

# PATRIARCHS, MATRIARCHS, AND ANARCHS

*Genesis 12–50*



A 13-WEEK STUDY WITH

Dr. Tony W. Cartledge

THE *Nururing*  
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#### Abbreviations

KJV	King James Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation (also known as the NETBible)
LXX	Septuagint, an early Greek translation of the Old Testament
MT	Masoretic Text, the “standard” Hebrew text of the Old Testament
NASB	New American Standard Bible, 1977 edition
NAS95	New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition
NET	The NETBible, New English Translation, 1996-2017
NIV	New International Version, 1984 edition
NIV11	New International Version, 2011 edition
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

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The Hill of Moreh rises above the Jezreel Valley, where Abraham reportedly made his first camp upon entering the land of Canaan.

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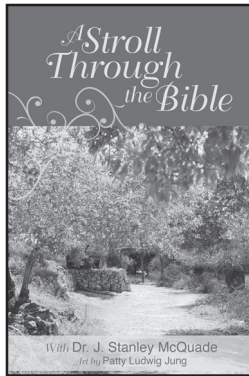
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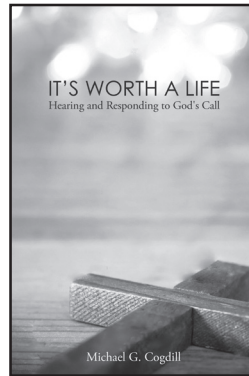
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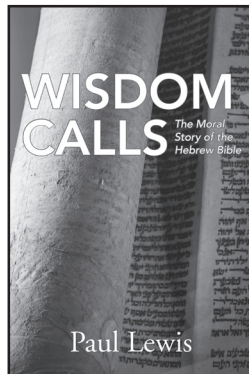
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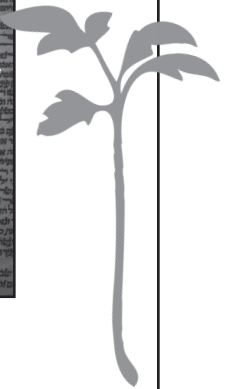
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## PREFACE



**B**ible study is a discipline that calls for the engagement of both hearts and minds. The Nurturing Faith Bible Series is designed to focus attention on biblical texts that expand the mind and enrich the heart.

Dr. Tony Cartledge brings the insights of a scholar, the heart of a pastor, and the communication skills of a seasoned writer and editor to this important task. With careful scholarship he guides learners to a clearer understanding of the context—language, culture, and setting—in which the biblical accounts occurred.

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Therefore, each lesson concludes with “The Hardest Question” in which Dr. Cartledge both raises and responds to such challenges in understanding and applying the biblical revelation to today’s living.

An honest wrangling with the biblical revelation—while guided by God’s Spirit—can produce clearer understanding and stronger commitments. Such Bible study will indeed nurture one’s faith.

These lessons explore the spiritual ancestors revealed in the book of Genesis—providing insights into their evolving faith. Digging into these studies will help answer the two-fold question: *Who were these people, and what do their lives have to do with mine?*

May these 13 sessions of exploring inspired biblical texts bring new insights and a refreshed commitment to living faithfully today as followers of God who is revealed most fully in Jesus Christ.

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# INTRODUCTION



Few parts of the Bible have occasioned as much interest and commentary as Genesis 12–50. Traditionally, it has been called the “Patriarchal History,” in contrast to the “Primeval History” of Genesis 1–11. In recent years, many scholars have chosen to avoid the male-dominant implications of “Patriarchal History” and refer to Genesis 12–50 as “Stories of the Ancestors.” In the studies that comprise this book, we will consider the roles of both patriarchs and matriarchs as players in the story of the promise—and how both could also act as anarchs whose actions seemed to threaten the promise, but were ultimately woven into the complex tapestry of Israel’s many-layered story of origins.

As we read, we must keep in mind that Genesis 12–50 was written by Israel and for Israel. More specifically, its final form was shaped by someone from the southern kingdom of Judah who sought to magnify the tribe of Judah—and younger sons—from the beginning. The people of Judah were conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, and many of them carried into a faith-shaking period of exile. After Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 BCE, he allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and the surrounding area shortly thereafter, but still as subjects of the Persian Empire.

Religious and political leaders realized that the Hebrews were no longer in a position to be an independent kingdom or nation, but they could still be preserved as a people. Seizing on that idea, they put increasing stress on a belief that the Hebrews, from the time of Abraham, had been the chosen people of God, called to be set apart for Yahweh (God’s personal name as revealed in the Old Testament), even if they lived as a minority people in a small sub-province called Yehud (an Aramaic spelling of Judah). The people of Yehud were Yehudim, a name that morphed into what Western languages came to pronounce as “Jews.”

In this process, then, the Hebrews became Jews, inheritors of a promise given first to Abraham, and later to Isaac and Jacob, both of whom are chosen over their older brothers. The family line carried on through the male descendants of Abraham forms the skeleton of traditions on which Genesis 12–50 was framed, and the foundation upon which the traditions of Israel’s history were built.

Two appendices offer a guide to finding our way through the family maze of Abraham and his many relations, many of whom are said to have become the ancestors of Israel’s later enemies. By examining these convoluted relationships,

we can see just how big and interconnected the biblical writers considered Israel's family to be.

In these studies we will also see how jumbled and confusing a story can be when it is composed from multiple sources that rely on oral traditions passed down over a very long period of time. All but the most diehard conservative scholars concluded long ago that Moses could not have written the Pentateuch, though the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were often called the "books of Moses." Moses was the main character in four of the five books, but could hardly have written them. Not only do the books record Moses' death and what came after (Deut. 34:5ff), but there are also clear signs of writing styles, vocabulary, and distinctive views of God that point to several different sources.

While various scholars may take slightly different approaches, it is common to speak of most patriarchal narratives as deriving from a source called the "Yahwist" (or "J"), because it has a clearly Judean perspective and commonly calls God by the name "Yahweh" (nearly always translated as "LORD," in all caps). Other sources also contribute, including the Elohist (E) source, which prefers to call God "Elohim" and seems to have been written by someone (probably a priest) from the northern kingdom. A source that emphasizes genealogies and cultic matters is generally called the Priestly source (P). It reflects the perspective of Israel's later religious establishment. Priestly writers likely brought the earlier sources together into an edited—but not always unified—whole. A fourth major source, the Deuteronomist (D), is responsible for the Book of Deuteronomy and possibly a few minor edits in the other books.

The J source is normally considered to be the earliest, perhaps as early as the ninth century BCE, with E adding its own stories and editing the work of J about a century later. The Book of Deuteronomy was probably completed just prior to the exile. The P source is commonly credited with adding a great deal of priestly-related traditions and combining the various sources into a carefully edited—if not unified—whole. The long editing process and an aversion to deleting anything from the story led to a number of duplications or different ways of telling the same story.

Structurally, it is obvious that chapters 12–36—composed of short stories that are loosely connected and almost interchangeable—are quite different in character than chapters 37–50, a much lengthier composition with a complex plot that is often labeled "the Joseph novella."

Hermann Gunkel, the pioneer of a field of study we call "form criticism," assigned most of the stories in Genesis 12–50 to the genre called "legend." This term refers to family stories (usually) that may be based on a historical kernel, but have been expanded in the telling and used to pass on unifying beliefs. But, as

Brevard Childs reminds us, the stories have been edited and brought together in a canonical form that has its own theological and didactic purpose.

The stories of the ancestors begin with Abraham (first called Abram) and his wife Sarah (first known as Sarai). Their stories begin with the genealogy of Genesis 11:10-32, which traces Abraham's ancestry to Shem, one of Noah's three sons. The modern term "Semite" derives from "Shem." The stories of Abraham and Sarah extend through the birth of Isaac and beyond, reaching from Genesis 12 to Abraham's death in Genesis 25:11.

Isaac proves to be an unfortunate character, for though he appears often, he is most commonly in the role of Abraham's long-awaited son who didn't get a wife (Rebekah) until his mother died when he was 40, or as Jacob's feeble father who favored Esau but was easily fooled. Isaac is born in Genesis 21 and doesn't die until Genesis 35, but he has center stage only in Genesis 25–27. Even then his adventures mimic those of his father Abraham. When Isaac is old, Jacob comes to the fore by finagling to receive his aged father's blessing by pretending to be his twin brother Esau (Genesis 27). Jacob, along with his four wives, then remains the lead character through Genesis 36. Jacob doesn't die until the end of the book, hovering in the background of the Joseph stories, but Joseph is clearly the focus of Genesis 37–50.

In these studies, which look at sample stories from each of the patriarchal families, it is not our goal to judge whether these interconnected and sometimes contradictory accounts really happened just as the narratives say, but to dig into the purpose of the people who remembered them and the writers who compiled them, hoping to discover what they want us to learn.