

Oral Tradition

1. Statements as to alleged accuracy of oral transmission, with precise references.

Von Rad, Genesis, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press) 1961 trans. from a German edition of 1956. p. 341

The list [in Gen. 36] vs. 20-30 also gives the impression of being a reliable ancient tradition. A notice like the one in v. 24 bears the stamp of authenticity, and the same is true of v. 35.

Meek, Theophile James, Hebrew Origins (New York: Harper & Row) rev. ed. 1960

p. 214

Albright argues that the stories of Moses, transmitted orally for four centuries or more before being put into fixed form, are at least as historically reliable as the accounts of Zoroaster and Gautama, which were transmitted much longer by oral tradition, and in this he is perfectly right. As a matter of fact, however, we have little dependable information about either Zoroaster or Gautama. Indeed we have so little about Zoroaster that we cannot even date him with any certainty, and the data for his religion are so obscure and so conflicting that no two specialists agree in their interpretation of the evidence, as Albright himself recognizes.⁸³ There was a time when we had complete and detailed biographies of every great religious leader: Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Gautama, Laotze, Confucius, Muhammad, and the others. Modern historical criticism, however, has reduced these biographies to very small proportions, and that of Moses has shared the fate of all the others. If modern historians cannot agree (and they cannot) about the life and teachings of men so recent in history as Lincoln and Washington, concerning whom we have such abundant contemporary records, and hence cannot speak with certainty about them, it is surely most presumptuous on our part to say that we can speak with certainty about Moses.⁸⁴ There is much of truth in what Albright has to say about tradition,⁸⁵ but it can never have the accuracy that he accords it, and in this we are not hypercritical, as Albright asserts; we are simply realistic. Even contemporary written records are always biased and hence not absolutely accurate, as modern historians are discovering in the case of Lincoln and Washington and hosts of others.