

Literary Analysis of Genesis Doublets: Parallel or Duplicate Accounts (Doublets)

Doublets are seemingly identical duplicative narratives of the same event, which source critics believe is one story told by two or three different authors living during different periods of time. They believe that this explains the differences and contradictions of each account. Found mostly in Genesis, doublets can also be found elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

The following are the most commonly cited doublets:

The Creation Narrative (Genesis 1-2)

The Flood Narrative (Genesis 6-8)

The Selling of Joseph (Genesis 37:25-28, 36)

Abraham's Half-Truth: passing Sarah off as his sister (Genesis 12: 10-20; 20:1-18; 26:6-11)

Today, largely as the result of a better understanding of Ancient Near Eastern Literary styles and culture, source critics no longer consider doublets as strong evidence of source documents; the alleged doublets were not a consequence of multiple authors, but instead a reflection of literary devices typical of that period. The following summarizes the problems that destructive critics face in light of Ancient Near Eastern Literary styles and culture.

1. Misunderstanding Ancient Near Eastern Literary styles: repetition.

Ancient Hebrew used restatement as a literary style in which the essential elements of an account is repeated with some variation and introduces more specific information to emphasize or focus on the relevant elements of the account. In comparative Near Eastern manuscripts (such as the Gebel Barkla Stela or royal inscriptions from Urartu, etc.), this literary pattern is observed as the author (scribe) makes a general statement or praise about a ruler and then duplicates (repeats or restates) the account with more specific and important details.

For example, in the beginning of the Gebel Barkla Stela, there are general terms describing royal supremacy, and immediately following is a restatement that specifically elaborates on the triumphs in Syria-Palestine. In another example, the royal inscriptions from Urartu have the initial paragraph attributing the defeat of certain lands to the god Haldi and then the same victories are repeated in detail as achieved by the king.

2. Misunderstanding Ancient Near Eastern Literary grammar: paratactic sentence structure.

Ancient Hebrew sentence structure was usually paratactic, which meant that whole sentences were connected with the conjunction "and." Unfamiliar with this fact, source critics saw this sentence structure as a method used by redactors to join fragments from diverse sources.

A good example of a paratactic sentence is the literal translation of Genesis 1:1-4, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth **and** the earth was formless and void **and** darkness was over the surface of the deep **and** the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters **and** God said, "Let there be light" **and** there was light **and** God saw that the light was good **and** God separated the light from the darkness.

With the use of "and", ancient Hebrew rarely used subordinate clauses or phrases when the sentence expressed several ideas. Thus, the relationships of the ideas were left to the reader. In modern Bibles, translators replaced the paratactic sentence structure with modern forms and expressed the relationships between ideas. For example:

if there was contrast, "and" was replaced with "but",

if there was a purpose, "and" was replaced with "in order to" or "so that",

if there was a temporal relation, "and" was replaced with "when" or "while" or "then."

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Genesis 1:14 is a biblical example of how modern translations approach paratactic sentences. The bold font indicates the words supplied by translators:

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and **let them be** for signs and for seasons and for days and years; (Genesis 1:14)

3. Misunderstanding Ancient Near Eastern Literary style: parallelism.

Ancient Hebrew used parallelism for both poetic and non-poetic purposes. This involved clauses that were paired to invite comparison and thus convey more descriptive information.

Another form of Hebrew parallelism is found in the literary device called a chiasm. Based on the Greek letter X (chi) describing the x-shaped literary structure, a chiasm is an inverted parallel literary structure where the central idea is located where the inflection or turning point has occurred. Hence, the ideas of this structure take the following sequential form A-B-C-X-C'-B'-A' where X is the central or important message.

4. Misunderstanding Ancient Near Eastern Literary forms.

Within Genesis, the Hebrew term *tôledôt* (or *toledoth*) is found twelve times and establishes a structural and directional unity that has been ignored by source critics. Based on the Hebrew root word for "giving birth," *tôledôt* means "generations," which, in other modern translations, may be seen as "account" or "story."

The term *tôledôt* provides a structural unity to Genesis by serving as an introduction. It introduces the next section, often a genealogical list or historical account of the person named next to the term *tôledôt*. When examining the subjects associated with each *tôledôt*, they form a histo-theological division: five form the Primeval history or Covenants with Adam and Noah – human initiatives that caused failure, and five form the Ancestral history of Israel or Covenants with Abraham and his seed – God's initiatives that redeem man from his failures. This symmetry adds to the literary beauty of Genesis, but is lost by source critics.

The term *tôledôt* provides directional unity to Genesis by delineating the scope of the passage. The first *tôledôt* begins with the widest scope: creation of the universe, and the last *tôledôt* ends with the smallest: the single human progenitor of Israel.

Verses containing the *tôledôt*

Primeval History / Covenants with Adam and Noah

Genesis 2:4 Account of Heavens and Earth - Creation and Expulsion

4) This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.

Genesis 5:1 Generations of Adam - Adam to Noah genealogy and Sons of God

1) This is the **book of the generations** of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.

Genesis 6:9 Generations of Noah - Flood and Rebirth

9) These are the **records of the generations** of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.

Genesis 10:1 Generations of Shem, Ham, Japheth - Table of Nations and Tower of Babel

1) Now these are the **records of the generations** of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood.

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Genesis 11:10 Generations of Shem - Shem to Terah genealogy

10) These are the **records of the generations** of Shem. Shem was one hundred years old, and became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood;

Ancestral History / Covenants with Abraham and His Seed

Genesis 11:27 Generations of Terah – Abraham’s story

27) Now these are the **records of the generations** of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran became the father of Lot.

Genesis 25:12 Generations of Ishmael – Ishmael’s genealogy

12) Now these are the **records of the generations** of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s maid, bore to Abraham

Genesis 25:19 Generations of Isaac – Jacob’s story

19) Now these are the **records of the generations** of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham became the father of Isaac;

Genesis 36:1 Generations of Esau – Esau’s genealogy

1) Now these are the **records of the generations** of Esau (that is, Edom).

Genesis 37:2 Generations of Jacob – Joseph’s story

2) These are the **records of the generations** of Jacob. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

The only instance where *tôledôt* was used as a conclusion instead of introduction

Genesis 10:32

32) These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their **genealogies**, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

The only instance where *tôledôt* was used as a restatement of a prior *tôledôt* (Gen 36:1 – Details of Esau’s genealogy)

Genesis 36:9

9) These then are the **records of the generations** of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.

Another literary form that source critics have not noticed is the systematic method by which the unchosen descendant of an ancestor is treated. The genealogy of the non-elect is typically given before the heir.

For example, Cain is given before Seth (Gen 4:17-26), Japheth and Ham is given before Shem (Gen 10:1-4, 6-8, and 21-22), and Ishmael before Isaac (Gen 25:12-15, 19), and Esau before Jacob (Gen 36:1-10; 37:2).

Genesis 4:17-26 - Cain before Seth

17) **Cain** had relations with his wife and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. 18) Now to Enoch was born Irad, and Irad became the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael became the father of Methushael, and Methushael became the father of Lamech. 19) Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. 20) Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 21) His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. 22) As for Zillah,

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she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. 23) Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech, give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me; 24) if Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." 25) Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him **Seth**, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him." 26) To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Genesis 10:1-4, 6-8, and 21-22 - Japheth and Ham before Shem

1) Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. 2) The sons of **Japheth** were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras. 3) The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz and Riphath and Togarmah. 4) The sons of Javan were Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim.

6) The sons of **Ham** were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan. 7) The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. 8) Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth.

21) Also to **Shem**, the father of all the children of Eber, and the older brother of Japheth, children were born. 22) The sons of Shem were Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram.

Genesis 25:12-15, 19 - Ishmael before Isaac

12) Now these are the records of the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham; 13) and these are the names of the sons of **Ishmael**, by their names, in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam 14) and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, 15) Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah.

19) Now these are the records of the generations of **Isaac**, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac;

Genesis 36:1-10; 37:2 - Esau before Jacob

1) Now these are the records of the generations of Esau (that is, Edom). 2) Esau took his wives from the daughters of Canaan: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3) also Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth. 4) Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, and Basemath bore Reuel, 5) and Oholibamah bore Jeush and Jalam and Korah. These are the sons of **Esau** who were born to him in the land of Canaan. 6) Then Esau took his wives and his sons and his daughters and all his household, and his livestock and all his cattle and all his goods which he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land away from his brother Jacob. 7) For their property had become too great for them to live together, and the land where they sojourned could not sustain them because of their livestock. 8) So Esau lived in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom. 9) These then are the records of the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. 10) These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Esau's wife Adah, Reuel the son of Esau's wife Basemath.

37:2) These are the records of the generations of **Jacob**. Joseph, when seventeen years of age, was pasturing the flock with his brothers while he was still a youth, along with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought back a bad report about them to their father.

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Thus doublets are intentionally used for a literary purpose and do not reflect the identification of sources in the manner of the Documentary Hypothesis.

References:

1. Archer GL, *An Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (1982).
2. Kaiser WC, Davids PH, Bruce FF, Brauch MT, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Chicago, IL: Inter-Varsity Press (1996).
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