

Anderson, G. W., The History and Religion of Israel (Oxford) 1966

p. 15 The traditional view that the patriarchal stories are in every detail accurate records of events and conversations is extremely difficult to maintain on grounds of general probability and in face of the literary evidence which shows that sources from different periods have been interwoven in them and that these sources sometimes give varying accounts of the same events.

At the other extreme is the theory that some at least of the narratives were originally myths about gods, and that the divine figures have been scaled down to human proportions. In support of this two main arguments have been advanced. On the one hand, similarities have been pointed out between some of the names in the patriarchal stories (e.g. Gad, Asher, Terah, Milcah, Laban) and divine names found in other ancient Near Eastern sources. On the other hand, it has been supposed that the association of individual patriarchs with particular sanctuaries (Abraham with Hebron, Isaac with Beersheba, Jacob with Bethel) points back to a stage at which they were the gods of these holy places. But the evidence from these names is highly precarious; and the entire theory is so much at variance with the spirit of the narratives that it must be rejected.

There is much more to be said for the view that at least sometimes the individual personages in the stories represent tribes or other communities. This is in accord with the concept of 'corporate personality', which plays an important part in the Old Testament.

p.16 As we have already seen, some of the stories connect one or another of the patriarchs with this or that sanctuary. These, no doubt, were recounted as part of the sacred tradition of the sanctuaries before being worked into the record as we now have it, or even into the sources of which it is composed. Some of them may have been told to account for the origin of the sanctuaries in question. Akin to these are the aetiological stories, which explain the origin of a custom (e.g. Gen. 32.12), the bestowal of a name (e.g. Gen. 21.31), or the existence of some natural feature (e.g. Gen. 19.26).