

Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 11, Uses of Toledot in Genesis with Implications for Translation

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This is Dr. George Paton in his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 11, Usages of Toledot in Genesis with Implications for Translation.

Right now, I'd like to talk about an application of translation and an application of interpretation by using a particular phrase that's in the book of Genesis.

And this was the topic of my doctoral dissertation. When I was working in Kenya doing the Orma translation, we started in the book of Genesis. And as we were translating, we came up across this phrase, these are the generations of so and so.

And the Hebrew word is Toledot. These are the Toledot of the heavens and the earth. These are the Toledot of Adam, Noah, etc.

And it always made me wonder, what does that word really mean? What is it referred to? And this sentence, these are the Toledot of Noah, is it just something that's relevant to the immediate context of that chapter or that pericope? Or does it have functions on higher macro level issues? And as a Bible translator, I view the text as communication. We've been talking about this. The text is there to communicate what God's message is for the people.

There's authorial intent. There are textual functions. And all of these are foundational to the hermeneutical model that I am using for this presentation and for the work that I do.

The idea is that the author intentionally put certain things into the text that would give us clues on what is meant. And so, I'm trying to look at what's in the Hebrew text in order to figure out what Toledot means. So, communicating the meaning, the intent, and the functions of Toledot as accurately as possible in the Orma language that I worked in, but also in any other language that you might look at.

What's the problem? Why is it challenging to translate this phrase or this word? So if you look at the literature on the meaning of Toledot, there's a wide range of opinions on what it means. There's a wide range of opinions. Does it come at the beginning of a section? Does it come at the end of a section? Or a combination of both, beginning in some places and at other places? What does it mean? So, there's no consensus among the scholars.

If you look at Bible versions, there's no consensus among Bible versions about all these issues. First of all, the meaning. Second of all, does this sentence come at the beginning or the end? They say superscript meaning at the beginning, colophon to mean at the end.

It's not really a heading as such because it's a complete sentence. And so, it's a part of the first line of that particular section of scripture. So, suggested meanings include generations.

We have history, story, origins, genealogies. So, there needs to be something that enables us to look at this in a new way. And let me just give the example in Genesis 6:9, and we can see what the problem is, and we can see some of these difficulties.

So, in the literal English rendering of the Hebrew, these are the Toledot of Noah. And these are actually not in Hebrew, these Toledot of Noah. ESV, these are the generations of Noah.

NASB, these are the records of the generations of Noah. NIV, this is the account of Noah and his family. Good News Translation, this is the story of Noah.

Okay, so we have this disparity. And so, I looked at all of the research and all of the resources, and they tend to look at the macro structure issues in the text to determine what Toledot means and where it should go, or where it is placed. And so they say, well, if the thing that follows it is a narrative, then it means history or account or record.

This is the record of Noah and his family. If it occurs before a genealogy, like in Genesis 5, Genesis 10, Genesis 36, then these are the descendants of Adam or Shem or Esau. And so they're looking at the macro level issues to determine what it means, to determine where it should go.

One of the views is, well, in most places, it occurs at the beginning. But in Genesis 2, 4, let's split the verse in half. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth, is actually a summary of the first part of chapter 1 up to 2:3. And then halfway through the verse, they put a nice big section heading and a nice big section break.

And then that verse continues 2:4b, then starts the account of Adam and Eve and their sons in the Garden of Eden. But all of that is primarily based on macro-level issues. And I'm thinking, shouldn't we also look at micro-level issues? Why should we do that? And I thought about that.

And I'm thinking, okay, in a court case, if someone gets murdered, one of the things that the police start with is motive means an opportunity. And so they look at motive

means an opportunity. And they say, well, it's obviously the husband, right? Do they arrest him? No.

Why not? They don't have any evidence. It's just a theory. So, what do they do? They go to the crime scene.

And what do they look at? They look at how everything is situated. They look at the evidence in the room. Is there any sign of a struggle? They look at, is there blood there? And is it splattered? And if so, can they account for how the blood got there? Was the person shot, or were they beaten or whatever? So, they look at blood splatter.

They look at all of that stuff. They look at the DNA of the blood to see if it is the victim or is it someone else or whatever. They look at all those details. They don't stop there.

They look at relationships. The person has relationships. What about the relationships of the relationships? So his wife, okay, what about, does she have other relationships? They look at the person's computer and phone and e-mails and all these records and they try to piece together as much of the detailed pieces that would then line up with the macro level motive, means, and opportunity.

And so, what I tried to do was to do that with Toledot and Genesis. Let's look at macro-level issues first and see how then that relates to the higher structural levels. And the first thing that we notice is that Toledot is in a sentence that doesn't have a verb.

It's a verbless clause. These are the words of Toledot, of Noah. And so I looked at the verb, I looked at this verbless clause and it starts with the word eleh.

Ele means the word these. And so how are all the other sentences in Genesis with eleh in a verbless clause, how are they used? And maybe that evidence can then point us to how this phrase with Toledot is used. So eleh, Toledot, you have a word, pronoun, these, and a noun, Toledot.

How is this phrase used throughout Genesis? That could then point us to how Toledot is being used in Genesis. I looked, and I saw that when it's used outside of Toledot, it always begins with a list of names: These are the sons of so-and-so.

And so, you get the names. And then it appears at the end. These are the sons of so-and-so.

It's the same exact phrase. So, it's used at the beginning of a set of names, a list, and it's used at the end. And so it's an inclusio, like a pair of bookends, that marks the beginning and the end of that pericope.

So, you know, okay, this is a set unit. Is it ever used at the end without one at the beginning? No. It is ever used at the end of a narrative section to mark the beginning and the end of a narrative section.

Is it used to summarize what happened in that narrative? No, it is not. What that tells us is, wherever you find it, it occurs at the beginning of narratives, primarily the Toledot formula, but that's a suspicious one, so we can't just go there yet. But it never occurs at the end of narratives.

It only occurs in this inclusio thing or at the beginning of narratives. Therefore, it looks like it's always at the beginning. There's no evidence for it coming at the end.

So, this suggestion that it's at the end of 2.3, beginning of 2.4 as a summary, isn't supported grammatically by the Hebrew. So that means it's at the beginning of the genealogies in Genesis, it's at the beginning of the narrative sections in Genesis, including chapter 2, verse 4. We'll get to that verse, and we'll break that down in a bit. And if you look at the Masoretic text, it has the pay.

The pay always comes before, and the pay is the opening showing a new section is starting. Pay always comes before Toledot, always, including between 2.3 and 2.4. So there's evidence in the Masoretic text as well that they determine the same thing that I just described. So, we find out it is at the beginning, the first sentence of that section.

Another thing is, what does it actually mean? Because as we said, you've got 6, 8, 10 different things. Okay, I agree that it probably means different things, but it can't mean two or three or more things in the same verse. So when it's this is the Toledot of Noah, it can't mean a count and descendants.

That's a disconnect, sorry. It can't mean two things at once. Remember, we always say context determines which sense is triggered in that particular place.

So, I analyzed all 39 examples of Toledot and the whole Old Testament. And with very little information in that sentence, there's no verb, and they just have the relationship. I'm trying to think, how can I know what this points to? And the word these in Hebrew can point backward, like at the end of a list, these are the descendants of Ham.

But remember, we said that that word these only occurs in that verb and clause at the end, if there's one in the beginning. So, my starting point was, okay, this with

Toledot and the Toledot formula is beginning a new part. And the word these is equal to Toledot.

So those two go together. Toledot is a plural noun. So, these is a plural pronoun.

And they're equal. They're equal in kind, the kind of thing that it is. They're equal in number, and they're equal in gender.

So that's just a normal grammatical thing that is the same for any particular word in any language. So that equality there gives us a clue that it's pointing to something plural in the context. So, then it's not in the sentence.

What do we find as we look in the context? And so, I was looking at the genealogies. And you look in Genesis 5. And the genealogy says, Shem fathered Arpachshad. He had other sons and daughters.

He died. Arpachshad fathered so-and-so and so on. And so, what kind of words do we get in that particular chapter? We get the word fathered.

We get sons and daughters. And I'm thinking, what semantic frame, what framework in society does this kind of bring to mind? All those are family words. They're all relationship words.

And so if you think, what does the "these" and the toledot point to? It's pointing to those people who are descendants of Adam or descendants of Shem or descendants of Esau. So, it's pointing to that. So, it's really the difference between a list of people in my family is one possible interpretation.

Or it means this is a picture of the people in my family. And so, this is really a picture. These people in the picture are the descendants of Adam.

These people in the picture are the descendants of so-and-so. And so, it points to that person's descendants, several generations. It can include men and it can include women.

So, there's no gender specificity. So, looking at that, it means that person's progeny. And so a one word summary would be progeny.

And that seemed to carry through Genesis. It carried through in the genealogies in Exodus. It carried through in the genealogies in Chronicles.

Okay, so number one is a unique usage of toledo. It says, of Reuben their toledot. And that gives men who were 20 years old and could go to war 56,000, something like that.

So, it's their toledot and then a number is given. Are we told any names? No. Are we told who the fathers are? No, there were maybe even thousands.

Are we told who the names of the children are? No. The function was to find out how many people were from the tribe of Reuben and all the others. So, all of that to say, it means progeny, but it's used slightly differently in that the focus is not on names.

So, it's on the number. And so that in one sense is a different sense, although it's very, very close. So, it might be a subset of progeny as a whole.

This is numbered progeny. And we find the same thing in Chronicles. These are the ones who settled in Jerusalem 956 from the tribe of Judah, etc.

So, we have progeny, numbered progeny. Now, we look at where it occurs before a narrative. It only occurs before a narrative in the five sections in Genesis.

It only occurs before a narrative in Numbers chapter 3. These are the Toledot of Moses and Aaron. And then as we read down, it says Aaron's other sons died because they rebelled against the Lord. And then these are the sons who were serving with Aaron as priests.

And so it gives the name of his sons. If we look at Noah, who's listed with Noah in Genesis 6, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Those are his immediate sons.

And then you look at Terah. This is the Toledot of Terah. Who are they? Abraham, Nahor, and Lot.

And so, in that regard, it does mean progeny, but it's a more specific thing that's focusing in on his immediate children, his male offspring. And so, in that regard, it means male offspring. Then we get to Genesis 2:4. Who is it pointing to in Genesis 2:4? And so, we're looking for a couple of different things.

So far, we've seen that it refers to people. So, in 38 of the 39, it points to these people are these. So then, could it possibly mean people in 2:4 as a starting point? People who were fathered by as a starting point.

Some plural entities in the text because these are plural, and Toledot is plural. So, we look at all those things and try to figure it out. And in looking at that, again, the sentence doesn't offer us enough information.

That one is a bit longer and does say in the day that they were created, when God created the earth and the heavens. But looking at Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4,

what is the story about? Adam, Eve, and the sons. Could it be that it is pointing to them? That actually was a legitimate interpretation.

Carr says that used to be an interpretation several decades ago in the 30s, 40s, 50s, maybe into the 60s. But that interpretation fell out of popularity. But that is one legitimate interpretation of who this is talking about.

And so, if it means Adam and Eve and their children, what do we do with the phrase, these are the Toledot of the heavens and the earth? So, did the heavens and the earth procreate Adam and Eve? Can they even be seen as figurative parents of Adam and Eve? Some scholars say yes. I look at that and I say, is anything in Genesis indicating that God did this? Yes.

God spoke and it was all the way through. And then you look at, did the earth do anything? The earth was passive through the whole thing. You look at 2:1 and it refers to creation and it uses the passive in referring to them.

And even in Chapter 2, verse 4, in their being created is a passive. So, it's being acted upon and not being acted upon. So, it can't be the heavens and the earth as the ones who procreated Adam and Eve.

So, could it be God? If you said these are the Toledot of God, wait a second. We've got to be really careful with that because what would people think? God physically fathered Adam and Eve. My opinion is that the writer of Genesis wanted to avoid that at all costs because they believed that God could actually do that in those days.

In the ancient Near East, God had relationships with humans and would then have children. So, let's get totally away from that and not even mention God in this, except after them being created in the day when Lord God created the earth and heavens.

Then he's brought in, but not in that phrase. So, what does it mean? So, we looked at how this phrase is used. And of is used, I think, in the two grammar books that I looked at, 28 different uses of the word of in the Old Testament.

Okay, so that doesn't help much. But if you look at some, like it says in Chapter 2, it talks about the different places. And it says Ophir's gold was of high quality.

Great. Is that gold that Ophir produced? Probably not. Was it gold in the land of Ophir? Yes.

Was it gold that they mined and took out of Ophir? Yes. And so, there's somehow a connection between gold and where it came from. And if we look at how heavens and earth is referred to, and you look at Exodus, when Moses is saying, I'm telling

you about the God who created the heavens and the earth, and then it says this, and all that is in them.

And that includes the stars, the sun, the moon, that includes the plants and the animals. And so, conceptually, they're picturing the heavens and the earth as this big thing. God puts the stars in the sky.

God puts the fish in the sea. God puts the plants and the animals on the earth. And so, this idea that is talking about heavens and the earth as a place, as a starting point, then I ask you this, in 2.7, where did God get the dirt from? Out of the earth.

And so, this concept that the heavens and the earth are the location is one interpretation that seems to make the most sense to me anyway, that that's where Adam and Eve came from. So, these people that we're going to be talking about are the ones who were created. And again, we have to use created rather than born from.

So, in that sense, total doubt is used as a metaphor. Metaphorically speaking, it's created. Actually, it's a metonymy, but anyway.

So, it's figurative for created from out of the heavens and the earth. So, these people are the ones who were created who came out of the heavens and the earth. And those are the four main meanings of total doubt.

Now, we look at this phrase as a literary device. And as you look at it, there's a narrative section and then a genealogy section, narrative genealogy, all the way through. And total is the thing that connects each of those connecting narratives and genealogies.

And then, as you look, what else does it join? So, who is mentioned in the narrative? So, if you look at 6:9, who's mentioned? Noah and his sons. Well, 6.8 is not a genealogy. Where is that? That's back in chapter 5. So, that's connecting the genealogy in chapter 5 with the events in chapter 6:9. So, we see that connection there.

Then, the story of Shem, Ham, and Japheth is told. Chapter 9 ends with, So, Shem is highlighted at the end of Chapter 9. Chapter 10 is the Table of Nations up to 11:9. 11:10 is Shem's toll road. Two years after the flood, he had this son.

And so, it's linking us back to Chapter 9. And so, every time we have one of these main characters, Toledot links the genealogy of the main character to the story about the main character. But not just the two places that are linked, but it links the time, it links the location, and it links the people. So, we see Toledot linking all those things all the way through to the main storyline.

And what do we mean by the main storyline? Well, if you look at the verb that's used all the way through, we say Yelad means to bear. Holid is another form of the verb, it means to father. And Toledot is from the verb Holid.

So, all this whole fathering thing, Holid is the link that links all these sections together. And as we said, it joins the place, before the flood, the time. Shem had children.

Excuse me, after the flood, two years after the flood. So, it connects all of these elements in the genealogies, in the narratives, all the way through. Another thing is in these narrative sections, and we get two other words that could mean sons.

One is sons, Benim, and the other one is Zerah, which means seed. And as you look at it, God says to Noah, I will give your seed this land. Actually, he says to Abram, I will give your seed this land.

And so the promises of God to the patriarchs were connected with the word seed. Does that contradict Toledot? No, it works together with Toledot. So the covenant, the seed, and Toledot are woven together to form this cohesive cord that carries the story of Genesis forward.

And what is that story? It emphasizes on the divine human relationship. These are the people that God had this special relationship with. Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And those are the main characters in the book of Genesis. What about the other characters? They're there, and they are descendants who deserve to be mentioned. But in the table of nations, we have the non-chosen descendants.

In chapter 25, verse 12 to 18, we have the descendants of Ishmael. And then we have Esau in chapter 36. And if you look at that, those genealogies look different.

The ones with the main characters are called segmented genealogies, where one on each generation is mentioned. The other one is, excuse me, that's linear genealogies. The segmented genealogies are the other ones, and they have a lot more information.

They also give more than one person on each level. So those two are different, and as we see going through, the linear ones connect the people on that main storyline who have a special relationship with God. And that special relationship we see in Genesis 2-3, worship.

God created, and God sanctified the seventh day. And that seventh day is holy. What is emphasized in chapter 4 in Genesis? The right way to worship.

What do we see with Noah when he gets out of the flood? He worshipped. What do we see about Abraham? Everywhere he went, he built an altar and worshipped God. And so, this characteristic of worship follows through with all these chosen men.

Same thing happened with Isaac, and the same thing with Jacob. His whole life, everywhere he went, he worshipped God. And so that theme of worship is connected to seed and to promise by this phrase of Toledot.

And so we see that, that big schema. So, Toledot joins the macro-level stuff together with the micro-level stuff to form cohesion. It sticks together, and coherence, it makes logical sense all the way through.

And if you consider, what is the function of the book of Genesis? Genesis is Torah. And what is it teaching us? It's teaching us, and according to Walton, it's teaching us shema, to listen, asah, do. We're to listen to God and to do.

And so, if we read it like a Hebrew, that's what we get out of the book of Genesis. So the big story about Genesis, if you wanted to call it that, what is the big story? God establishes a special relationship with a particular lineage of people that he chooses, but yet he still maintains a looser relationship with the other people that are connected to that chosen line, but not of that chosen line. So let me just share this diagram with you.

Okay? This diagram shows the prologue, which is Genesis 1, 1 to 2, 3. The last person that's mentioned in the previous section is the person that's highlighted in the Toledot formula. And so there's an end-beginning linkage on the main chosen line, not the other ones, but on the main chosen line. So Adam and Eve are mentioned.

These are the Toledot of the heavens and the earth. They're the main characters that are drawn into focus. The last one that's mentioned in Genesis 4 is Seth.

And then Adam and Seth are joined in the genealogy in Chapter 5. At the end of the genealogy, Noah is in focus with his three sons. Noah and his three sons are mentioned in the Toledot formula. Noah is then down to Shem.

Shem is highlighted in the narrative and so on. And so, we see this tail-head linkage going through. And this is the thread, this main cord that goes through Genesis and joins all of these sections.

That is how Toledot functions in Genesis. What are the implications for translation? One is to recognize that these are people, and to say these, referring to people, are

the progeny of Adam, of Noah, of the others. Using that same phrase all the way through is really helpful for the reader to know this is a major section at the beginning.

So, if you use different expressions, like Bible versions today, a lot of them have more than one that they use for the Toledot formula. It's very confusing. But if it's the same one, then you can tell.

So, these are the progeny of the person that's mentioned, the named ancestor. And then in the other places in Scripture, these are the progeny who are numbered in Numbers and Chronicles. And if it's in Numbers, referring to the children of Aaron, then we would translate that the same way.

Since it's a Toledot formula, these are the progeny of Aaron, and it refers to his son. And the reader will get that. So, we choose to translate it depending on the sense that's evoked.

With the exception of Genesis, sometimes it means the whole progeny, and sometimes it means just the sons. But for the sake of this powerful linking section marker all the way through Genesis, it's good to use the same expression all the way through. So, this is one interpretation.

If you have other interpretations, that's okay. But this is what we've come up with, and hopefully, our translation people in these other languages now have at least one other resource to consider when they try to translate the book of Genesis. Thank you.

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