

(1) I am speaking the truth in Christ --- I am not lying! My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit --- that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

(4) They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is Christ --- who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

(6) But it is not as though the Word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 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. 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, 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 --- she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Think on These Things:

- 1) Why do you think Paul expressed deep sadness about the Jews? Keep in mind how they treated Jesus during His ministry. How do you understand people get saved?

Like Paul himself, Jewish religious leaders opposed and persecuted Jesus during His ministry, and His followers after He returned to heaven. As Peter pointed out on the Day of Pentecost sermon, salvation is found in Jesus --- and no other name (Acts 2). By rejecting Jesus, they cannot be saved --- and this troubled Paul greatly. He was a Jew. He understood what was going on, even if they didn't. He didn't want any of God's chosen people to be lost!

- 2) Describe the privileges and advantages pointed out here that the Jews had compared to other cultures. What would be God's expectation? See Genesis 12:3; Deuteronomy 28:15, 37; Isaiah 43:9-13 and Acts 13:46-47.

The Jews are God's covenant people, His chosen people from among all cultures in the world. He showed them His great glory and power through a special deliverance from Egypt, and He Himself spoke to their patriarchs in many ways across many years. He created the Jewish culture by providing His Laws to live by (think 10 Commandments) and defining worship, and He shared many promises and warnings with them through prophets. Finally, Jesus Himself, the world's Savior, was a Jew, traced back to the line of King David.

- 3) Describe the privileges and advantages you think we have as American Christians. Do you think God puts expectations on us? See Matthew 5:13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:16-20; Philippians 2:12-15 and Isaiah 58:6-12.

We have an abundance of Bibles, well-trained ministers, and protected freedom-of-worship from the government. Though less today than in the past, Christians are generally well thought of. Since we are so privileged, I believe God has high expectations from American believers.

From Matthew, we are to be salt (influence) and light (exposure, path illuminators) and testimonials (good works) to our world. 2 Corinthians says Christians are entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation to the unsaved in the world. Philippians identifies obedience and not grumbling or complaining as a way to witness to others through blamelessness and innocence. Isaiah lauds the person who intervenes to help the downtrodden, promising refreshment and protection; they will be referred to as “repairers” and “restorers.”

- 4) Explain your understanding of, “not all these of Israel are Israel.” (v. 6)

When God speaks of “Jews” (Israelites), His understanding is narrower than physical descent. V. 7 says, “not all children of Abraham...are his offspring.” Physically speaking, the Arabs are also descendants through Ishmael.

- 5) How many sons did Abraham father? See Genesis 16:1-2; 21:1-5, 9-13; 25:1-6. In these verses, what keeps being repeated about Isaac (e.g., 25:5)?

Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar, Isaac through Sarah, and 6 more sons through Keturah after Sarah’s death. Isaac is regularly referred to as the “son of promise” to Abraham.

- 6) The Muslims are also descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, his firstborn son from Sarah’s Egyptian concubine, Hagar. “Father Abraham” is deeply revered, and they claim to serve the “God of Abraham” --- but not “Jehovah” (Yahweh), the God of the Jews. Read Genesis 16:3-16. From v. 13, can you understand how they arrived at their (imperfect) understanding of God? Also, what kind of man was Ishmael (v. 12)?

Hagar would have learned about Abraham’s God through Abraham and Sarah across the years she lived with him. Further, Abraham would have carefully instructed Ishmael about the one, true God he served, until Ishmael and Hagar were banished from Abraham’s camp at age 13.

When Hagar had run away from Sarah over harsh punishment, God’s Angel intervened and told her Ishmael would be alone in life, hated and hating others. When they left the camp, God’s Angel again intervened with God’s assurance He would be with him. Ishmael lived and grew up in the wilderness around (Mt.) Paran (located on the Sinai peninsula), and his mother secured his wife from Egypt. He became the father of the Arabs.

- 7) What is your reaction to God’s “predetermined election” and the phrasing of v. 13: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” --- before the boys were born!?

Personal response. This fits well with the doctrine of man’s free will (Wesleyan theology). That perspective believes God KNEW in advance how the lives of Jacob and Esau would turn out, and He rejected Esau while accepting Jacob as a result. Knowing the end of their lives from the beginning, He could state knowledgeably that He loved one, and hated the other.

The other perspective (Calvinism) would indicate that Esau was incapable of being loved (or saved) because God had predetermined his outcome and fate.

People and situations I want to pray for this week: