

# The Uniformity of Genesis 1-4

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As a non-uniformitarian in geology I must explain why I'm a uniformitarian in Scripture. That is, I believe all parts of the Bible are equally inspired. But I also believe that Genesis 1-4 is itself uniform in overall style and content.

That doesn't mean believing that every line of the Pentateuch has to be authored by Moses. It does mean that Moses compiled it, with the possible exception of the final chapter and footnotes added by later scribes to familiarise later readers with geographical nomenclature and similar changed conditions. I believe the overall uniformity in style and content is due to the input of the Editor-in-Chief, the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit today renews the minds of believers<sup>1</sup>, so He prepared the minds of people like Moses to author or edit the original Scriptures.

Genesis, as opposed to Exodus-Deuteronomy, was in all probability **compiled** by Moses rather than authored by him, since all of it happened before he was born. God doesn't perform unnecessary miracles.

The fact that liberal theologians have in the past dreamed up identities like J, E, D and P needn't inhibit the assignment of sources to what Moses wrote. The great difference between Wiseman's (see below) theory and those of the liberals consists in the former's use of archaeological evidence versus the latter's belief in oral traditions, forgeries and other unreliable sources. In any case, liberals don't see these books written before the Exile, and they then regard 'Moses' as a refinement of Babylonian myth. Not many scholars now accept such a picture, but unfortunately not too many go out of their way to refute the earlier theories.

There are indications in the text of Genesis that Moses may have compiled Genesis up to the time of Joseph from earlier clay tablets of Mesopotamian origin which could have been handed down over the years by the patriarchs mentioned in the text. Note, for example, Genesis 5:1, where it speaks of a written record connected with the name of Adam.

I find P.J. Wiseman's theories in this regard of considerable value.<sup>2</sup> Though I cannot support his

theory about the 'revelation' of creation in six days instead of the actual creation's performance in that time, nevertheless his actual **research** as reported in his books<sup>3</sup> is scholarly and can be used to explain apparent unevennesses in Genesis 1-4.

In ancient times, tablets were written with a **colophon** included. Wiseman explains:

... many tablets ended *with* a colophon. This was *the equivalent of the modern title-page*. However, in ancient tablets *it was placed at the end of the written matter, instead of at the beginning*, as is now done. *The colophon included among other things:-*

- (a) *The name of the scribe who wrote the tablet.*
- (b) *The date when it was written.*<sup>4</sup>

Wiseman then proceeds to apply this feature to Genesis, suggesting that it still bears the marks of the original clay tablets:

*That the Book was compiled at an early date, certainly not later than the age of Moses, is witnessed by the presence of these literary aids. It is a remarkable testimony to the purity with which the text has been transmitted to us, that we find them still embedded in this ancient document.*<sup>5</sup>

I support his theory of textual origin. It is this part of Wiseman's work with which I personally concur, and not with his attempt to reconcile what Genesis says with evolution. Actually, these evolution-supporting theories came later than Wiseman's research on the origin of the Genesis text, and we find in his earlier book a complete absence of reference to the 'six day story' theory.

In his later book, despite some unwarranted theorising there is also some textual comment which supports a literal reading.<sup>6</sup> He cites CD. Ginsburg on Genesis 1: 'there is in this chapter none of the peculiarities of Hebrew poetry' and S.R. Driver: 'it purports to describe not appearance but facts'.<sup>7</sup>

Also in this second book, the range of possibilities in the colophon is extended to the following potential items:

- (1) The 'title' or designation given to the narrative.
- (2) The date of writing.
- (3) The serial number of the tablet, when it formed part of a series.
- (4) If part of a series of tablets, a statement whether the tablet did or did not finish the series.
- (5) The name of the scribe or owner.<sup>8</sup>

Now this five-point list includes one item, (3), which Wiseman uses in part to support his 'six-day revelation by God to Adam' theory, which I reject. He uses it (without, of course, archaeological support, for we have no biblical version in cuneiform) to suggest that somehow the use of six tablets may have had some meaning in it.

My response to this suggestion is to say that, if Moses had before him six tablets numbered from 1 to 6, each confining itself to the events of a single day, he wouldn't have been true to his undoubted scholarship if he'd included the numbering in his presentation of Genesis 1.

What I'm saying here is that the numbering of the tablets would have been omitted. Therefore the expressions 'day one', 'second day' etc. refer not to tablets or to revelation to Adam, but to the work of creation in the narrative itself.

As for the other four points, I agree that an honest and scholarly Moses would give references and would therefore include these elements from a colophon as confirmation of the genuineness of his sources.

Hebrew custom in early times was to entitle books from their opening words. Thus Genesis is in Hebrew *Be-reshith*, 'In-the-beginning', Exodus is **Ve-elleh Shemoth**, 'Now-these-are-the names', and so on. Hence we are not surprised to note a reference in Genesis 2:4 (the end of the first set of tablets if the implications of the research reported by Wiseman is correct) to Genesis 1:1:

*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.*

The colophon (found at the end of a set of tablets in the oldest sets) thus refers in general terms to the title of the series. Actually in two sections (see Genesis 25:12 and 36:1) it seems that the colophon may have preceded and that these two sections were then inserted into the record of Isaac and Jacob respectively. Did this have something to do with the birthright? We also have to remember that 'This is the record of. . .' may refer not to authorship but to ownership. Did Isaac inherit Ishmael's tablet and Jacob Esau's? If this were so, 'These are the generations of. . .' in 25:19 and 37:2 refers to two sets of tablets, not one.

Going back to the first section of Genesis, there

appears to be no date in Genesis 2:4 if we used some recent translations but KJV reads: 'in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens', which may well represent a formal date, since the repetition is grammatically strange unless it should be regarded as a separate rubric.

As for finishing the series, this point, like point (3) would hardly be worth copying, but point (5) is in this case absent, unless we consider that the name 'The Lord God' might refer to the writer. Certainly there was no human being present to witness the events of the first five days.

When we apply Wiseman's five indicators to other hypothesized sets of tablets, we find more than two of the five points in most cases. Thus in Genesis 5:1 we have (1) a title: 'Book of the Generations', (2) a date: 'in the day that God created man'; and (5) a scribe or owner: 'Adam'. Further examples are found in Genesis 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1,9; 37:2.<sup>9</sup>

But if the above represents a break in continuity at Genesis 2:4 on the basis of the hypothesis that there were originally two sets of tablets, how can we claim uniformity? The spiritual answer is that the same Holy Spirit is the Author of both sections. The natural answer is that these are but two parts of a record of origins, similar in style to many scientific articles in learned journals.

Writers usually arrange their work so that the reader is given an overall view of an event on a large canvas. Then the writer focuses on the main point he is trying to get across. In this case, our Writer wants us to know about our origins, rather than go into unnecessary detail about all the other things visible on the earth. Thus after outlining the order and method of creation, He tells us what specifically happened to the male and female humans He had created on the sixth day. Genesis 1:1 to 2:4 tells us of the general plan, and we are at liberty to go into detail in today's world through the agency of science to gain more detail on that. Then the record turns to something else we couldn't know about: the way our progenitor fell into sin. From here on, essential information about history and theology are presented.

Human beings are unable to study history without written records, and are unable to know about God unless He communicates in some permanent, stable form like writing. Hence the Scriptures.

The word **toledoth**, translated 'generations' in KJV, is explained by Gesenius to mean 'history. . .the origin of anything'. Other scholars like Boettcher, Havernick and Roberts all translate as 'history'. Today our word 'generation', is restricted in meaning. In Scripture this modern meaning is best

represented by the Hebrew **dor**. But **toledoth** concerns written records of past events. Hence we find a collection of Jewish traditions called in English 'the History of Jesus' is in Hebrew **Toledoth Yeshua**.<sup>10</sup>

Thus if Genesis 2:4 represents a colophon, its translation ought to be something like 'Report on Earth and Universe when Created', and Genesis 5:1 can be rendered 'Document containing the Report of Adam'.

But there is a problem. Throughout the years most scholars, at least during the Christian era, have tended to see these verses relating to 'generations' as referring to what follows, not what precedes. Surely 'This is the . . .' or 'These are the . . .' introduces something that follows rather than referring back to something already expressed?

Perhaps our use in English of 'this' and 'these' does do this. But a study of the use of 'this/these' in a concordance will indicate to the enquirer that in Scripture the word refers 80% of the time to what precedes. And in Genesis it is always possible to refer 'These are the generations of . . .' to what preceded anyway.

If you asked someone to state his 'genealogy' (**toledoth**) you'd most surely expect an outline of ancestry, not descendants. Even in the case of Adam, his 'genealogy' has to mean his creation.

However, a further meaning, as we have seen, is that someone's toledoth may refer to events rather than people, so that in Genesis 11:27, for example, even though it's mainly about people, we might call it 'Terah's Report', dated in his 70th year. This would incidentally solve the problem of the age of Abram when he left home, for according to Genesis 12:4 and Acts 7:4 he must have been born when Terah was 130. This becomes clearer if we regard Genesis 11:26 as a dating statement: 'by Terah, now 70 years old. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.'

If our hypothesis (Wiseman's hypothesis) is correct, then we should find nothing prior to each colophon which could not be known to the writer or owner before he wrote it or came into its possession. As we apply this standard scientific test — can the hypothesis be shown to be wrong? — we find that in this case we can find nothing before any of these 'generations' statements which could not have been known to the person named.

But then, what about the language? Scholars agree that the early part of Genesis (up to Chapter 36) contains numerous Mesopotamian items of vocabulary, whilst the latter part contains items of Egyptian vocabulary. This should not surprise us if we regard Moses as a compiler from documents written in Mesopotamia. As an 'honest broker', he

would wish to retain as much of the original as possible, and where in doubt he would not translate, but instead transliterate.

In this respect, Genesis 1-4 is uniform in exhibiting a Mesopotamian or 'Babylonian' flavour. There's no need to relate it to the Exile, however, for that Babylonia was very different. The Genesis words are simple and archaic.

Now the earliest records in any language which provides lexical information show words for sun and moon, and in Babylonia the word **shemesh** for the sun was the name of a god Shemesh. It's interesting that Genesis 1:16 uses what must be an extremely primordial expression for these two bodies, without actually naming them.

Is there a general change in style between Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a and Genesis 2:4b to 5:1? To discover the answer, I carried out a 'lexical density' test between Genesis 1-4 and a comparable slice of Dickens' **A Tale of Two Cities**. The result of this comparison suggested that if either pair of sections had two separate authors it would be those of Dickens rather than the Bible! But we all know there was only one Dickens, so we can confidently say that within Genesis 1-4 there is no real trace through general style of entirely separate authorship. (This research is reported in **Ex Nihilo** 7(1), pp. 35-36.)

If my understanding of the method of compilation is correct, the inference is that the Lord God may have dictated Genesis 1:1 to 2:4 to Adam; or alternatively that Adam, with a memory probably 100 times as good as anyone's today, memorized God's description of the creation. Thus the first set of tablets could have been written. There would also be a need for Adam to learn from God, or else to invent with his near-perfect brain, the actual art of writing on clay, or whatever was originally used.

The above paragraph is quite unashamedly hypothetical, but then so also is any theory of the origin of language and its recording on a physical surface. What is probably new is the idea that writing began with the appearance of humanity. But if we are to take Genesis 5:1 as it stands, there seems to be no alternative. In general I am against believing that God mechanically dictated to men, but for the initiation of the art there must have been a need for some miraculous input. After all, God is the source of all knowledge, as indicated in 1 Samuel 2:3; Job 21:22; and Job 37:16

In such a way later generations could know about the works of God without using Mazzaroth or any other form of representation in sky or earth. From Genesis 1-4 they could learn about God's power, His love for humanity, His desire that man should not be lonely, His reaction to sin and His provision of a remedy. There was a specific case indicating how

God dealt with a murderer — the system changed in Noah's time (Genesis 9:6) — and how mankind became divided between the righteous and the unrighteous, despite advances in technology and the arts (Genesis 4:21-22). Men could also learn about the rise of religion (Genesis 4:26). Knowledge through God's gift of language (Genesis 2:19) would be vastly superior to a system based on decoding star arrangements into pictures, which in any case would depend on an unstable oral tradition to explain how to join the dots. Enough has been written about the breaking-up of Genesis 1:4 into phrases assigned to J, E and P, and few today seriously accept such a subjective approach to a text. But is there a difference in the meaning of words, indicating radically diverse sources with different cultic backgrounds? What about the use of 'God' in Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a as against 'Lord God' in most of Genesis 2:4b to 3:24, with 'Lord' alone starting to be used in Genesis 4?

It looks as if my hypothesis may have an answer, for if God somehow 'taught' Adam to write the first section, then God would not call Himself 'Lord' at this point. Adam, however, would learn that God was his Lord and speak with reverence. It's significant that whenever Satan speaks, he omits 'Lord' and just says 'God'.

Some in their inability to accept literal days in Genesis 1 to 2:4a have pointed the finger at the different use of 'day' in 2:4b, as though such a difference in use automatically presupposes a new source. Such people ignore linguistic context and would not be supported by the majority of linguists today in making such an assessment.

The verb tenses also change from the first section to the second. But this is precisely because the focus has also changed. Instead of looking at the overall picture of creation we look at specific acts within that framework. Hence the 'tense' changes, though in contemporary linguistic terms we would rather say that the **aspect** changes.

As in English we distinguish between 'I ate' and 'I had eaten', so in Hebrew it's possible to distinguish between 'God planted' and 'God had planted', though this doesn't always come out in the translations. The action verbs in 2:8 ('planted') and 2:19 ('formed') are in what is labelled 'perfect' aspect. They can mean 'had planted', 'had formed' in the grammatical context of the conjunctions employed, as well as the discursive (and to some extent the lexical) context of the second section.

There is thus no difficulty in seeing Genesis 2:4b onwards as a second section written in the same language as the first section, hence about the same time, but focussing on specific events already described in general terms.

Some recent theologians have claimed that one needs to be a psychologist to understand Genesis 1-3:

[Our 'instrument of apprehension' — presumably our mind?] is complex and multifarious. It includes *capacity to manage the literary structure*. We need to understand what the story is about [*what the words mean*]; we need to understand *how the story is told [how it works]*. The *text itself does not contain these needed aids*. They must be supplied *from somewhere else*. And *these aids change with the passing of time*.<sup>11</sup>

Though it is not claimed here that Genesis 1-3 is necessarily composite, the claim emerges as the professor continues, that the text can only be evaluated in terms of a set of culturally determined commentaries both Hebrew and non-Hebrew. At the same time 'modern knowledge' must elucidate the Bible (as if God ignored the millions of simple folk today who have little of this 'knowledge'). The argument is at times most inept:

*The inerrancy of the Bible was thus identified with materials in two academic subjects — the Hebrew dictionary . . . and the history of rainfall (no rain before the Flood)*.<sup>12</sup>

It's remarkable that either of these could be called 'academic subjects'. The implication seems to be that creationists are arguing from academic subjects alone, and that they have an unscholarly approach anyway.

In practice, creationists do use academic sources, but interpret them in the light of faith in the plain meaning of God's Word, whereas theistic and other evolutionists argue along academic lines without admitting their faith in the inerrancy of those academic sources. Thus we find:

*Specimens of fossil rain can be seen in any decent museum, some of them a very great age*.<sup>13</sup>

The writer's naive acceptance of modern dating methods is pathetically obvious. He also appeals later on to Akkadian meanings for biblical lexical items, unaware that in so doing he has assumed that 'Akkad' is older than the writing of Genesis. Since the earliest form of Genesis 1-3 is no longer with us, we cannot argue from negatives in this manner.

As I see it, linguistics is a discipline which itself has recently moved into an evolutionary matrix in the scholarly world at large, and one easily deceives oneself into relativism on the basis of secular wisdom. The upshot of this is that when looking into Holy Writ one may easily approach the Word as if it were not supernatural, as if it were not addressed to ordinary people, indeed as if it were only through scholarship that one could properly understand it.

Besides supernaturally getting His Word written, God also must have seen to it that the various translations through the ages were kept free from serious blemishes, so that all middle-of-the-road translations (i.e. those not produced by sectarians or cultists with particular axes to grind, but by — preferably — a range of believing scholars) would reflect in terms simple enough for a person to read and understand without benefit of intellectual or psychological (indeed, more frequently today, sociological and anthropological) input.

Does this make me into what many regard literalists as being — anti-scholastic? Not at all. The scholarship must at all times subject itself to the supernatural nature of the text — indeed, to the supernatural nature of its content, so that one is not surprised to read that God:

in six *days* . . . made *the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them (Exodus 20:11)*.

The scholar can then set about deciding how much of modern science fits into this, how much of modern textual criticism is valid, e.g. whether 'the sea' should be included or not would be solved in the light of the notion that God overrules His Word, that the majority or central text will therefore be the one to accept.

From this point of view I arrive at the acceptance

of Genesis 1-4 as the work of one single Author, the Holy Spirit, hence uniform in its teaching of both physical and spiritual truth. There is no need to demythologize.

## REFERENCES

1. Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23.
2. Wiseman, P.J., 1936. **New Discoveries in Babylonia about Genesis**, Marshall, Morgan and Scott.
3. As above. Also: Wiseman, P.J., 1948. **Creation Revealed in Six Days**, Marshall, Morgan and Scott.
4. Wiseman (1936), p.63.
5. Wiseman (1936). p.63.
6. Wiseman, P.J., 1948. **Creation Revealed in Six Days**, Marshall, Morgan and Scott.
7. Wiseman (1948), p. 28. Incidentally, Driver is a liberal theologian. Note his use of 'purports', for this means that the text describes facts, but that Driver doesn't accept them as facts. In other words, the text tells it 'as if they were facts', so it's not poetic licence or metaphor.
8. Wiseman (1948), p.46.
9. For further details see Taylor, C.V., 1983. **Rewriting Bible History**, House of Tabor. Note also the dating of Terah below.
10. Most of the information in this paragraph comes from Wiseman (1936), p.47.
11. Andersen, F., 1984. On Reading Genesis 1-4. **Interchange**, 33, p. 11.
12. Andersen (1984), p.12.
13. Andersen (1984), p. 12.