

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



JEDP Hypothesis

by J.K. McKee posted 21 October, 2008 www.messianicapogetics.net

What do I do when I encounter the JEDP documentary hypothesis in various books and materials? I am confused about what to do.

The JEDP documentary hypothesis has been around since the 1860s, primarily accredited to the publication of Julius Wellhausen's book *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. As Messianic Biblical Studies improves, being aware of it more and more, and the affects that it has had in the interpretation of various parts of the Torah, will come into focus. The 2004 *Jewish Study Bible* (Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press)—which many Messianics have purchased—is littered with JEDP remarks. Many do not know what to do with this, reading various introductions that disparage Mosaic authorship or involvement with the composition of the Pentateuch. It is not wise for us to ignore something that has been around for over 150 years.

We have only made references here or there to JEDP in our FAQ entries on the composition of the Torah books, as it is doubtful you will ever run into a Messianic Believer who adheres to the documentary hypothesis. Perhaps in future *Practical Messianic* commentaries or exegetical papers, we will point out JEDP issues that are significant and considered to be “obvious contradictions” to readers—as most are not that significant. Conservative scholars have spent a great deal of time refuting JEDP already, and so in the event that you ever encounter it, you will want to have some of their resources in your library. These may include:

Cassuto, Umberto. *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2006).

Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

Kaiser, Walter C. *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

Kitchen, K.A. *The Bible In Its World: The Bible & Archaeology Today* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977).

_____. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

The critical tradition itself has had to move toward the Left-of-Center in the past few decades. An important resource that describes this is:

Childs, Brevard S. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

Many of the critical books and commentaries from the mid-Twentieth Century spent so much time dividing the Pentateuch into J, E, D, and P—and arguing those positions—that little time was spent actually interpreting the text in its final form. While we may not always agree with critical scholars who believe that the Torah was a compilation of these hypothetical sources, it is good that more are spending their time and energies on dealing with the Books of Genesis-Deuteronomy as a whole.

The editor has a variety of books and commentaries in his library that while adhering to the JEDP documentary hypothesis, still try to interpret the text as a whole and offer tips about

teaching and preaching. And believe it or not, it is very useful to consider the perspective (among several points of view) of those resources when one is writing a paper or conducting a Bible study. When the Messianic movement can learn to engage with a wider variance of Biblical scholarship, including the critical tradition, it will indeed be a sign of great theological maturity on its part.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of Messianic Apologetics (www.messianicapologetics.net), a division of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is a 2009 recipient of the Zondervan Biblical Languages Award for Greek. He is author of numerous books, dealing with a wide range of topics that are important for today's Messianic Believers. He has also written many articles on theological issues, and is presently focusing his attention on Messianic commentaries of various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.