



'ESAU HAVE I HATED'

By MAXINE WILLIAMS

"JACOB HAVE I LOVED, BUT ESAU HAVE I HATED." These words have chilled hearts of believers, cast doubt on the character of God, been rejected by some, and caused despair in the hearts of those who have feared they too might be hated of God.

These words have leaped from the page with such force that they have obscured the context or have been grossly misinterpreted. Yet back of them lies one of the most glorious, hopeful, and blessed truths of the Word of God.

In the first eight chapters of Romans, Paul meticulously detailed the sorry condition of man who had "worshipped the creature rather than the Creator," and of whom it was said that "God gave them up to their uncleanness" (Romans 1:24, 25). Then he expounded

God's way of salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ, ending with the exultant hymn of triumph in Romans 8:33-39.

Think what must have been the reaction of the Jews upon hearing the message of Paul that salvation depended upon faith. Was the Law to no avail? Were the revelations of God to the Jews as His chosen people to be accounted as nothing? Were the Gentiles to find as abundant an entrance into the Kingdom as they? Romans 9, 10, and 11 are Paul's answer to a Jewish reaction to the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. It is in this answer that the dread words occur, "Esau have I hated."

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

In Romans 9:6-9, Paul reasserted the basic premise of the gospel: the children of God are those who are the children of faith in the promise, the "seed of Isaac, the promised son." God, in His sovereign wisdom, has declared this faith in His promise of salvation through His Son to be the way of salvation.

To make his point about salvation by faith, Paul first set out to prove God's right to sovereign acts. In doing so, he chose a series of illustrations familiar to the Jewish people.

1. *Jacob and Esau.* In Romans 9:10-14 he referred to God's sovereignty in regard to Jacob and Esau. Their positions in life were determined before their birth, and were not the outcome of their behavior (other than His foreknowledge of their behavior, perhaps). It was God's decree, based solely on His will. The word "hate" here does not mean "to regard with a strong or passionate dislike." It is not the opposite of affection. It means rather that God chose not to give Esau the rights of the firstborn. At no time in the story of Esau do we find him seeking God, only to be turned away by God's decision. We have no record that he ever sought God at all. This "hating" had to do with God's decision to give Jacob the place of priest in the family. We will not here try to explore God's reasons for this, although we have evidence that Esau had little regard for spiritual matters.

Hebrews 12:17, where we read that Esau "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears," does not refer to his seeking salvation. Rather, he repented of having sold his birthright, but there was no way to regain the heritage he had so lightly regarded. In any case, without question, it is the sovereign prerogative of God to say that an older shall serve a younger.

2. *The children of Israel.* In Romans 9:14-16, Paul recalled God's word to Moses in Exodus 33:19: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." In this instance, the people of Israel had done everything to deserve the wrath of God. They had complained; they had made a golden calf; they had protested the leadership of Moses, God's appointed deliverer. And when Moses had declared that the name of the Lord was at stake, God reminded him of His sovereignty: "I can show mercy to whomever and whenever I choose." And He chose, in His sovereignty, to show mercy to that willful and gainsaying people who deserved only wrath. It was "not of them that willed nor of them that ran," but solely of His mercy.