. The genealogical records of the ‘rejected’ (e.g., Cain, Ham, Nahor, the sons of Abraham by Keturah, and Esau) are included but almost without comment while the ‘chosen’ line is deeply involved. But this is just not mere tidiness; the showing of the genealogies of the rejected line further shows the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham to make of him ‘many nations’ (17:5,20).* “Now, another characteristic of these generations is, that they always commence with the bad line first, i.e., Genesis gives an account of Cain’s descent before it takes up the descent of Seth. It gives an account of the descent of the nations of the earth. When you get to the generations of the sons of Noah, it gives an account first of all of the nations of the earth, then it follows one nation through Shem. When you come to Isaac and Ishmael, Ishmael’s genealogical table is put first, and then is sidetracked. When you come to Esau and Jacob, Esau’s genealogy is given first, and then Jacob’s. Esau is sidetracked.” [Carroll, 43]

PROLOGUE AND THE TEN *tôl^edô^t* — With the exception of 1:1 the rest of the main sections begins with the *tôl^edô^t* :

Chapters 1–11 have a universal perspective, dealing with all mankind

‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ (Gen 1:1)	1:1-2:3	Prologue. In this section God creates the heavens and earth with the creation of man (male and female) being part of this bigger picture. They were the peak of creation as they were created in God’s image. The first section could not have started with an <i>tôl^edô^t</i> because there was nothing from which anything could have come.
‘These are the generations of the heavens and the earth’ (Gen 2:4a)	2:4-4:26	The first <i>tôl^edô^t</i> (<i>that which was produced out of the heavens and the earth</i>) is not a second creation story but focuses on what came forth: Adam from the earth (2:7) and Eve from Adam (2:27). The emphasis is narrowed down to the paradise garden and Adam and Eve because of their sin and the curse which changes the earth.
‘This is the book of the generations of Adam’ (Gen 5:1a)	5:1-6:8	The <i>sēper tôl^edô^t</i> of Adam is mostly genealogies with few narrative details, dwelling on what comes out of Adam. It is not Adam’s story but <i>what was produced from Adam</i> , meaning the line from Adam to Noah. [for the use of <i>sēper tôl^edô^t</i> , see Appendix 1]
‘These are the generations of Noah’ (Gen 6:9a)	6:9-9:29	The <i>tôl^edô^t</i> of Noah describes <i>what was produced from him and with him</i> : the children of Noah and the animals saved through his ark. After the flood God makes a new covenant with mankind (all the descendants of Noah).
‘These are the generations of the sons of Noah’ (Gen 10:1a)	10:1-11:9	The <i>tôl^edô^t</i> of the sons of Noah consists mostly of genealogies with a few narrative details, describing what was produced from the sons of Noah: <i>all the different nations of the world</i> .
‘These are the generations of Shem’ (Gen 11:10a)	11:10-26	The <i>tôl^edô^t</i> of Shem is again mostly genealogies with a few narrative details, especially the chosen line from Shem to the family of Terah; <i>that which was produced from Shem</i> .

Chapters 1-11 told the general story of creation and revelation of God with regard to all nations but now the Lord will focus upon the creation of one special people from Abram. Chapters 12–50 deal almost exclusively with Israelite concerns, with some of Israel’s closest neighbors only briefly mentioned (Moab, Ammon, Edom)

‘Now these are the generations of Terah’ (Gen 11:27a) 11:27-25:11 The *tôl^edôt* of Terah does not tell his story but *what was produced from Terah, what came forth from Terah*, especially Abram. The focus changes from the world at large to a single chosen family.

‘These are the generations of Ishmael’ (Gen 25:12a) 25:12-18 The *tôl^edôt* of Ishmael is a short section (25:12-18) consisting mostly of genealogies with a few narrative details. In the way of Genesis, the line which is not chosen is handled first and brought to a closure and then comes the chosen line.

‘These are the generations of Isaac’ (Gen 25:19a) 25:19-35:29 The *tôl^edôt* of Isaac (a long section: 25:19-35:29) describe what was produced from Isaac, his son Jacob. Again note, this *tôl^edôt* is not about Isaac but *what came forth from Isaac (Jacob)*.

‘These are the generations of Esau’ (Gen 36:1a, 9a) 36:1-37:1 The *tôl^edôt* of Esau is mostly genealogies with a few narrative details, the line which is not chosen being handled first and brought to a closure. What is unusual however is Esau gets a double *tôl^edôt* section – the first (36:1-8) is the *tôl^edôt* of Esau ‘*who is Edom*’; possibly emphasizing Esau as the origin of his Edomite descendants. The second (36:9-37:1) is the *tôl^edôt* of Esau ‘*the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir*’; possibly emphasizing the origin of a certain political structure and kingdom. Note 36:31, ‘*Now these were the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel.*’ Compare that with 37:1, ‘*Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.*’ ***The Lord is emphasizing the contrast between the chosen one Jacob, still living in Canaan because of God’s promise as a powerless stranger, while his brother had rapidly developed into a powerful nation with kings. The worldly beholder might imagine Esau to be more blessed than Jacob who did not receive his promised land until the end of the book of Joshua.***

‘These are the generations of Jacob’ (Gen 37:2a) 37:2-50:26 The last *tôl^edôt* section of Genesis, ‘*the generations of Jacob,*’ actually tells the story mainly of Joseph and his brothers, especially Judah (see Gen 38, Judah’s role in Gen 44, and the fact that Joseph and Judah get the main emphasis in the blessings in Gen 49). It is again *what was produced from Jacob* that is the content and not Jacob himself.

OTHER USES OF *tôl^edôt* IN GENESIS — Note the word *tôl^edôt* also occurs in Gen 10:32 and 25:13. I cannot explain why but none of the commentators consider these to be part of the *tôl^edôt* structure given above; possibly because all the divisions use the *phrase* ‘*elleh tôl^edôt*’ (‘*these are the generations;*’ except 5:1) and the following do not use *tôl^edôt* in that manner?

‘These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.’ (Gen 10:32 ESV)

‘These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam’ (Gen 25:13 ESV); ‘And these were the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam’ (Gen 25:13 NKJV)

tôl^odôt **OUTSIDE OF GENESIS** — Outside of Genesis, the term *tôl^odôt* also occurs in Num 3:1; Ruth 4:18; and 1 Chron 1:29.

- *‘These are the generations of Aaron and Moses’* (Num 3:1) In similar fashion to Genesis, this *tôl^odôt* focuses on the elect, heads a genealogy, and looks forward to progeny (Numbers 1,2 concerns the census of Israel, to the four sons of Aaron’s household).
- *‘Now these are the generations of Perez’* (Ruth 4:18) – 10 names from Perez to David. While Perez appears to be mentioned almost incidentally, this *tôl^odôt* forms a bridge from the previous to *what comes forth from Perez, King David*.
- *‘The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael. These are their genealogies...’* (1 Chron 1:28,29) As in Genesis, what follows is not Abraham but *that which came forth from Abraham*. First the ‘rejected’ line (Ishmael / Abraham’s concubines / Esau / Edom, 1 Chron 1:29-54) then the ‘elect’ line (the sons of Jacob, 1 Chron 2-9 with interspersed narratives).

THE FIVE GENEALOGIES — Note further, the five *tôl^odôt* genealogies in Genesis fall into two categories. The first type is a vertical genealogy which traces one line of descent (5:1ff, a ten-generation genealogy of Adam to Noah; 11:10ff, a ten-generation genealogy of Shem to Abraham). Both of these conclude with a reference to an individual who fathered three children:

VERSES	GENEALOGY	BEGINNING	CONCLUSION
5:1-6:8	the descendants of Adam	<i>‘This is the book of the generations of Adam’</i> (Gen 5:1a)	Noah: Shem, Ham, Japeth
11:10-26	the descendants of Shem	<i>‘These are the generations of Shem’</i> (Gen 11:10a)	Terah: Abram, Nahor, Haran

The second type of genealogy in Genesis is a horizontal or segmented type in which the genealogy is not traced through one son (the oldest) but through various children. These last three genealogies protrude little into the narrative sections of Genesis, and at times seem almost tangential.

VERSES	GENEALOGY	BEGINNING	CONTENTS
10:1-11:9	the descendants of the sons of Noah	<i>‘These are the generations of the sons of Noah’</i> (Gen 10:1a)	descendants of Shem, Ham, Japheth
25:12-18	the descendants of Ishmael	<i>‘These are the generations of Ishmael’</i> (Gen 25:12a)	descendants of the twelve sons of Ishmael
36:1-37:1	the descendants of Esau	<i>‘These are the generations of Esau’</i> (Gen 36:1a, 9a)	Esau’s family tree

Appendix 1: A little further explanation is required concerning the 'ēlleh tōl^edōt structure that is such a definitive part of the book of Genesis. First let me state this structure is recognized and acknowledged by each of the major commentaries I am using (see lesson 1 for further bibliographical information for each of the following):

Carroll, Benjamin H., *Genesis*

Hamilton, Victor P., *Genesis*

Keil, Carl F., *The Pentateuch*

Mathews, Kenneth A., *Genesis*

Morris, Henry, *The Genesis Record*

Ross, Allen P., *Creation and Blessing*

Waltke, Bruce K., *Genesis*

Wenham, Gordon J., *Genesis*

Each of the above accepts the ten-fold 'ēlleh tōl^edōt structure as given in the notes. But as I was digging deeper into the other places where 'ēlleh tōl^edōt is used in the OT and places where the term tōl^edōt is used within Genesis but not the phrase 'ēlleh tōl^edōt, I came across something I did not expect. Of each of the ten divisions recognized by the commentators (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 and 37:2), each uses the phrase 'ēlleh tōl^edōt with one exception! The Hebrew phrase used at 5:1 is not 'ēlleh tōl^edōt but sēper tōl^edōt = 'book of the generations.' A couple (Ross, Waltke) pass over this distinction without comment but most do note the difference; e.g., "*This is the book of the family history of Adam.*" A heading like this introduces each new section in Genesis (cf. 2:4; 6:9), but only here is a book mentioned.' [Wenham, 125; emphasis mine]

The word sēper is the Hebrew word for *book* but we must be careful not to read into that our modern understanding. Sēper simply means something that is inscribed, irrespective of the external form it takes (e.g., a tablet). It denotes a writing complete in itself, whether one 'sheet' or several. Other such written sources are recorded in the OT; e.g., '*the Book of Jashar*' (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18) and '*the Book of the Wars of the LORD*' (Num 21:14).

Why the change from our usual tōl^edōt formula in 5:1? Of all the other genealogical lists given in the OT or the other tōl^edōt structures within Genesis (and the few outside of Genesis), there is no other such phrase in the OT. The start of 5:1 is unique. Most of those above believe Moses was employing an ancient written genealogy record at this point, one that could have been, quite literally, in his hands as he wrote (*and possibly written by Adam himself!*).

But Morris and Carroll also makes an interesting observation: this is the first mention of 'book' in the OT. The first mention of a book in the NT is Matthew 1:1, '*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*' ***Thus the first book mentioned tells of the origins of the first Adam; the second speaks of the origins of the last Adam, 'the Lord from heaven' (1 Cor 15:47). An interesting 'coincidence,' is it not?***