

## **Matriarchs and Heroes of Israel**

The Matriarchs and heroes, whose stories are told in the Bible, would be amazed to know that thousands of years later we are still telling their stories. It would be difficult for them to see how their own lives were able to fit into God's big picture. Because of their covenant with God, we are able to reflect on the meaning of their lives. During Biblical times, women did not have the same advantages and social standings as men. In a patriarchal culture, a woman was dependent upon her father before marriage and then her husband after marriage. Their primary responsibility was to bear children for her husband, which was rewarded by security and prestige. Not being able to bear children, would have been a deeply humiliating situation for a woman. We see this scenario several times in the Old Testament; where a woman pleads with God to have a child. Such examples would be: Sarah the wife of Abraham; Rebekah the wife of Isaac; Hannah the mother of Samuel. A woman's role also included infant nurturing, cleaning, washing, making clothes for the members of the family and instructing the children. Despite the fact that they played a subordinate role in their culture, they were essential in the development of Israel's faith. In fact, Israel came to be known as God's bride and spouse. The Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) clearly begins with the male and female being made in the image and likeness of God. God is seen in the world, through men and women. God made woman from Adam's rib, rather than making her from dust. This calls attention to the fact that because she is made of the same substance as man, she is on the same level of man and equal in value and is equally valuable before God. The ways God worked in their lives can teach us about hope and the reliance upon God. They inspire, warn and lead us through the challenges of life. The first human words in the Bible are of a poem in praise of woman: *The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."* (Genesis 2:23) For the next six weeks I will be writing about the following matriarchs in the Old Testament: Eve, Sarah and Hagar, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, Esther and Miriam. A matriarch is a woman who is the founder of dominant member of a community or a group. Whether you are a man or a woman, we all stand on the shoulders of these famous women. As we take a closer look at their lives, we will be able to see our own struggles, triumphs and lessons. *–Sherrie Clutts DRE*