



The Legends of Genesis: the Biblical Saga and History

Hermann Gunkel

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Are the narratives of Genesis history or legend? For the modern historian this is no longer an open question; nevertheless it is important to get a clear notion of the bases of this modern position.

The writing of history is not an innate endowment of the human mind; it arose in the course of human history and at a definite stage of development. Uncivilised races do not write history; they are incapable of reproducing their experiences objectively, and have no interest in leaving to posterity an authentic account of the events of their times. Experiences fade before they are fairly cold, and fact and fancy mingle; only in poetical form, in song and saga, are unlettered tribes able to report historical occurrences. Only at a certain stage of civilisation has objectivity so grown and the interest in transmitting national experiences to posterity so increased that the writing of history becomes possible. Such history has for its subjects great public events, the deeds of popular leaders and kings, and especially wars. Accordingly some sort of political organisation is an antecedent presumption to the writing of history.

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