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We're ready now to resume our study of Genesis right there between chapter 25 and 26, the selling of Esau's birthright. We know that this little episode of five verses is given to us, and then we have the intervening chapter 26 before we find much else out about Jacob and Esau. We have this interruption with the episode of Isaac going down to Abimelech and dwelling in Gerar and so forth.

But the significance of the selling of the birthright, the significance in the fact that God had already told Rebekah, interesting that He told this to Rebekah and not to Isaac in verse 23 of chapter 25, the Lord said to her, two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body, one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger. And you notice it is two peoples, it's the nations that are represented by these men that are the issue. There's no real record of Esau serving Jacob at any point in their lives, but the offspring, the nations that spring from them, the Edomites and the other ites that come from Esau, will eventually be subject to Israel.

And we may have been excessively ambitious looking at Romans chapter 9 this morning, but it is ironic, whatever you think of these verses, where Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, it was said to her, the older shall serve the younger. This is what Paul quotes in verse 12 of chapter 9. Well, the Jacob and Esau that are being spoken of here in 13, the older shall serve the younger, these are the nations, right? Two nations are in your womb. What nation is Paul talking about in chapter 9? Jacob.

This is the one he's weeping over. This is the one that he would be accursed from Christ on behalf of. The one to whom belong these promises, that these Gentile Edomites should serve the Israelites from Jacob.

The elder shall serve the younger. God seemed to make a choice there, but isn't it ironic? We always talk about this, oh, it seems unfair, God chose Jacob and not Esau. This is the Jacob that's being passed over.

This is the Jacob that's being set aside, that Paul is grieving over in chapter 9 and chapter 10 of Romans. To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises because of verse 13, the older shall serve the younger. God made this promise to Jacob and this is the Jacob that has missed out on that.

Why? Is there unrighteousness with God? We tend to think, well, verse 14, is there unrighteousness with God in choosing Jacob instead of Esau? I suspect Paul's mind is running, what happened to that promise? Here's Israel under the thumb of the Romans. You've got Pontius Pilate and Caesar and all these other people floating around in government. You've got Herod.

What happened to the elder shall serve the younger? What happened to Jacob being the dominant nation when all these nations proliferate? God says, I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy. And unfortunately, most in these generations in Israel have not qualified by faith, have not qualified by obedience. They want the promises all right.

They would love to be prosperous. They would love to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They would love to have the favor of God, but they are not willing to submit to the righteousness of God that comes only by faith.

This is the point that Paul will go on to make. In verse 16, it is not of him who wills or of him who runs. Esau, we're going to see here shortly, will be seeking his inheritance diligently with tears, but he's not going to find it.

He's going to want the blessing from his father Isaac, but it is not there to be had. And Jacob himself, the heir of these things, his descendants, the nation Jacob, is going to be seeking these things and miss it. Look at Romans chapter 10.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved, that they may be delivered. And this is broader than just salvation from the lake of fire. He's talking about deliverance from their hard-heartedness, deliverance from their misguidedness, deliverance from their own bad choices and faulty priorities and misconceptions about the word and the plan of God, is that they may be delivered.

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God. They have a will for God. They're running after God in a lot of ways.

They're still slaughtering animals down at the temple. They're still observing the feasts and the ritual observances, the cleansings and the oblations and all the other things that are part of the law of Moses. They're still doing those things.

They are willing and running, but that's not what it's based on. They have a zeal for God, not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, they don't understand righteousness by faith, and they are not willing to submit to the idea of righteousness by faith.

It doesn't appeal to them. They are seeking to establish their own righteousness, and they have not submitted to the righteousness of God. This boils down to a lack of submission.

What is submission based on? This is a big issue with all the feminist movement of the 70s and 80s, and one thing and another. Now we have a lot of churches, and there is still strife. Even this past few weeks, there are churches who are splitting over ordination of women and what the role of women will play in the church and so forth.

What is submission based on? It's based on understanding the plan and the purpose of

God. It's based on recognizing authority and recognizing responsibility and understanding that your personal worth doesn't depend on what you do or whom you serve in the earthly world. And this ignorance of God's righteousness and this seeking of their own righteousness through works, Paul says, this is lack of submission.

It is rebellion against the authority of God's word. It's rebellion against God's plan. They don't want to do things God's way.

They want to do it their own. They want the same end result. And this is what we have today.

We have people who are going around, and they want good things. They want to minister to the hurting and the sick and dying and afflicted round about us. There are people who want legitimate things.

It's wonderful to want everyone to hear the gospel and to come to faith in Christ. It's wonderful to want to minister and to help and so forth. But to do this in human energy with human schemes, human organization, human wisdom, human power, instead of in the power of God's word and God's spirit, they take a right thing and make it wrong.

You notice it doesn't say Israel is seeking evil, does it? It doesn't say Israel is seeking idolatrous, adulterous lifestyle. What are they seeking? Righteousness. They're seeking good things.

And this is the terrible trap. It looks like Debbie Boone used to sing, it can't be wrong if it feels so right. You look at ministry opportunities and being a benefit to other people, and you think, what could be a higher or greater calling? But done in the wrong way, it is, at best, a waste of time.

And at worst, it's an abomination before the Lord because it is lack of submission. It is rebellion. This is what Israel has done.

They've created their own religion out of the law of Moses instead of submitting to the righteousness of God by faith. And this is what we have to understand. Do you really want to please God, or are you using the things of God as an excuse to please yourself? And even people in ministry, this is why people have families and marriages fall apart in ministry, because they're really in the ministry to satisfy some desire they have.

Some people really get a buzz, get a great sense of personal satisfaction out of affecting another person's life, making a change in what they think is a change for the better. And there are people who live for this and will knock themselves out, and there's nothing that pleases them more than for someone to walk up and introduce them and say, this is the man that led me to the Lord and changed my life, or this is the man that's been mentoring me or discipling me, or this is the person that did this and so. Here's the person that helped me out of a tight scrape, and I'm eternally indebted to them, and so

forth.

Some of us just live for that. Well, that's not the plan and the purpose of God. That's not reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ.

That's reflecting the glory of somebody who got their nose in someone else's business and maybe made a difference for the better, maybe got them out of some jam, or helped them kick some bad habit or whatever. But that's not the measure. The measure in this life is not the righteousness.

Israel here is seeking righteousness. They're seeking good things, but not according to faith, not according to God's plan. And you can take a right thing and make it wrong if you do it in a wrong way.

Abraham wanted to have a child so all the promises of God could be fulfilled. Having a child is a good thing. But having a child with Hagar out of wedlock is not a good thing.

And to be fruitful not through the grace of God and not through the mercy of God is not fruitful. And that's why Ishmael doesn't count. And that's why the works that Israel produces, which are righteous when looked at on the surface, don't count.

Just like Ishmael doesn't count. The first product of Abraham's body is Ishmael, and it doesn't count. And the first product of a lot of these Israelites that Paul is talking to and talking about in Romans 9 and 10, they have a zeal for God, but it's not according to knowledge.

They have a desire for righteousness, but they're running after it in the wrong way. This is what Paul is illustrating in chapter 9. You can get tangled up in the details of chapter 9. That's why it's such a controversial chapter. But the bottom line is, look at Moses on the mountain in verse 15 of Romans 9. God says to Moses, He says to a man who is already a believer, to a man who has already done mighty things.

If Moses had died on Mount Sinai, his life would have been a smashing success because he led the people out of bondage. He stretched out the rod and the waters parted. He strikes the rock and water comes forth.

He's done all these wonderful things. But he wants more of God. He wants to understand God more fully.

He wants to see God face to face as it were. He says, Lord, show me your glory. He's already glowing in the dark from the Lord's glory, but he wants to see more.

And God says to him, when he asks that, He says, I will have mercy, because I have had mercy. I will have compassion, because I have had compassion. You have built up a pattern in your life of faith.

And you are going to get what you're asking for. And he's going to see the glory of God. And so Paul draws the conclusion in verse 16, So look, now when Moses first said, Boy, I sure wish I could see the glory of God.

He didn't see it, did he? And he climbed Mount Sinai. But he didn't see the glory that is about to be revealed. You can will and you can run, but the only reason you get anything is because of God's mercy.

God doesn't just say, Sure, Moses, you're a man of faith. Let me show you my glory. Stand right here.

And he passes by. God makes a point of saying, You know why I'm going to show you my glory? You know what my revelation of this glory is? It is mercy and it's compassion. It's not a parade like they have in Red Square.

We're going to flaunt our power. God says, when I do this for you, when I grant this request, this is mercy. This is compassion.

I am going to have mercy on you because I have had mercy on you. I'm going to have compassion on you. Grant this request because I have had.

And that's why Paul says, So then, it is not from the source of the one willing. Moses could want to see the glory of God. I've wanted to see the glory of God.

That doesn't make it happen. Moses wanted to see it, and that didn't make it happen. Anything that happens, anything that is accomplished, any blessing that is received, any glory that is reflected, isn't from the source of the one who wants it.

And it isn't from the source of the one who runs after it. It's from the source of God who shows mercy. It's the mercy of God.

The birthright that is the possession of Esau that he gives away on this day, at the end of chapter 25, it's a mercy from God. It's the key to the compassion of God, and he despises it. He doesn't care anything about it.

In this family, the birthright is a spiritual birthright, a spiritual heritage. It wouldn't matter if Isaac had five sheep or 500,000 sheep. It's the privilege of being the spiritual head, not only of that family, but at this point, of the entire world that is on the line here.

And Esau doesn't care about it. God can't have mercy and compassion on someone who isn't interested in it, who doesn't value it and isn't seeking it. Someone like Moses who is, who has and asks for more.

He's already glowing in the dark and it's not enough. I think this is an amazing thing. Who has less reason to ask to see the glory of God than Moses? And yet Moses wants more.

And that heart is what God has compassion and has mercy on. Why is it that this Jacob, in verse 13 of Romans 9, Jacob I have loved. God says, I've set aside Esau and all the people in Esau's category to bless you, Jacob.

And yet this is the Jacob that's being passed by. And Paul says, I'm grieving in my heart. I wish I could be accursed from Christ for the sake of these people.

This is Jacob. Because they are heir of these things and they've let it slip. They're making the Esau mistake.

And that's what you find when he continues this argument over in chapter 10. They have a zeal for God, not according to knowledge. They're ignorant of God's righteousness.

They are running after their own, seeking to establish it. They have not submitted to the righteousness of God for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who has faith. And he goes on to elaborate on that.

In verse 11, the scripture says, Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. There is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

So what does it mean to be a child of the promise? You have to want it. You are someone who seeks. There are so many scriptures that talk about seeking God.

Deuteronomy 4.29 From there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. Guess what? If you don't seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul, you're not going to find Him. Even if you're Jacob.

Even if God has moved heaven and earth to give you the birthright. And we as believers, God has literally moved heaven and moved earth to give us the birthright in Christ. But if you don't seek Him with all your heart, you're not going to find Him.

Deuteronomy 4.29 2 Chronicles 14.4 Talking about Solomon. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to observe the law and the commandment. Psalm 27.8 Remember the first 50 Psalms are Psalms of David.

What does David say? When you said, Seek my face, my heart said to you, Your face, Lord, I will seek. It's a response. God says, Seek me.

And David says, When I heard that, my heart said, I will seek your face. Psalm 105.4 Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face evermore.

Isaiah 55.6 Seek the Lord while He may yet be found. Call upon Him while He is near. By the way, these are all exhortations to whom? To what nation? Israel.

They have the possession of the birthright, don't they? Paul says, Ever since Abraham to them have belonged the promises and the covenants and the adoption and the service and the law and the whole bit. But yet, they're still exhorted to seek. Why? Because if they don't seek, that possession will slip through their fingers.

They're not going to receive the mercy and the compassion of God if they don't seek it. Having title to it doesn't mean you're going to possess it. Seek the Lord while He may yet be found.

Call upon Him while He is near. Isaiah 55.6 Jeremiah 29.13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. And he could almost have said, And not before.

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. Hosea 10.12 Sow for yourselves righteousness. Reap in mercy.

Sow for yourselves righteousness. Reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes and rains righteousness on you.

It's a wonderful passage. Hosea 10.12 Amos 5.4 Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, Seek Me and live. Zephaniah 2.3 Seek the Lord all you meek of the earth who have upheld His justice.

Seek righteousness. Seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger.

Of course, in the New Testament, Matthew 6.33 The Lord Jesus, Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Luke 11.10 Everyone who asks, receives. And he who seeks, finds.

And to him who knocks, it will be opened. It doesn't say him who was elected or him who was predestined. The one who seeks.

Acts 17.27 So that they should seek the Lord in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. With this in mind, we want to take a moment to better understand what's going on here in the contrast between Jacob and Esau. And to do that, we actually need to take a look at the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael.

Because this is where this originates. Because the Scripture sets this up for us, doesn't it? We see it over in Romans 9. We also see it over in Galatians. If you still have a finger in the New Testament there, turn with me quickly to Galatians.

You're probably familiar with this comparison. We reviewed it recently. Where the Galatians, as Christians, are falling back into the same mistake that Israel made of

seeking their own righteousness through the works of the law instead of understanding that righteousness comes by faith.

Some have misunderstood this and thought that they were seeking salvation through the works of the law. But this is justification before God. And so Paul says in Galatians 4.21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free woman.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise. Which things are symbolic? For these are the two covenants, the one from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.

It corresponds to Jerusalem, which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, O barren you who do not bear, break forth and shout, you who are not in labor.

For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. Remember what we saw in Romans 9? Are you a child of the flesh? Or are you a child of the promise? We are the child of the promise.

We're Jacob. The elder will serve the younger. You're going to be blessed.

Jacob couldn't see it, could he? He was the younger brother. Looked like Esau was going to get it. He felt like he had to chisel his brother out of it.

Had to dupe him with a red stew. And at this point, he wasn't really trusting God. You would think, well, I'll bide my time.

Maybe God's going to strike my brother down, or he'll have a hunting accident, and then I'll inherit everything. But he decides that he's got to seize the birthright. By force.

He's got to deceive and chisel to take it. But he is the child of the promise. Does he believe the promise, or does he believe his circumstances? Well, Jacob believes his circumstances.

He's the younger brother. He's staying back there, tending everything, but it doesn't look like he's going to inherit any of it. We, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.

Back to Isaac and Ishmael. Just as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so it is now. You remember at the weaning of Isaac, Abraham threw a big party because he'd kind of entered into a new phase.

He wasn't an infant anymore. He had been weaned, and so Abraham has a party.

Ishmael is in his teenage years at this point, and he mocks and makes fun of his infant half-brother Isaac.

Sarah looks over and sees this, and she gets upset, and she goes to Abraham and says, cast out the bond woman and her son because he's not going to inherit with my son. Depending on what the age of weaning is, you figure this might have been a year old or so. This would make Ishmael roughly 15 years old, somewhere in that range.

Ishmael is 14 when Isaac is born. Just as he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit, even so it is now. And this is the Judaistic church, or the Jewish crowd who is hanging on to the law and so forth.

These are Christians, but they're wanting to keep the law, and they're wanting to make the Gentiles keep the law, even in Christ. Nevertheless, what does the scripture say in Galatians 4.30? Cast out the bond woman and her son, for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free.

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. This running after righteousness by what you do and what other people think and how much impact you can have and what numbers you can rack up and print in your bulletin or put on your tote board or convey to others in your press releases is not the measure of righteousness. It's faith, and faith alone.

This is the way to serve God. This is the way to be fruitful and be pleasing in God's sight. This is the way to receive the mercy of God and the compassion of God, is to tend to our own soul and know the promises of God.

And when the time comes to trust God for what we cannot see, trust God for what's going to happen tomorrow, trust God for the circumstances coming up that we don't know how it's going to be resolved, when there's uncertainty, when there's fear, when there is the consequence of our own failure, when there are bad things on the horizon and we are stressed and we're uncertain and we're fearful and we're rattled, it is faith that enables us to go before God and cast our cares before Him. It is faith that reminds us that we are a child of the King. It is faith that sustains us and we know that it's not the earthly outcome of circumstances that is the measure of where we stand before the Lord.

It is when we trust Him, it is whether we understand and receive and exploit His mercy and His compassion. So, you have Paul in Galatians pointing our attention to the contrast between Isaac and Ishmael and to the contrast between their mothers. What is this all about? Well, think about, we've often contrasted, at least I have, we've often, or other people have pointed this out, Paul points it out, you say, well, you've got Ishmael on the one hand and Isaac on the other and you compare the two.

Isaac's mother is Abraham's wife and even though they're old, God promised they would have a child and they did. Ishmael is the son of a slave girl, out of wedlock, the son of a concubine and was a human expedient to try to make the promise of God come true. And you get the idea that they rationalize this by, well, how else are the promises of God going to come true? Sarah can't have any children.

God said your seed, blessings, land, all this stuff, so let's figure out a way to have a child. So, by their own efforts, they're going to seize and lay hold of the promise of God. And this is a hereditary problem all the way through the nation of Israel and it is a hereditary problem all the way down through the church as well.

But what we don't often do is compare Ishmael and Esau versus Isaac and Jacob. What are the similarities and the differences between Ishmael and Esau? Because both of them seem to be in line for the birthright and both of them miss out. Who is the firstborn son of Abraham? It's Ishmael.

Who is the firstborn son of Isaac? It's Esau. They're both the firstborn, but their conceptions are different. As I just pointed out, Ishmael is conceived outside the will of God.

Abraham goes into Hagar, who is his wife's slave. They're not married. She's a concubine.

It's not supposed to happen. It betrays a lack of faith in the promise of God. Abraham and Sarah don't think that Sarah can have a child, even though God has promised, so they try to have a child somewhere else.

The funny thing is, when they do this, and you see this in the later parts of Genesis, if a maid is going to have a child on behalf of the mistress, at the point of the birth, they talk about giving birth on the knees of so and so, the maid is like a surrogate mother. They treat the child as though it's a surrogate and she just sort of hosted the baby, but it's really the wife's baby and not the concubine. So at the birth, she will give birth, and they didn't lay down and do the weird things that people do now to have babies in hospitals.

They did it the way God intended by letting gravity help out. They would stand up. They would be in a squat position and give birth.

Well, when someone is there in a squatting position, the other lady can sort of get underneath, and when the baby is born, she catches it, and it's born on her knees. So she takes possession as it emerges from the womb, and she says, well, this is my child that my maid had for me. My maid does a lot of my other dirty work, and here she went through this pregnancy thing for me.

What a wonderful maid. But you'll notice that this was the idea when Abraham went into Hagar. They said, well, Hagar will be the surrogate, and it will really be Sarah's son.

But you notice that by the time Ishmael is born, Sarah doesn't have anything to do with her. She doesn't go in and catch the child on her knees and say, oh, my son, my son, thank you, Hagar, for birthing this for me. The deal has already gone sour long before then because Hagar started sort of getting her nose in the air that she could conceive and Sarah couldn't.

There was always some question about who the problem was with, that there were no children in the marriage. But Abraham goes in with Hagar on apparently one occasion, and bingo, she gets pregnant. So the problem is not with Abraham, it's with Sarah.

So it's kind of like, well, I can conceive and you can't. You see this pattern down through the Old Testament. But this conception is in sin for Ishmael.

It's outside the will of God. It goes against and is in flagrant disregard of the promise of God that Sarah and Abraham will have their own child. But there's no problem with the conception of Esau, is there? In fact, Jacob and Esau, if you think about it, they both spring from the same act of conception.

Jacob is going to be the younger just by a few seconds. But Rebecca is the divinely chosen mother for the children. So there's no problem in the way they come into the world when you get down to Esau.

There's nothing wrong with his background. He's not previously disqualified the way Ishmael is. Ishmael never has a prayer.

He could have been the greatest man of faith in the Old Testament, but he didn't have a prayer, apparently, because of the circumstances of his birth. At least that's what we would think at the moment. So you get the idea that Ishmael, we think, gosh, poor Ishmael, he just never had a chance because his parents' decision is the issue for him.

We think, well, this was wrong from the beginning. But there's no such problem with Esau. Esau, from the outset, everything is legitimate.

He's got his papers, so to speak. So you look at the mothers and you think, well, what was it about the conception of Ishmael that knocked him out from the beginning? Well, Hagar is a slave and she's from Egypt. And this has a lot of symbolic baggage, doesn't it? She is Egyptian, first and foremost.

We're told at the outset she's Egyptian. And Egypt always, always, always stands for the pagan unbelief. Everything that is not the plan and the purpose of God, everything that is not a part of the people of God is in Egypt.

Out of Egypt I have called my son, it says in the Old Testament. If you're a son, you're not in Egypt anymore. The worst thing anybody can do is to go down to Egypt, which brings up an interesting question when you get to Mary and Joseph taking Jesus down to

Egypt during the persecution of Herod where he's slaying all the children.

And have you seen these movies and the idea that, well, the best place to hide something is right in the police station or right where the most obvious place is the place they typically don't look. And it's almost as though God put his son in the very camp of Satan. Satan through Herod is trying to wipe out the Christ child.

And so God takes him to Satan country, takes him down to Egypt and secretes him there like it's the last place they're going to look or something. But in the Old Testament especially, Egypt always represents evil non-response to God from the beginning. And this is where Hagar is from.

Rebecca, on the other hand, is as far away from that as you can get. Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and the mother of Esau, she is God's choice. We just had a whole chapter of how God supernaturally guided the servant to find her and her wonderful response of faith and her willingness to follow in the pattern of Abraham and leave her land and her people and come to an unknown place, marry a man that she's never met.

She's a great woman of faith. So in some ways she outshines her mother-in-law Sarah in that regard. So you have Hagar in contrast to Rebecca when you look at Esau versus Ishmael.

Ishmael is the half-brother, therefore, of Isaac who is eventually going to be the heir of Abraham. But Esau is a full brother to Jacob. They are as close as a brother as you can get.

So these two situations are superficially similar, but when you start looking at the details you see that they're quite different. And there are going to actually be three of these reversals. We studied on Friday night the doctrine of threes, or we were looking specifically at the three-day period that Jesus was separated from his parents at the age of 12 and the significance of that period of time, three days.

Among other things, often you find that something will happen in threes. How many times in this first part of Genesis do we have a patriarch telling a king that his wife is really his sister? Three times. How many times do we have the reversal of the inheritance that's expected to go to the firstborn son go to some other son? Three times.

It happens with Abraham's sons, it happens with Isaac's sons, and it's going to happen with Jacob's sons. Who's the firstborn of Jacob? Reuben. What does Reuben inherit? Zilcho.

He gets kind of a lame sort of blessing on Jacob's deathbed, but all of his double portion and his priesthood and all the other things devolve down to other brothers. Remember the priesthood goes all the way down to Levi, the rulership goes down to Judah, the double portion travels all the way down through the brothers to Joseph, and all of those

were Reubens by right of birth. So three times, but each time God shows us something different.

Just like in the Trinity, we see something different in the essence of God looking at the Father, looking at the Son, and looking at the Spirit. By the mouth of two or three witnesses, a thing is established, and we have the threefold deception take place, and we'll be looking at that. But here we're in the middle of the second switching over of the birthright, and we learn something by the comparison.

We also learn something by the contrast. In the case of Ishmael, you have Egypt involved, and this is at the fundamental level of response to God. We saw the fact that God appears to Hagar in the wilderness twice.

God makes an issue of himself to Hagar, speaks to her two times. The first time when she's pregnant, and Sarah drives her out. The second time when she and Ishmael have been driven out, and Ishmael is dying of thirst, and she goes off a little ways to watch him die, and God provides for them, and God makes a promise about Ishmael.

God makes a promise about Ishmael to Abraham. God makes a promise about Ishmael to Hagar, that he will be a great nation, twelve princes will come from him, and so forth. But the illustration there is that he's not the product of faith.

And regardless of the emphasis in his situation is that the union that produced him, the conception that produced him was ill-conceived, could I say? It was an ill-conceived idea for Ishmael to be born. And so the focus here is on the lack of faith on the part of Abraham and Sarah in that instance. But, Ishmael lives this out because he despises the child of promise.

He laughs at Isaac, and Paul amplifies that in the New Testament, says that he persecutes him. He persecutes the son of the bond woman, persecutes the son of the free woman. You get the idea, and it doesn't have to be this way.

Think about Jonathan and David. Jonathan is the rightful heir to the throne, but when Jonathan realizes that David has been anointed, that David is God's choice, Jonathan says, Amen, brother, I'm your biggest fan. Because Jonathan has humility.

Jonathan is a great man of faith and a great man of God. And he doesn't have that jealousy and that self-centered desire. He doesn't join his father in trying to kill David.

And this could have been the attitude of Ishmael. This could have been the attitude of Esau for that matter, but it's not. Mocking, despising, persecuting.

This is Ishmael's response. And so, in a sense, he's sort of living out the symbolism that started out in his birth. He's a child of Egypt.

And when you follow the later career of Ishmael, we saw just previous to this chapter that Ishmael marries an Egyptian. He goes out and his mother marries him to an Egyptian. Hagar had a revelation from God on two different occasions.

Hagar could have done the same thing Abraham does for Isaac. Hagar could have said, you know, I'm a believer, my son is a believer, we need to get with the people who are believers, the people who are blessed by God. But no, she goes down to Egypt.

Are there any believers down there? Do you think Ishmael's wife cares anything for the God of Abraham? She does not. She's from Egypt. And so that contact with God doesn't produce a response.

You don't seize and lay hold of the things of God. And so it's a fulfillment. God knew this ahead of time.

God told Abraham, Ishmael is not going to be your heir. God already knew Ishmael was going to follow the pattern of his mother's country. But the emphasis there is on the lack of faith of Abraham and Sarah.

Now, in the second case where this happens, the emphasis shifts. God gives us a different perspective. Here there's no problem with the origin.

Jacob and Esau spring from the very same act of conception. Ishmael never possessed the birthright. There was never a point, even before he was born, God told Abraham, Ishmael is not going to be your son.

It's going to be the one that comes from Sarah. Ishmael never possessed the birthright. It was never his to sell.

It was never his to lose. Because he was illegitimate from the beginning, literally and spiritually. This is different.

With Jacob and Esau, Esau is a legitimate firstborn son of Isaac, isn't he? He's the son of Rebekah, the great woman of faith. He possesses the birthright. It is his.

It belongs to him. So here, where you almost have the difference between maybe saving faith or lack of saving faith, at least in illustration between Ishmael and Isaac, Ishmael never does possess it. Isaac is the one who is the child of promise.

But here, there's nothing disqualifying Esau. It's not his circumstances. It's not something beyond his control that fates him to never have it.

Esau has it and is his legitimately with every right of birth. But he gives it away. He doesn't value it for what it is.

Ishmael, all of these things illustrate the later history of the nation of Israel. All of these

things foreshadow not only Israel, but the career of believers in general in the broadest sense. In the narrower sense, you see foreshadowing of what's going to go wrong in Israel.

Paul points it out in Galatians. The people who are stuck under the law, running after righteousness, trying to impress each other, themselves, and God with what they do, they're like Ishmael. They've enslaved themselves to a law of works.

He says, you're the son of the bondwoman. And Paul makes the comparison of Israel to Ishmael. In Romans 9, he says, here's the second case.

Shift down to the next generation. Now, look at the fact that you have it by right of birth and give it away because you don't value it. That's what Esau does.

You see a connection between what seems to be fated, the side of God's plan that says this was all in the preordained plan of God. God knew ahead of time. You get that sense with Ishmael.

Well, he never really had a chance. In the same way, we get the idea that Israel never really had a chance at the kingdom when Jesus came and preached it to them. It says in the Bible, God knew ahead of time they were going to reject the Messiah, and God sent him anyway.

They really never had a chance, we figure. How would God's plan have turned out if they had surprised him and accepted the Messiah? Well, that's the foreshadowing we get with Ishmael, that God knew ahead of time that these dead branches were going to be broken off and the Gentiles were going to be grafted in. So that's one aspect in the Ishmael-Isaac contrast.

Now, in the Jacob-Esau, we're looking at a different aspect. Now we're looking at the personal culpability rather than the big picture of God's plan and promise and the way things work. Now we're looking at the other side of it.

And this is the tension in Romans 9, isn't it? Between human responsibility and divine sovereignty. Now we're seeing the illustration that Esau possessed this and of his own free will, furthered it away because he despised it. He didn't value it.

He was pursuing other things. And Israel, the nation, is also pictured in this. And that's why Paul makes that comparison in Romans 9. He possessed it but despised it and gave it away.

And when we get to the Jacob cycle, we'll return to this theme and we'll see that the fullest look at this idea is going to come in the sons of Jacob. Because now it's like we're under a microscope and we don't just have the tension between two sons, between twelve sons. And we're going to see in detail how each part of the birthright is analyzed.

The rulership, the priesthood, the double portion fall to different brothers rather than just the whole thing. So it's like we're moving in ever closer. We see the broad outline of God's plan and purpose with Isaac and Ishmael.

We see it expanded and we see the importance of personal faith and personal responsibility and accountability between Jacob and Esau. And when we get down to the sons of Jacob, each in turn losing their part of the birthright, we'll see in even greater detail the outworking of personal accountability in this regard. But it's fascinating and we need to cover that because we're now entering into the Jacob section of Genesis and it takes fully half the book to cover the Jacob portion.

And in that we're going to see that God is looking for those who are looking for Him. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. And the wonderful promise is that even if the magnitude of your failures is great, the grace of God is greater.

And it's not your willing and it's not your running that it ultimately depends on. It's God's mercy. It's the compassion of God.

And if you ensure that you are a person on whom God can have mercy, that you are a person on whom God can have compassion, like Moses. God nearly killed Moses in the wilderness because he was disobedient about circumcising his children. He gave in to his wife, Zipporah, who didn't want to circumcise them.

And when he saw the burning bush and got his commission and was on his way back to Egypt, it says God met him and was ready to slay him. And it wasn't until Moses went back to Zipporah and said, we've got to circumcise the kids and she said, you're a bloody bridegroom. She cuts off the foreskin, slams him on the ground and stomps off.

And basically that sort of splits the blanket with Moses and his first wife there. But Moses had some great failures. Moses commits murder.

Moses has a great disobedience. Moses strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. But God says, I have had mercy on you.

I will have mercy on you. And it is our recovery. It's our focus on righteousness by faith instead of trying to establish our own righteousness.

That's what really counts. That's what we're going to see illustrated in the whole second half of Genesis. And that's where we will pick up when we analyze this third instance of the wife-sister ploy in Genesis 26.

This very same idea is going to come forward. This third time we're going to see when we compare these three wife-sister incidents. Remember the first time Pharaoh figures it out because of a plague.

The second time Abimelech figures it out because of a vision. God speaks to Abimelech. The third time there is no plague and there is no vision.

Abimelech looks out the window and sees Isaac and Rebekah making out. So what's that all about? What are the similarities and differences in these three episodes and why are they presented to us in the pages of Genesis? Well, that's where we will resume next time. But let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying your word. We thank you for the wonderful truth that sustains us.