

Genesis 12:1-3 (Opening)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And 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. ³ 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."

Introduction

There's always more than one way to do anything.

If you're in the Army, there's three ways of doing anything: the right way, the wrong way, and the Army way. At least that's what I was always told.

I was also told by a drill sergeant that there's only two ways of doing things. In his words "My way, or the highway!"

Have you ever prayed "Hey, God. That's not how it's supposed to happen! It's not supposed to work out that way, it's supposed to work out the way I want it to work out!"

God has an answer for that prayer. It's in Isaiah 55, verses eight and nine.

Isaiah 55:8-9

- ⁸ *For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.*
- ⁹ *For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

In other words, God is saying "You don't understand how things are supposed to work. But that's OK, because I do, and I'm in charge."

Paul, in our scripture in Romans 9 today, is telling us that God knows what He's doing. He's explaining that even though the Jews seem to have turned away from God, that God has a plan, and everything has been going according to plan this whole time, since the very beginning.

Romans 9:6-13

⁶ *But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your*

offspring be named.”⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.”¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

The Promise (6-9)

In Romans 9:1-5, Paul explained that he was in great anguish over the fact that his fellow Jews didn’t accept Jesus as their Messiah. They had all the advantages possible, but still wouldn’t accept Him, for the most part. God’s word failed them, right?

No, God’s word didn’t fail the Jews; they failed to understand God’s word. That’s what Paul is point out in this section of his letter. Paul says that just because someone is a descendent of Abraham doesn’t mean they’re Abraham’s child. The Israelites always bragged that they were Abraham’s children, and that’s true, physically, but there were many, many more descendants of Abraham that weren’t considered to be part of Abraham’s children.

Of course, the first to come to mind is Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham’s oldest son, but not Sarah’s son. God had promised Abraham that he would have many descendants, but Sarah knew she was getting too old to have children, so she decided to help God by having Abraham sleep with her servant Hagar. Hagar did have a son, but God told Abraham that Ishmael wasn’t the one his offspring would be named through. But Ishmael was the father of a great nation.

Genesis 21:8-13

⁸ *And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. ¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring."*

But did you know that Abraham had six more sons? After Sarah died, Abraham remarried, and continued to have children!

Genesis 25:1-2

¹ *Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.*

And it's more than just the flesh and blood children of Abraham that Paul is talking about here. Paul says in verse 8 of Romans 9 that the children of the promise are counted as offspring. Isaac was the child of the promise, but there are spiritual children of the promise, as well.

When John was baptizing people in the Jordan River, just prior to Jesus' ministry starting, he talked about the children of Abraham.

Luke 3:7-9

⁷ *He [John] said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God*

is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

John told them that you don't have to be a blood descendent of Abraham to be one of the children of Abraham. This is where our adoption as sons comes in to play as Christians. We're adopted into God's family, just like the Israelites were considered to be God's children. When we're adopted, we're considered to be children of the promise.

The chosen (10-13)

Isaac was the child God chose to carry Abraham's name. Isaac was the child of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, that they would have a son and have as many descendants as sand on the seashore, or stars in the sky.

But when Isaac and his wife Rebekah conceived children, things continued to go on a path that doesn't really make sense, according to the way inheritance is usually reckoned, anyway.

Generally, the oldest gets the birthright from the father, and a double share of the inheritance. God already showed through Ishmael that just being born first didn't make a difference. But now, God distinguishes between two children of the same parents, who were in fact twins.

Isaac and Rebekah weren't having any children, so Isaac prayed for Rebekah to be able to have children, and it must have been a powerful prayer, because she got pregnant with twins, Esau and Jacob. Esau was born first, and Jacob was born immediately after, holding on to Esau's heel. But before this happened, while Rebekah was still pregnant, she prayed to God to understand what was going on, because, the way the Bible puts it “the children struggled together within her”.

Genesis 25:23

²³ *And the LORD said to her,*

*“Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger.”*

It's important to remember here that God tells Rebekah there are two **nations** in her womb, not just two children.

Paul is point out here in Romans that God's plan continued as He directed it. God decided that even though Esau was Abraham's descendent, He was going to use Jacob's branch of the descendants of Abraham to send a Savior for the world. He planned to use Jacob, the one who grasps the heel, to become Israel, the one who strives with God, and be the father of the twelve tribes.

Verse 12 of Romans 9 quotes part of Genesis 25, saying the older will serve the younger. But Esau never was Jacob's servant. In fact, it was the other way around for the most of the time. But many hundreds of years later, after Esau had become the Edomites and Jacob had become the Israelites, we see God's promise in effect.

2 Samuel 8:13-14

¹³ *And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴ Then he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.*

Here we actually see Esau serving Jacob! God's promise to Rebekah finally comes to pass.

So, in verse 13, Paul quotes from Malachi chapter one, verses two and three.

Malachi 1:2-3

² “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob ³ but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.”

Is God saying that He decided before these twins were born that Esau was destined for hell? That there was nothing he could do to be in God’s favor? Lots of people read this part of Romans this way, and I could understand that interpretation if Jacob and Esau here and in Malachi and in Romans were the individuals, but God is referring to the nations descended from them.

And what about the choice of the word “hated” here? Is God saying that no matter what happens, any descendent of Esau is condemned?

Well, let’s look at the word “hated” here. Paul usually quoted from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew. So, I looked at the word translated as “hated” or hate in the Septuagint, and then looked for the same word in the New Testament in Greek. I found a useful scripture in Luke 14 verse 26.

Luke 14:26

²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

I’ve always thought this verse was a little harsh. Can Jesus really be saying that we have to hate our parents, wives, children, and siblings, as well as ourselves?

No. Jesus wouldn't want His followers hating their parents or anyone else. In fact, the Ten Commandments say we're supposed to honor our parents, so how could Jesus want us to follow the Law, but hate our parents?

Well, there's a parallel scripture in Matthew chapter 10 verse 37 that makes things a little clearer.

Matthew 10:37

37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

So, in Luke, Jesus is saying we need to love Him more than we love anyone else; He needs to come first in our lives. So, the word translated as "hated" here, means to love less.

So, Paul, quoting Malachi, says that God loves the nation of Israel more than He loves the nation of Esau or the Edomites. The only thing this phrase has to do with the actual individuals of Jacob and Esau is that they are the fathers of those respective nations, just like God told Rebekah before they were born.

Conclusion

God told Abraham that the families of all the world would be blessed through his offspring. Obviously, God had a particular lineage from Abraham to perform this great blessing with.

While it was happening, it didn't make sense. And some would say the whole thing still doesn't make sense. But God chose Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and through Judah, David, and through David and his line, eventually Jesus.

God does a lot of choosing that may seem arbitrarily to us, but like it says in Isaiah, His ways are not our ways. He's in control, and as long as we let Him stay that way, we'll be OK.

Galatians 3:7-9 (closing)

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.