

THE MIGHTY ACTS OF GOD by Arnold B. Rhodes. Covenant Life Curriculum

The Documentary Hypothesis

Until the eighteenth century A. D., Christians for the most part accepted the tradition of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. In that century, however, a type of study began which was to result during the latter part of the nineteenth century in what has been called the Graf-Wellhausen or documentary hypothesis. K. H. Graf and Julius Wellhausen did much to bring the theory to its classic formulation. But today many who hold to some form of this hypothesis have modified it considerably - often in a more conservative direction. The following is a very brief general statement of the theory as it is held by many in our time.

Mosaic authorship is denied, and the Pentateuch is considered a compilation of four major documents written down over a period of centuries. Yet it is admitted that many ancient traditions were handed down orally (some in written form) for centuries before the documents themselves were written. Here are some of the reasons ordinarily given for denying the authorship of the Pentateuch to Moses or to any other one person:

1. Moses' obituary is found in Deuteronomy 34:1-12, and, to say the least, it would be rather odd even for Moses to write his own obituary. Moreover, the language of the chapter suggests someone other than Moses.

2. The Pentateuch contains anachronisms (datings that are too early). For example, Genesis 36:31 reads, "These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites." In other words, the point of view of the writer was that of one living after Israel had had kings, and this took place long after the time of Moses. For other anachronistic statements see Genesis 12:6; 14:14.

3. The same man would not have used the names of God as they are sometimes used. Exodus 6:3 states, "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them." Yet according to Genesis 21:33, "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God" (see also Gen. 12:8; 15:2,8; compare 4:26; 9:26). In the first account of creation (Gen. 1:1 - 2:4a) the name God is used; but the name LORD God suddenly appears with the beginning of the second account (Gen. 2:4b).

4. In the Pentateuch Moses is said to write something only occasionally, the impression being that he did not write everything contained therein.

5. There are certain narratives that can best be explained as duplications. For example, according to Genesis 32:28 Jacob's name was changed to Israel at Peniel, but according to Genesis 35:10 it was changed at Bethel. Compare also Genesis 21:31 with Genesis 26:33; Genesis 12:10-20 with Genesis 20:1-18 and Genesis 26:6-11; Genesis 6:19-20 with Genesis 7:2-3.

6. The codes of law reflect a settled life rather than the nomadic life of the desert wanderings (Exod. 22:5, 29; 23:10).