***Paul's Anguish for the Jews, No. 2
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**Paul's Anguish for the Jews**

Our subject this morning continues to be Paul's anguish for the Jews. This is segment number 2. Our text is Romans 9:1-5. In the next three chapters of the book of Romans (9, 10, and 11), we have an explanation from the Apostle Paul about how the Old Testament covenants which God had made with the nation Israel relate to the new thing which God is doing, namely the New Testament church.

The Old Testament divine program for the Jewish people is currently on hold. And we should understand that. It is not cancelled. All of the covenant promises, all of the agreements that God has made with the Jewish people which have not been fulfilled even though God promised He would do them, and even though God promised that He would do them no matter whether they were obedient to Him or not (if they were disobedient, He would punish them, but He would do these things for them), they have not been performed.

Therefore, that does raise a serious question as to what has happened to all those Old Testament covenants. And, we must conclude that God is going to keep His Word. And so, these promises, while they're not being fulfilled today, are simply on hold. God is instead, now, calling out from Jews and Gentiles alike a special heavenly people who form what the Bible calls the church, and which it describes as the body of Christ.

The divine program for the Jews, which was based upon the promises to Abraham has not been terminated, nor is it being fulfilled by the church. It is important that you understand both those things. The church and Israel are totally two different things. When the church body is completed and taken to heaven at the point of the rapture, God then will resume fulfilling His covenant promises to Israel. Those promises are just on hold. When He finishes with the church, He'll turn back to Israel. Israel and the church are two totally separate programs in the plan of God for mankind.

**Paul's Grief for the Jewish People**

Now, the Apostle Paul is deeply grieved by the fact that he sees that the Jewish people to whom Jesus Christ came to fulfill all those Old Testament promises have rejected their Messiah Savior. And he sees the tragedy which his immediately on the horizon for them as a nation, national destruction, but he is also grieved by the fact that he knows what happens to a person who dies without Christ as his personal Savior. They are doomed forever to hell. So, he forcefully declares that he is not merely putting on a pious front, when in the first two verses of chapter 9, he expresses great sorrow for spiritually blinded Jews.

His truthfulness, he says in this matter as to how he feels, can be confirmed by the fact that he speaks as one who is in Christ and therefore is one who is in the presence of the Lord who is the truth. In fact, the Holy Spirit does not convict His conscience of playing any deceit. Now, the reason he comes down on this so hard is because he's going to say something in verse 3 that would appear outright ridiculous if it was not for the intensity of emotion and the conviction that lies behind the statement. You would think by reading verse 3 that he's putting on a front, he's faking something, he's making a pious pretense as preachers often like to do, if it were not for the fact that he is really telling us the truth. This is indeed his attitude. And so, that's why he stresses that in the first two verses so that we will take seriously what he says in verse 3.

Paul has great mental anguish as he observes the rejection of Jesus Christ the Messiah by his fellow countrymen, the Jews. He is saddened by the fact that his joy and peace which he is experienced in salvation by grace through Jesus Christ was not being experienced by his fellow Jews.

And so, in verse 3, he continues after having established his sorrow, his mental anguish, and the truthfulness of what he is about to say, he says, "For I could wish myself accursed from Christ." The word "for" is the word "gar." This is a conjunction which is introducing a desire which is based upon Paul's mental attitude of anguish toward the Jewish people. He has said what he has said in verses 1 and 2 about his truthfulness, and now he says, "I have said this FOR I am about to tell you something that you might not take seriously."

He says, "I could wish for something." The Greek word looks like this. It's the word "euchomai." "Euchomai" means to desire something. Here, it expresses a wish for something which cannot be. We know that because the Greek grammar comes to our rescue. It is in a tense which we call, "the imperfect tense," which is a tense that is used to describe something that a person did again and again in the past. He repeatedly did something. When that's the idea, then they put in the imperfect tense. Also, the imperfect tense, therefore, expresses something which is not attainable. It is in the past. You did it, you didn't get it. You did it, you didn't get it. You repeatedly kept doing it.

So, Paul is saying, "Here is something which is not attainable. I could almost wish," if it were possible, is the idea, "that I could do this for all of my Jewish fellow countrymen." It is in the middle voice, which indicates that Paul is telling us something that he wishes about himself. And, it's a statement of fact; it's in the indicative mood. I could almost wish. Paul does not actually pray this for himself, what he is about to say in verse 3. He expresses what he feels willing to do if it were possible, to sacrifice himself so that the Jews could be saved, to sacrifice his salvation if they could be saved.

And again, as we say, this might be viewed as a pious pretense unless you knew that the man was really expressing the truth to us which is what verses 1-2 tried to establish. He says, "I, myself. For I could wish, if it were possible, that I myself [and this is an emphatic word inserted here] that I myself were accursed." The word "were" is "eimi," which is the regular word for the verb to, "to be." This is an expression of the status quo of the Apostle Paul. It is present tense. It is something he always desired. This wasn't just an occasional thing. This is active voice; it is personally true of him. It is in the infinitive mood, which indicates a purpose.

**Accursed**

The Apostle Paul says, "It is constantly my purpose that if it were possible, I could wish that I were accursed." The word "accursed" in the Greek Bible looks like this; it's the Greek word "anathema." "Anathema" is a word that indicates something that is destined for destruction.

We see the destructive implications of this word when we look to the Old Testament translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. As you know, the Old Testament Bible is translated into Greek because after the Babylonian captivity, many of the Jews were not able to read Hebrew. They had become part of the Greek world and the Greek culture, and they spoke Greek, so finally somebody said, "We've got to translate the Old Testament into Greek so the Jews can read it." And so, they came up with what was supposedly translated by seventy scholars, and the symbol for the Septuagint version, as it's called, is LXX, which is the Roman numeral for seventy, and the meaning of Greek words is preserved for us as we looked at a Hebrew word and see what Greek word they used to translate that. Because they Hebrew was preserved very precisely in its meaning.

Well, there's a Hebrew word which looks like this. It's the word, "herem." The word "herem" means to set something apart to God for destruction. And when they came to translate the Bible into Greek in the Septuagint version, they translated this word, "herem," which means, "destined for destruction at the hand of God," by the Greek word, "anathema." So that we know that "anathema" is a very serious word. Paul isn't just talking about being criticized. Paul isn't just talking about being out of fellowship. Paul is talking about the worst possible thing you can imagine - destruction in the lake of fire - when he uses this word, because that's what the Old Testament Hebrew word meant.

A couple of examples of the Hebrew word to clarify this, for example, in the book of Leviticus 27:28-29. In these verses, the Hebrew word "herem" is translated by the English words "devoted thing." "Notwithstanding no devoted thing [no "herem"], that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord." So that, something that is in the category of the "herem" has been set aside to God for God's use. Verse 29 says, "None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." So that, verse 29 says what is a "herem," a thing that has been devoted to God, set aside for His use under judgment, is going to be set aside for destruction.

In Deuteronomy 7, this is illustrated again in verse 26. Here, it is translated by the words "cursed thing." Deuteronomy 7:26 says, "Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing." Lest you be a "herem," lest you be an anathema, something destined for destruction. ".A cursed thing: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing." Up in verse 25, you will see some of these cursed things in form of idols that snared the Jews. So, Deuteronomy 7:26 uses the word "herem" about something that God is going to destroy. It is something under great divine judgment.

One more will illustrate it for us in the book of Joshua 6. Joshua 6:17-18. Here, the Hebrew word "herem" is translated by the English word "cursed." Joshua 6:17, "And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are in it, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent." Rahab was in the city of Jericho. God says, "The city is a 'herem' with me," which is saying, "This city is under my anathema," which now you should understand, God was saying, "I'm going to destroy this city. Anything that comes under my 'anathema,' anything that comes under my 'herem,' I'm going to send to destruction."

And as you know, that's exactly what happened with the city of Jericho. He points out that Rahab, because she helped the spies, was going to be preserved. Verse 18 says, "And ye, in every way keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, ['herem, herem,' every time you see this word, 'accursed'] and ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it." So that, the Lord says, "Jericho is doomed. Don't have any part with it, or you will be a part of that destruction."

So, with this background, you see, it is very clear that when Paul uses this word "anathema" as it was used in New Testament times as we understand as we relate it back to this Hebrew usage, we see that this is the word that means simply, "to be separated from God and to be destroyed."

**Paul's Willingness to Suffer for His Brethren's Salvation**

So, here, the Apostle Paul is making an astounding statement in Romans 9:3, "For if it were possible, I could wish myself to be accursed [to be under God's destructive judgment, to be accursed] from." And the preposition there is "apo," which means separation. He is still talking about separation - separation from Christ, from "Christos," that is, to be separated from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul, as a Christian, is in Christ. And he is saying, "If it were possible, I would like to separate myself from being in Christ." And the Greek has, "the Christ," the specific one whom the Jews are rejecting.

Paul is referring, in short, to being separated from his salvation and to be cast into hell. Paul knew that he could not lose his salvation. He has made that very clear to us at the end of Romans 8. Nor did he actually want to be separated from his salvation. But he was expressing a willingness to suffer that extreme destruction so that the Jewish people could be saved if it were possible. It really bothered Paul that these people to whom the Savior came primarily were going to lose it all. And he expressed an attitude that he truly felt of what he would do if it were possible for him.

Paul pointed out in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that this is the same attitude that was characteristic of the Lord Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul says, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." Paul was expressing the same attitude. If he could impoverish himself to the point of losing his salvation and going to the lake of fire for all the Jews, he said, "I would be willing to do that. I would almost be willing to do that if it were possible." Paul wished he could buy Israel's salvation with the price of his own destruction.

He specifically identifies those for whom he would be willing to be accursed from the Lord Jesus Christ when he says, "To be accursed for Christ for." And here, that preposition, "huper," which means, "for the sake of [what he calls] my brethren," his "adelphos." The word "adelphos" refers to a family relationship. Paul, of course, had two kinds of brethren. The question for us is which kind of brethren, which kind of family relationship was he talking about here?

He had a certain family relationship to the Jews because he bore their genetic structure as a Jew descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In 2 Corinthians 11:22, he refers to this family relationship when he says, "Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I." When he is comparing himself to all the foolish legalists who take pride in their Jewish, Israelite-ish background, Paul says, "I've got everything they've got to boast of and more." But the Apostle Paul had some brethren who were brethren simply because of their physical relationships to him.

On the other hand, he had another kind of family group, and that we have in Philippians 1:14, and these were people who were brethren by dent of their being in Christ, born again Christians. Philippians 1:14 says, "And many of the brethren in the Lord [Christians], becoming confident by my bounds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." He said, "My fellow Christians have been encouraged by my imprisonment to be more courageous in their witnessing." So, he refers to these people, "many of the brethren in the Lord," his brothers in the Lord (that is, in the person of Jesus Christ), His fellow Christians.

So, the Apostle Paul has two kinds of brethren, and you can't automatically decide from verse 3 which he's referring to. But immediately, he clarifies that by adding another word, "my kinsmen." And the word "kinsmen" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "suggenes." "Suggenes" refers to a genetic relationship only. It refers to a natural family line. So that, this tell us that he is not talking about his Christian brethren; he is talking about his genetically-related Jewish brethren. The brothers that Paul is in agony over are his racial brethren, the unsaved Jews. And he clarifies that by saying that these people are according to the flesh, the "sarx," which is the word for "physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Now, Paul has made a very impressive and dramatic statement. This is the missionary with a heart. This is a missionary that is indeed concerned for the fact that people around him are going to the lake of fire and that the consequences are terrible for those and that it is the height of human kindness to caution and to call their attention to it and to do everything you can to preserve them from that.

**Moses' Intercession on Behalf of the Sinful Israelites**

Actually, Paul, in this attitude, is a latter-day Moses. Moses, you may remember, in Exodus 32, expressed this same concern and this same attitude toward the Exodus generation, those Jews that had just led out of Egyptian captivity. Moses here on this occasion in Exodus 32 has been called up on Mount Sinai to receive the law from God. He remained up there, as you remember, for 40 days and 40 nights. Meanwhile, the Jews, these ex-slaves that he had just led out of Egypt, are back in camp. Aaron has been left in charge while Moses is absent, and the Jews in the campground decide that something has happened to Moses. He's not coming back. Over a month has passed, and they've seen neither hide nor hair of him.

So, they go to Aaron, and they say, "Aaron, Jehovah's our God, but we have to have something to worship that we can see, something we can take hold of. So, why don't you make us an idol that represents our God Jehovah so we can worship Him?" And of all things, Aaron, who should have soundly rebuked them for such a suggestion, actually accommodated them and said, "Well, bring me some of the material. Bring me some of the gold the Egyptians gave you." And they brought him a huge amount. And he proceeded to create an animal for them as an idol to represent their God Jehovah. This was commonplace in the context in the ancient world, and certainly, they were used to that in Egypt. So, he forms a golden calf.

Later on, when he's trying to cover his tracks over the fact that he did something really stupid and really sinful here, and Moses called him to task, he said, "I just threw the gold into the fire, and out popped this calf! It was a miracle, Moses! How can you blame me for this?" And you know, you look at that, and you read that again, and you say, "Did he really think Moses would believe that?" "I just threw it in there, and out popped this calf! It was such a miracle; I thought it was from God." That's what he was implying.

In any case, the worship of this golden calf soon led to revelry in the camp in the form of drunkenness, in the form of nakedness, and in the form of sexual immorality. It turned into a real sex orgy. That's what it means when it says, "The people rose up to play." They actually converted the worship of this calf into the same kinds of expression that were commonplace in all the other idolatry that they had been used to in Egypt.

Now, God, of course, was aware that this was taking place back in the camp, and while Moses was still up on Mount Sinai, He told Moses what was happening, how the rebellious Jews had turned against Him. And God said, "I'm just going to destroy the whole lot of them. I am sick and tired of dealing with this stiff-necked people. I'm going to rub them all out of existence, and I'm going to start again with you, Moses, and create a new people."

Immediately, the heart of Moses welled up as the Apostle Paul in concern for what the results would be to these people if God were to execute this justice upon them. And Moses interceded for the people with the Lord. He said, "Please don't do that. Don't do it because of the testimony you have given to the Egyptians. You have demonstrated to the Egyptians your power. We have told the Egyptians that we have the one true God, and they better listen to Him, and He is going to lead us out and make us a great nation. What will the Egyptians think when the word gets back to Egypt that you took this people out into the desert - a million and a half of us - and slaughtered them all?" How is that going to look? And then, the promises you made to all of our patriarchs. The promises you have made from Abraham on down. How can you ignore that, that you have promised Abraham that you would make a great people in this way?"

And so, the result was, the Bible says that God relented. Moses had persuaded Him to preserve the people. And then, Moses, having completed his 40-day stint, went back down the mountain. In his hand, he carried two tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. They were put in a special category on these two tables of stone written with the finger of God. Moses came into the camp, saw what was happening, and in an outrage and anger, he threw the two tablets to the ground. They immediately broke, and he proceeded to discipline the idolaters. Thousands of the unrepentant were then executed. He called those who would stand with the Lord, and the tribe of Levi rose up and stood by him, and he sent them through the camp to slaughter the unrepentant.

Now, Moses knew that the whole nation was now under enormous divine judgment and in for an enormous divine punishment - the nation as a whole. And so, he proceeds to confront God again with a deeply emotional appeal that He forgive the nation for what they had done in this hideous idolatry.

In Exodus 32, beginning at verse 31 and 32, the depth of the emotion can be seen because Moses starts speaking and then he chokes up. And in the Hebrew Bible, nothing is finished; it just stops. And so, the translators, in order to put some punctuation in there, put a dash to show you that he just choked up and said, "That's it. I, I just can't say any more."

And so, Exodus 32:31, "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, 'Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; [And then, he chokes up, and there's the dash. He never finishes the sentence. When he gets composed, he adds] if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written."

And there you have the same attitude expressed that Paul, centuries later, would express toward the Jewish people. "Take my name out and put their name in." Here, Moses is specifically referring to the fact that these people who have rejected the Lord's guidance are indeed deserving of all this judgment, but Moses says, "I don't want to go on without them. If you're going to blot them out, then take my name out of the Book of Life, if the nation is not forgiven."

Now, he probably refers here to the book that God has of those who are saved. The New Testament calls it the Lamb's Book of Life." In Psalm 69, it seems we have a reference to such a book. Psalm 69:28, "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous." So that, here in describing those who are sinners, that they should be blotted out of God's Book of the Living and not be written with the righteous which suggests that the righteous are those, of course, who are born again and are going to be saved.

We also have this in the book of Daniel 12:1, where Daniel says, "At the end time [just before the Lord's going to return to this earth at the second coming, at that time] shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."

Here again, suggesting that there is a book of believers who will be delivered from the final destruction at the end of the tribulation period. However, we may also consider this as referring to God's record of the current citizens of Israel who were living at that time when Moses was speaking to God. And he may have simply been saying to the Lord, "If you rub them out, then take my name out of the Book of Census, take my name off the roster too, because I don't want to go on without them." In any case, the love of Moses for his fellow Jews was so great that he was willing to share God's judgment with them if they could not share God's blessings with him.

Well, of course, the Lord declared that He would not blot Moses out of His Book of Life but that He would remove those who were guilty of idolatry and of immorality. Moses could have ignored the Exodus Jews. He could have gone on with God by himself and become a great nation. The Abrahamic covenant would have still been fulfilled. He could have let them get what they deserved, but he did not.

Over the centuries, the Jews continued to kill the prophets who spoke the Word of God to them as Moses had. Rather than be obedient to the message of God, it was not uncommon for the Jews simply to finally silence a prophet who was telling them what they did not want to hear about themselves. In Matthew 23:37, the Lord makes a reference to this when He says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as the hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

You would think as they read this incident back in Exodus, what Moses had been willing to do for them and how God had preserved them, that they would never again want to strike down one of the prophets of God whom God had sent to deliver His message to them. But they did it again and again.

Paul in the New Testament era had the same deep feelings of love for the Jews that Moses had, and the Jews were as unworthy in Paul's day for that love as they were in Moses' day. Paul knew from God that there was national destruction imminently on the horizon for the Jews because of their rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This destruction, which is described for us in Luke 21, Paul was well-acquainted with what was ahead for them.

In Luke 21, beginning at verse 20, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them that are in the midst of it depart; and let not them that are in the countries enter into it. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written shall be fulfilled. Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that nurse children, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

Well, all this took place in just a few years down the road in 70 A.D., and the Jewish nation was finished as an entity until 1948. So, Paul knew what was coming. He knew the terror and the suffering that goes with military destruction that was about to descend on the people of Israel, and he cried out to God on their behalf as Moses had.

Paul, you see, had already suffered the loss of all things for Jesus Christ. We are told in the book of Philippians 3:8 that this characterized Paul's lifestyle. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ."

The Apostle Paul was not a man who was flush with money any more than Jesus was. He was not a man who had all the things he needed to do the job. He was a person who constantly had to stop and go back to work to earn enough funds to go to the next mission station. The Apostle Paul abandoned everything. He abandoned all of the things that people normally would like to pursue in family and possessions. He says, "I have suffered the loss of all of it." And then, he should say, "I'm willing to suffer the loss of my salvation"? Now, that indeed is double Jeopardy. It was enough what he had already suffered on this earth and lost that he should be willing to add an eternal loss to it. It shows the depth indeed of the feeling that is behind these statements in Romans 9.

The Inability for Moses and Paul to Die for the Salvation of Others

What Moses and Paul were willing to bear for the Israelites' salvation of course could not be granted by God. They were men with old sin natures, both of them, in fact, were murderers. They could not die for the salvation of others. The only one who could die for the salvation of others was the sinless Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:13-14. Chapter 3:13, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree [on a cross]': That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

So, the Bible is very clear that only someone like Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, could do what both Paul and Moses wanted to do for the people. Moses didn't want to be saved without the Jews. Paul wanted the Jews to be saved at the cost of his own salvation. Paul is not putting on a front. He is expressing a true and deep feeling, but while it is something that he is willing to do, God could not grant to him.

**The Privileged Condition of the Israelites**

Then, in verses 4 and 5, the Apostle Paul indicates the enormity of the problem here, the enormity of the loss, because of the fact that the Jews are a privileged people with great advantages. You know, it's one thing to lose out when you don't have advantages in life. It is another thing to lose out when you are born with great, personal advantages and then you blow it. And that's what Paul in verses 4 and 5 is point out to us: what advantages the Jews began with, and yet the failed to receive Christ and to be saved. He says, "Who," this is the Greek word "hostis." "Who," referring to the Jews, "are," the verb "eimi," again, the status quo of the Jews. Present tense: their constant condition. Active voice: what is true of the Jews. Indicative mood.

They are Israelites, which is a word describing a very privileged condition. "Israelites." "Israelites" comes from "Israel." "Israel" is the name that refers to the third great patriarch - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it refers to Jacob. Jacob was given the word "Israel" on the occasion that he had a wrestling match with the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ on the occasion when he was coming back from his Uncle Laban's home after years out there where he had secured a family, secured wealth, where he had run to escape the wrath and the hatred of his brother Esau who he had conned out of the birthright privilege of the firstborn.

In Genesis 32:28, we have this name identified, "And he said, 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.'" The word "Israel" means, "he who struggles with God." Jacob was returning back home to the Promised Land with his family. He was preparing to face the wrath of his brother Esau whose birthright he had stolen. Esau had threatened years before to kill Jacob, which caused Jacob to flee from his home.

Back in Genesis 27:41, we have that threat recorded, "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.'" So, Jacob knew that his brother Esau had put out a contract on him, and that's why Esau ran to his Uncle Laban's home for all those years to escape the wrath of his brother Esau.

Now, the years have passed, and he's coming back home. Jacob comes to the River Jabbock, which is the dividing line back into the Promised Land, and this day, he sends all the family and all of his basic possessions across the river. He himself stays on the other side alone. A man appears who proceeds to attack Jacob, and they end up in a wrestling match that goes on all night. In time, the light began to dawn on the horizon. Daybreak was at hand.

At that point, the man with whom Jacob was wrestling reached down and touched the socket that is under his thigh that is attached to his hip and knocked it out of joint, which immediately incapacitated Jacob as a wrestler. You know anything about wrestling, it's no fun wrestling with your hip joint dislocated. So, immediately, whoever it was that Jacob was wrestling with had some kind of really supernatural advantage, and Jacob, who was used to always outmaneuvering people, sneaking people, slipping around, conning them, finally had met his match. Somebody who could reach down, touch his hip, and that was the end of the battle.

All Jacob could do, then, was to hang onto this man like a fighter who is about to go down, and he puts his arms around his opponent and he hangs on for dear life. He would not let him go. And the man called upon him to let him go. Jacob holds onto this man (who was God, the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ), and Jacob, when he was incapacitated, realized who it was that he was struggling with.

In Genesis 32:30, "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." The word "Peniel" means, "face of God." And of course, he had not seen God directly face-to-face. He had seen the pre-incarnate form that Jesus Christ had taken that was struggling with him. It was at this point that the assailant changed Jacob's name from meaning, "the deceiver," to, "Israel," which means, "he who strives with God," signifying that he had power with God and with man. And so, his name is changed. And as verse 28 of Genesis 32 says, his name is changed to "he who strives with God," and "as the prince and has power with the God with whom he strives and with men. He hast prevailed."

The man that he is struggling with then blesses Jacob, for Jacob says, "I will not let you go until you bless me," realizing that he was now indeed fighting with God Himself. And so, verse 29 of Genesis 32 says, "And Jacob asked him, and said, 'Tell me, I pray thee, thy name.' And he said, 'Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?' And he blessed him there." In other words, he said, "Don't worry about my name, but I will give you a blessing."

So, this occasion shows us this. Jacob, who is the sneaky conman and had the name Jacob comes into this confrontation with the living God in the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. He struggles with Him all night, realizes who it is, holds onto Him, says, "I will not let you go until you bless me." And Jesus Christ says, "Yes, I will bless you, and I will tell you that you have prevailed with God, and you will prevail with men. You have struggled with God. You have prevailed with blessing. You are now to be called 'Israel:' he who strives with God."

There are not many people that can go around with a name like that. So that, to be called an Israelite, you see, was a unique category of people, because all of the posterity now descended from Jacob. The Jewish people also had this honored position. They were Israelites. They were the people who could meet with God and get things done. And it was a limited national group. It was a great honor. As we look upon the fact to say, "We are Americans," and that connotes certain characteristics and certain honored qualities that we are delighted to claim. So, to be an Israelite meant to be under special divine blessing. It is the title of honor.

You can see that in 2 Corinthians 11:22 and John 12:13. The title "Israel" is used as a title of honor to those who are addressed. It is a term of esteem (John 1:47-49). It is used in great respect. The Jews' distinct humanity was descended from this man Jacob, Acts 2:22 points out to us. They are directly connected to Jacob so that they bear this honored title of being Israelites. So, when the Apostle Paul says, "I would have been willing to have given up my own salvation if the Jews could have been saved. I feel so bad about that. I'm crushed. It causes me great personal anguish."

And this, because of the fact of all things, these people who are on their way to the lake of fire are Israelites. People who are under the supreme, unique category of special blessing that Jacob, the first Israelite, had received directly from God and which now passed down to everybody born in his line. What a tragedy that the people who have the blessing of being able to prevail with God, who are able to approach God and get things done, who were able to receive His enormous blessing, are the ones who are going to end up, when it's all over, in the lake of fire.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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