

The Complexity of the Multi-Document Theory

If a person is to examine the Graf-Wellhausen theory (otherwise known as the multi-document theory), as it is being widely disseminated today, it is very important that he have a clear idea what it is. It has been my observation that many, not only of those who oppose it, but also of those who support it, have little idea of its real teaching, and particularly of the complexity that it involves. During the nineteenth century it was the regular practice to divide ancient and medieval books into alleged sources. I have examined many of these theories about early writings, but have never come across a case in which the theory advanced was nearly so complex as the present widespread teaching about the five books of Moses.

The fact that an idea has been held for a long time is no reason why it is necessarily true. The fact that a great many people believe there were such documents as J, E and P does not prove that they ever actually existed. It demands investigation. In most matters that have been discovered further investigation brings to light new and simpler arguments so that it is possible to put the evidence into very clear, plain, and yet convincing language.

Stripped to its bare essentials, and giving only what is agreed upon by practically all who hold to the theory, it can be said that according to the theory there was a document to which the name of J might be given because of certain peculiar characteristics it is said to possess, which was written sometime between 1050 and 800 B.C. Some scholars are very dogmatic as to the particular century, but there is a certain variation on this. This manuscript would contain about a fourth of the material in the first five books of the Bible.

According to the theory, another document was written about a century later, which, because of certain of its characteristics, might be called the E document. This document paralleled the J document to quite an extent. Both documents