

Genesis 25C (2011)

- We are beginning to focus on the question of who will inherit the promises and blessing that God spoke to Abraham
 - Collectively, these promises from God constitute the birthright in the family of Abraham
 - Every family in ancient times honored and respected the birthright
 - The birthright was the privilege of the first born male, to receive a greater inheritance than any other son
 - Specifically, the oldest son inherited a double portion of the father's estate
 - More importantly, the oldest son would become the authority figure in the clan after the father's death
 - Now in the family of Abraham, the birthright has taken on special significance
 - God granted Abraham unparalleled blessings and promises
 - Moreover, God declared that His promises to Abraham would be inherited
 - They would not die with Abraham's body, but rather the blessings would move from generation to generation
 - So by His promises God created an unprecedented inheritance, one that was far more valuable than anything the world has to offer
- But God's promises come with two important caveats
 - The first caveat is the inheritance God gave Abraham is largely a future inheritance
 - While there will be some earthly blessings included for Abraham and his children in the present time, most of the inheritance does not materialize until they enter the eternal kingdom
 - Abraham and his descendants receive the full measure of their inheritance on the future day when they have been resurrected and join Christ in His kingdom on Earth

- This fact creates an interesting and important issue in the story of Genesis
 - Only those who believe in the promises of God will find value in this birthright
 - Without faith in God's word and a trust that God will bring about all that He promises, the inheritance God has granted Abraham and his family is worthless
- The second caveat to God's promises is that God Himself decides who receives His promises among Abraham's descendants
 - We remember that God chose Isaac rather than Ishmael
 - But as we noted last week, God's choice was overshadowed by Abraham sin in the way he fathered Ishmael
 - We might be tempted to assume God chose Isaac because he merited God's choice
 - Or we might explain Ismael's rejection as a result of Abraham's sin
- So as we moved into studying the life of Isaac and his children, we watched God go out of His way to emphasize His sovereignty in the assignment of this birthright
 - He began by withholding Rebekah's ability to conceive for 20 years until Isaac prayed for relief
 - Then when God responded to the prayer and allowed Rebekah to conceive, He communicated clearly that His hand was directing the events in her body
 - Then God created twins when we know He only intended to grant His birthright to one of the children
 - Then God caused the twins to fight in the womb so as to catch Rebekah's attention
 - This led Rebekah to pray for an answer, giving God the opportunity to explain His purposes further
 - And we ended last week with God's striking answer and Paul's challenging explanation

- So let's return to the chapter in v.23 looking at the two caveats that Moses makes the centerpiece of his narrative

[Gen. 25:23](#) The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb;
And two peoples will be separated from your body;
And one people shall be stronger than the other;
And the older shall serve the younger."

- The Lord's answer to Rebekah was worded and timed to present a simple and undeniable statement of His sovereignty concerning the birthright
 - He created two boys so they could give birth to two nations
 - These two nations would be separated from birth
 - The boys' destinies were set and established by God from before they were born
 - One would be stronger than the other and God has determined which would be which
 - In case the world wasn't willing to recognize God's handiwork and acknowledge His power to control these things, God does two things
 - First, He assigns the birthright to the younger, skipping over the older
 - Ordinarily, the older would receive the birthright
 - But God purposely reverses this pattern to ensure His choice is visible and undeniable
 - Secondly, God makes this announcement to Rebekah prior to the birth of the boys
 - In fact, He caused them to struggle in the womb
 - This caused Rebekah to inquire of the Lord at that time
 - Which gave God the opportunity He desired to explain His purposes before the birth took place
 - By presenting His choice of the younger over the older before the twins were born, God prevents us from falling back on any excuses for how the younger ends up with the birthright

- Paul says God declared this truth before either had done anything good or bad so that it would be understood as God's choice that determined their outcome
- Now let's see how God's choice plays out in their lives

[Gen. 25:24](#) When her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

[Gen. 25:25](#) Now the first came forth red, all over like a hairy garment; and they named him Esau.

[Gen. 25:26](#) Afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was sixty years old when she gave birth to them.

- Isaac was 60 years old when Rebekah gave birth, 20 years after they were married...a sign that God was at work in this pregnancy
 - And on the day Rebekah delivered, Moses says there were twins in her womb, just as God promised
 - And the first to come forth from her was red all over like a hairy garment
 - The Hebrew word here means literally ruddy or reddish
 - His hair was red, and since he was covered in hair at birth, it made him appear reddish
 - So they name him Esau
 - The word means red, so he is named after his appearance
 - Later, the nation Esau founds is called Edom, which also means red
 - Following Esau, the second born emerges
 - He emerges literally clutching the heel of Esau
 - The Hebrew word for heel is *akeiv*
 - And based on the curious way the child left the womb, Isaac and Rebekah assign the name Yaakov (which we pronounce Jacob)
 - The Hebrew word for Yaakov shares the same root as *akeiv*, heel

- So Jacob's name is a play on words
 - His name is an invented Hebrew word
 - It has been assigned the meaning heel-catcher
 - Later, based on events in Jacob's life, it came to mean supplanter
- It's important to note that neither of these names carries a negative connotation
 - Some interpreters take the name too far and assign meanings like "thief" or deceiver
 - These interpretations are simply not accurate
 - His name is simply a playful reminder of how he was born
 - Though it does assume additional meaning over the course of his life
 - As we go further in the story of Jacob, we will need to challenge many of the popular notions concerning his personality and his behavior
 - It's safe to say that if you've studied Jacob's story in the past, you're been exposed to many of these notions
 - "Jacob the sneaky thief who tricks his brother and his father"
 - "The selfish, scheming kid who broke up his family"
 - If you've heard any of these stories, then I ask you to set those notions aside for the duration of time studying the man Jacob
 - Let the text of Scripture speak to you and see if you don't come to a very different perspective of this man
 - The man whom God names Israel and uses to bring forth a nation

[Gen. 25:27](#) When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, but Jacob was a peaceful man, living in tents.

[Gen. 25:28](#) Now Isaac loved Esau, because he had a taste for game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

- Moses' storytelling of the lives of Esau and Jacob progresses quickly to adulthood
 - Esau is a skillful hunter and a man of the field, while Jacob is described as a peaceful man living in tents
 - Immediately, we have our first opportunity to dispel one of the more common misconceptions concerning Jacob
 - When we hear that Esau was a skillful hunter and out in the field while Jacob stayed in the tents, we may be tempted to imagine a scene from a Disney cartoon
 - On the one hand, we have rugged outdoorsman Esau
 - He has a size 46 chest and 30 inch waist
 - The square jaw, tanned skin and chiseled good looks
 - Reminds you of me, right?
 - On the other hand, we have Jacob, the momma's boy living in tents
 - Pasty, weak, with a mousey voice and weak constitution
 - Spends his days sewing, planting flowers and cooking with the women
 - Contributing to the stereotype, v.28 tells us that Esau was Isaac's favorite while Jacob was Rebekah's favorite
 - So Esau was a man's man and Jacob was a momma's boy
 - Based on all these assumptions, we're prepared to accept a false storyline reinforced by lazy preaching that simply repeats the stereotypes and never bothers to revisit the text of Scripture
- Let's take a second look at what we're learning here, and we're going to find the truth is actually opposite
 - First, Esau is a skillful hunter
 - While hunting isn't a negative pursuit, the Bible typically uses this description as a negative description
 - You remember the evil, rebellious Nimrod was described this way in Genesis 10

[Gen. 10:9](#) He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, “Like **Nimrod** a mighty hunter before the LORD.”

- The purpose of this description is to paint a picture of a man who relies on his own strength while lacking humility
- Just as the direction “east” takes on a negative meaning in scripture by association, likewise the description of skilled hunter has a negative sense in Scripture
- But we don’t have to rely on supposition and association to understand Esau’s heart
 - Hebrews 12:16 calls Esau a godless person
 - And in the context of that chapter, the writer of Hebrews uses Esau as someone who was close to the truth but never embraced it personally
- Then we have Jacob
 - Take a second look at the text in v.27
 - Jacob is described as a peaceful man
 - The Hebrew word for peaceful is *tam*, which is actually the word blameless
 - This the same word that was used to described Noah and Abraham and later Job
 - The word is also used to describe a holy and pleasing man in Psalm 18
 - Does it begin to challenge your assumptions about Jacob when you learn that the Bible describes him as blameless?
 - It should
 - Remember, blameless doesn’t mean sinless
 - It means he lives an upright life, endeavoring to please God and maintain a good testimony before men
 - And what about living in the tents?

- Here's another misconception based on an ignorance of the culture
- Living in tents doesn't mean remaining in the tent all day, or being afraid to go outside, etc.
- The term is simply a description of the life of a nomad
 - We could just have easily described Abraham as a man living in tents
 - Likewise, Isaac was a man who lived in tents
 - The term refers to shepherding and wandering from pasture to pasture with the animals
 - Jacob followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and father by remaining a wanderer
 - But Esau rejected his father's life and lifestyle, preferring to rely on farming and hunting
 - These professions necessarily required Esau to remain in one place and put down roots
 - Esau claimed some plot of land and made it his home
- Remember why Abraham and Isaac have refused to make this same decision
 - The Scripture told us that they remained wanderers and never took ownership of any significant part of the land as a show of faith in God's promises
 - They understood that the inheritance God promised wouldn't become reality until they enjoyed it in their resurrected life
 - They resisted any opportunity to put down roots because they didn't want to make a claim in this world and forfeit their claims to the greater world to come
 - And now we find Jacob continuing in this way while his brother Esau has forsaken the pattern
 - So if remaining a wanderer is a sign of faith in God's promises, what does it say about Esau if he chooses not to wander?

- Then we have the issue of Isaac and Rebekah and their favoritism of the different boys
 - Isaac is clearly enamored by Esau's strength and his ability to put meat on the table
 - We can understand this, since Isaac has only known shepherding and living off the land
 - Now along comes a son who spices up life
 - He brings back game, an exciting taste for Isaac
 - Notice in v.28 we're told that Isaac's interest in Esau stems from that enjoyment of wild game
 - Isn't it fair to say that Isaac's favoritism for Esau was driven by the flesh?
 - There is no good reason to show favoritism among your children
 - But Isaac's choice of Esau was made worse because it came as a result of his fleshly desire for exciting food
 - Rebekah on the other hand favors Jacob
 - What might explain her preference for Jacob?
 - Remember that the Lord spoke to Rebekah with a word concerning the two children and God's plan for Jacob
 - Rebekah is holding Jacob dear in her heart because of God's promise
 - She knows Jacob will be the son God will give the birthright
- But there's a deeper issue in this family, one that will be come even clearer in the next chapter but which we can already see here
 - Notice in v.23 that the Lord speaks to Rebekah only in revealing the future for these children
 - There is no record that Isaac heard these words
 - He doesn't know that there will be twins and that the older shall serve the younger

- We see confirmation of this in v.24 when the text says behold, Rebekah gives birth to twins
 - The word behold conveys a sense of surprise
 - Who would be surprised by twins? Certainly not Rebekah, only Isaac
- Why didn't Rebekah reveal these words to Isaac?
 - We can imagine many reasons, perhaps, but one thing seems obvious
 - Rebekah and Isaac weren't working together in this marriage
 - We see this clearly in the way Moses describes each one choosing a different son as favorite
- Rebekah has accepted the Lord's decree concerning Jacob but she hasn't shared that word yet with Isaac, or so it would seem
 - And as Isaac allows his flesh to draw himself to Esau, Rebekah grows more defensive over Jacob, knowing God's promise is to bless Jacob over Esau
 - But remember what we learned last week, that in this culture the patriarch had the right to assign the birthright to whomever he chooses
- So we can detect a tension developing in our story
 - Isaac will one day transfer the birthright to one of his sons
 - While the Lord has declared to Rebekah that the son to receive the Lord's blessing will be Jacob, Rebekah hasn't shared that revelation with Isaac
 - Meanwhile, Isaac is proceeding under the natural assumption that Esau, the oldest, will receive the blessing
 - And Isaac's fleshly attraction to Esau's lifestyle has blinded him to God's work in Jacob's life
 - And Rebekah grows more concerned for how God will bring about His promise to bless Jacob

- She begins to fear something will have to be done or else Isaac will move against the Lord's wishes and convey the blessing to Esau
- If you can't tell already, Isaac's family is sliding into a dysfunctional, soap opera household
 - And the story lines are multiplying fast
 - Will Rebekah reveal to Isaac that Jacob is God's favored child?
 - Will Isaac go against the Lord's wishes and grant the birthright to Esau anyway?
 - How will the Lord ensure His preference for Jacob will be honored?
 - Join us next week for our next episode...