

## Session 3

October 27, 2024

### ISAAC AND REBEKAH: FAMILY FAVORITES

Genesis 25:24-28; 27:5-13

One of the great challenges of parenting is treating the children equally. That's not too difficult with the logistical items: we feed them the same, dress them the same (although the youngest gets hand-me-downs), buy them comparable gifts, and do our best to "even things out" with what we provide. But it gets a bit trickier with our affections. We love them all the same, but sometimes in different ways. And the children themselves often pick up on the subtleties of favoritism. That may not be too big a deal when it is unconscious and incidental. But it *IS* a big deal when it is blatant and intentional. When it comes to the story of Jacob and Esau, both parents were guilty of blatant favoritism, and it created some huge problems.

**Picking favorites (25:24-28).** Rebekah's pregnancy was a blessed answer to prayer. Verse 21 indicates Jacob's desire for both offspring and to ease his wife's disappointment at having no children. Rebekah prayed as well (v. 22), and was told by the Lord that she would bear twins. As twins, brothers Jacob and Esau were anything but identical. Esau was the most remarkable. Three characteristics are indicated. First, he was reddish, either in his complexion, or his hair color, or likely both. Second, he was covered with hair. The words indicate this hair was coarse and thick enough to remind one of a fur coat; and it covered his entire body. Third, he was named Esau. While the word is used in Arabic for "red," the name actually means "made." So it seems that Esau's appearance was one of maturity. Simply put, the tiny baby reminded his parents of a grown man! Jacob, on the other hand, was unremarkable except for his manner of birth. It is significant that he was born grasping his brother's heel. Hence, he was named Jacob, which means "took him by the heel." The symbolism is significant. God had appointed Jacob as the next-in-line father of His people (see v. 23), yet Esau was the first-born. The favoritism shows up in verses 27 and 28 and is based not on who the boys were, but what they did. As befitting his appearance, Esau was a rugged outdoorsman who provided his father with wild game, while Jacob was a homebody who stayed close to his mother. For reflection: *Isaac and Rebekah had already been promised sons, yet they waited twenty years before the twins were born. What applications can we draw from this?*

**Plotting with favorites (27:5-10).** Here at the end of Isaac's life, he intended to bestow his blessing to his eldest son. His favoritism is still apparent, however. While cloaked in the seeming inevitability of passing the "birthright" to his elder son, Isaac was conveniently ignoring God's providential plan that He announced to Rebekah at their sons' birth (25:23). Isaac loved Esau and he loved his delicious wild game meals (vv. 7-10). The appearance is one of a special moment to be shared between Isaac and Esau, and there is no indication that Rebekah and Jacob were invited. Rebekah, having overheard the conversation, schemed to deceive her husband. And she thought of everything! She had no problem taking advantage of his taste for Esau's cooking and his blindness (v. 1). And she knew what to do to make up for Jacob's smooth skin. For reflection: *Do you think that Rebekah was trying to correct a wrong before God's plan was thwarted? Knowing God's promise and plan for Jacob, how do you think Isaac should have handled the birthright? What about Rebekah? What applications can we make from this messed-up situation?*

**Paying for favorites (vv. 11-13).** We often get the idea that Jacob and Esau were still young in this story. But according to the timeline, Isaac would have been about 135 years old and the twins about 75. Perhaps Jacob's objection was a legitimate attempt to calm his mother down and keep her from interfering. Or perhaps he was contributing to the deception. Either way, he was concerned about "getting caught" (v. 12). Rebekah, however, was adamant about pressing forward, even to the point of saying, essentially, "Don't worry. If we get caught, I will take the blame" (v. 13). What does all this say about her relationship with her husband Isaac? For reflection: *Look back over the story thus far. How many wrongs were being committed? Who was guilty and who was innocent? Add Gen. 25:29-34 to the mix. How does that affect your view?*