



Patriarchs

Why should we invest precious time studying the Old Testament and, in particular, lives from early antiquity when time has never been at a higher premium? Let's look at Isaiah 51:1-2 for a clue, **“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was but one and I blessed him and made him many.”** While the people of Israel were blood descendants of Abraham and Sarah, Scripture shows that you and I are spiritual descendants. Check out Galatians 3:29, **“And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”** We make up the “many” God referenced.¹

The word Patriarch literally means *chief father* or *ruling father*. It is the name given in the New Testament to the founding fathers of the Hebrew race and nation: Abraham (Heb. 7:4), Isaac, Jacob; Jacob’s twelve sons (Acts 7:8,9) and other great leaders of the Old Testament – such as David (Acts 2:29). The term is now commonly used to refer to the persons whose names appear in the genealogies and covenant-histories before the time of Moses (Gen. 5, 11).

God’s call of Abraham (*father of many*) instituted a variation in the divine manner of dealing with mankind. Until this occasion, God had dealt with all men in a general way. There had been no select nation chosen in distinction from others. Accordingly, when mankind did not obey, mankind was punished in the Flood. But with the call of Abraham, this world-wide approach was changed. No longer did God address Himself generally, but particularly. He chose one man alone. He separated him from others and gave him individual instruction. The intention was to rear a new, select nation, with Abraham as the father. God would now make a special people through whom to work in effecting His plan of redemption. Through them, the written Word -- the Scriptures -- would come to existence, and through them, too, the Living Word, Jesus Christ, would be born in due time.

Were the Patriarchs perfect? No way. For example, God promised the childless Abraham that he would make him the father of a great nation. God was faithful to His promise (Gen. 12:1-2) and gave the almost one hundred year-old Abraham and his ninety-year-old wife Sarah a baby named Isaac (Gen. 17:1-8). But during the many years between the promise and the baby of promise, however, Abraham and Sarah got tired of waiting on God, so Abraham decided he would “help” God with His promise and fathered Ishmael by the handmaid Hagar and gave birth to another nation. The point to be taken here is that despite Abraham’s weakness, God kept His promise. Read Gen 11:26 – 25:11 for the full story of Abraham and his faith in God. Abraham’s experience teaches us that God’s calling is worth responding to, and His promises are worth working toward and waiting on. This is good news for us, as heirs to His promise, that even with our shortcomings, God is faithful.

¹ Patriarchs, by Beth Moore