



More Women of the Bible Session 1 (For further reading) What Is Patriarchy?

Presented here are two views of what Patriarchy means. The first is from the Christian Publishing House and the Updated American Standard Version of The Bible. This resource holds to the “historical,

conservative Christian faith, which includes a firm belief in the inerrancy of Scripture”. This information can be found on the web at <https://uasvbible.org/2025/01/31/what-was-the-nature-of-patriarchal-society-in-the-time-of-genesis-121/> **The Structure and Function of Patriarchal Society**

A patriarchal society was built around the leadership of a male family head, or patriarch, who served as the central figure in governance, religious practice, and family welfare. Genesis 12:1 highlights this structure as Jehovah called Abraham, the patriarch of his family, to leave his homeland and follow divine direction: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

This system prioritized the family unit over the individual, with all members contributing to the collective well-being. Property, livestock, and other resources were commonly held within the family, and the patriarch managed these assets on behalf of the household. The responsibilities of the patriarch included providing for the family’s needs, resolving disputes, and ensuring adherence to Jehovah’s laws and commands.

The Role of Faith in Patriarchal Governance

Faith played an integral role in patriarchal society, as the patriarch served not only as the family’s leader but also as its priest and representative before Jehovah. Genesis 12:7 records that upon arriving in Canaan, Abraham built an altar to Jehovah in obedience and worship, reflecting his role as a spiritual leader. This act symbolized the family’s reliance on Jehovah’s guidance and provision.

The faith of patriarchs like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was demonstrated through their obedience to divine instructions, even when those commands seemed to challenge human reasoning. Hebrews 11:8-9 emphasizes Abraham’s faith: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as a foreigner in the land of promise, as in a foreign land.” This reliance on Jehovah defined the patriarchal way of life and set a precedent for future generations.

The Centrality of Family and Inheritance

In patriarchal society, the family was the foundational unit of governance and culture. The transfer of blessings, property, and responsibilities followed strict familial lines, often determined by birthright. Genesis 25:5-6 illustrates this principle when Abraham gave all he had to Isaac, the son of promise, while providing for his other sons with gifts.

This system ensured that the family’s legacy and resources were preserved, with the eldest son typically receiving a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). However, in some cases, divine

intervention altered these norms, as seen when Jacob was chosen over Esau (Genesis 25:23). These deviations highlight Jehovah's sovereignty in directing the course of His people's history.

The Nomadic Lifestyle and Its Challenges

Patriarchal society was often nomadic, with families moving from place to place in search of pasture and water for their flocks. This lifestyle is evident in Abraham's journey from Ur to Canaan and his subsequent travels within the Promised Land (Genesis 12:4-9). Living in tents, the patriarchs maintained a sense of transience, reflecting their trust in Jehovah's promises rather than earthly security.

This nomadic existence required careful organization and resource management. The patriarch oversaw the family's herds, servants, and possessions, ensuring the group's survival and prosperity. Disputes over resources, such as the conflict between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen (Genesis 13:5-12), were resolved through negotiation and mutual respect, often guided by the patriarch's wisdom and leadership.

Legal and Social Practices

The legal customs of patriarchal society were deeply intertwined with their faith in Jehovah. Contracts, property transfers, and disputes were settled within the family or between patriarchs, often in the presence of witnesses. Genesis 23 provides an example of Abraham purchasing a burial site for Sarah, negotiating with the Hittites and following established protocols for land acquisition.

Marriage arrangements were also a key aspect of patriarchal society. Parents, particularly the patriarch, played a central role in selecting spouses for their children. This practice is evident when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac among his relatives (Genesis 24:3-4). These unions often strengthened familial ties and ensured the continuity of the family line.

Divine Promises and the Patriarchal Era

The promises made by Jehovah to the patriarchs formed the foundation of their society and faith. Genesis 12:2-3 records Jehovah's covenant with Abraham: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

These promises emphasized the future fulfillment of Jehovah's plan, extending beyond the immediate family to include all nations. The patriarchal era was marked by the anticipation of these blessings, motivating the patriarchs to live in faith and obedience despite challenges.

The Decline of the Patriarchal System

While the patriarchal system provided a stable and divinely guided framework for governance and family life, it began to decline as societies grew more complex. The transition from patriarchal governance to tribal and, eventually, national structures is evident in the history of Israel. By the time of Moses, the Israelites had developed a centralized legal and religious system under Jehovah's leadership, as codified in the Law given at Mount Sinai.

However, the principles of faith, obedience, and reliance on Jehovah established during the patriarchal era continued to influence Israel's identity and relationship with Jehovah. The patriarchs' example of trust in Jehovah served as a model for future generations, inspiring faith and commitment to His covenant.

My second resource comes from CNN, written at the time when the movie Barbie came out to define the difference between patriarchal and matriarchal societies. This information can be found on line at:

CNN -Patriarchy<https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/03/world/what-is-patriarchy-explainer-as-equals-intl-cmd/index.html>

Derived from the Greek word patriarkhēs, patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and is used to refer to a social system where men control a disproportionately large share of social, economic, political and religious power, and inheritance usually passes down the male line.

Defining patriarchy, renowned American sociologist Allan Johnson wrote: "Patriarchy does not refer to any man or collection of men, but to a kind of society in which men and women participate ... A society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women."

What are the characteristics of a patriarchal society?

No two patriarchal societies will look exactly the same as cultures and norms are shaped by different factors, such as geography, language, and religion -- and also, because the demands and strides made by feminist movements all over the world are not identical. However, the main characteristic of a patriarchal society is one where men hold more power and authority which subsequently leads to male privilege.

Deeply ingrained biases see men hold most positions of leadership and control resources in both the public and private spheres, while women play a secondary role and are seen as weaker and better suited to domestic labor. As such, a woman's place in a patriarchal society is primarily to be homemakers, procreators or caregivers.

This male dominance perpetuates beliefs and practices (cultural norms) that -- whether consciously or unconsciously -- favor men over women, and these beliefs are not just held by men, but by the majority of the people in that society, whatever their gender.

The difference between sex, gender and sexuality explained

Recent data from the United Nations Development Program revealed in June that gender biases against women "remain entrenched," finding that "almost 9 out of 10 men and women worldwide still hold such biases today." The organization's Gender Social Norms Index report found that "half of people worldwide still believe men make better political leaders than women, and more than 40 percent believe men make better business executives than women."

In many parts of the world, patriarchal norms mean girls get little or no education, may be married off young, have little or no control over their bodies (whether through access to contraception or abortions) or household income, and will have less digital access than boys.

Even when educational attainment is comparable or girls are doing better in school, patriarchal expectations then shape career trajectories, with women underrepresented in STEM and overrepresented in nursing, for example. Patriarchies are also characterized by unequal pay for the same work; less research on conditions that disproportionately affect some genders more than others (e.g. endometriosis or migraines); a sense of entitlement to sex and pleasure by those who embody more masculine genders; the existence of period poverty, which can affect all who menstruate, and the pink tax -- where consumer goods targeted at women are more expensive; unequal burdens of care; women becoming invisible in older age and stereotypes about menopause; and the prevalence and acceptance of violence committed by men: domestic abuse, sexual harassment and femicide.

Is patriarchy another term for gender inequality?

Gender inequality -- the unequal treatment of someone based solely on their gender -- is an outcome of patriarchal societies but the terms do not mean the same thing.

Is the US a patriarchy?

Despite strides towards sex equality that have been gaining momentum for more than a century, the US remains a patriarchal society.

To date, for example, no woman has ever been US president so the ultimate power as commander-in-chief has always rested with a man.

Data shows that the US lags behind many of its allies around the world when it comes to paid parental leave, maternal healthcare, adolescent fertility rates, and, increasingly, reproductive rights. It also has a persistent gender pay gap, with women earning on average 82 cents to every dollar earned by a man in 2022, according to a Pew Research Center analysis. The data highlights that this gap has barely shifted in 20 years, and is worse for Indigenous, Asian, Latin and Black women.

Progress towards gender equality is neither linear, nor guaranteed. Gains in abortion access have been lost in the past year (with the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*), and other gains could also be lost as there is no provision in the US Constitution that explicitly protects against discrimination on the basis of sex. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), first introduced in Congress in 1923, was never ratified by enough states, though there have been recent efforts to revive it.