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*“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)*

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## THE CALLED, THE WILLER, AND THE RUNNER (PART II)

*So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (Rom. 9:16)*

Who are “*him that willeth*” and “*him that runneth?*” Last month we examined who “*the called*” were from Paul’s letter to the Romans in chapter 8 (v. 28). Although appearing in another chapter in Romans, the “Willer” and the “Runner” in chapter 9 (v. 16) are still part of the same building logic woven together in Paul’s writing of chapter 8. Paul’s letter to the Romans builds upon itself through its entire narrative, perhaps

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THE HARVESTER

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reaching its zenith in chapter 8. After what we know as chapter 8, Paul's comments in the remainder of the letter assume you've followed the logic he put forth up to this point.

In as concisely as we can attempt to summarize the first eight chapters of the book of Romans, Paul has provided the logic that there are functionally no differences between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:23). Both Jew and Gentile were after the same thing and in need of it: freedom. That is, specifically freedom from sin - the failing weakness of the flesh. Gentiles would not find it in philosophy or their own ill-conceived ideas of wisdom (Rom. 1:18-32). Jews would not find it in their genealogy where belief and meaning was absent (Rom. 4). Rather, those who had the true belief (Rom. 5) and did as Jesus in putting sin to death to arise in a new life through baptism (Rom. 6) could overcome the inherent weaknesses that a law (no matter how well written) would have over keeping one from sin (Rom. 7). A modern day example of what Romans 7 here conveys is that no matter how visible and well posted a speed limit sign on the highway is, it alone will not keep a driver from exceeding that speed. A driver will need an internal desire to drive that speed or lower, through value of his or her safety, value of his or finances for fear of a fine enforced by a police officer, or some additional motivation beyond the speed limit sign itself. When it comes to sin and the desire to leave it behind or put it to death, our additional motivation is found in a love for God and serving Him following after Christ (Rom. 8:1-11). In such a life, we are Christlike and thus enjoy a multitude of benefits that work together (Rom. 8:31). We receive the same inheritance of Christ by being joint heirs, where this inheritance is eternal glory. Such a gift has been preselected for "*the called*" (see last month's issue and Rom. 8:28-30).

All that Paul has been building to above is important context for some points he revisits in Romans 9. Given the gift that has been selected for all who believe and show their faith through action as Jesus did, then it is not birth as Jew or Gentile that

has any bearing on this gift. Paul recognizes that this particular point is a hurdle for his physical brethren, those who were Jewish and refused to believe in Jesus as the prophesied Messiah (9:1-5). Paul reiterates early points that “God’s people” does not mean just those with DNA tracing back to Israel or Abraham (9:6-7). Instead, it’s those of the promise (the preselected promise, not the preselected people) to whom “God’s people” refer (9:7-8). Paul points these out because if one were to believe only strict Jewish heritage made one “God’s people,” then you have to remember Abraham had children other than Isaac. Ishmael, according to the natural laws of the time, would be genetically Jewish. Yet, his descendants were not considered Jewish by those of Abraham’s lineage through Isaac. So, genetics do not make one “God’s people.”

Now at this point, Paul will get specific, and it’s important to remember the history of the people to which he will now refer. Paul refers to the well known story of Jacob and Esau, reminding that before their birth God had told Rebecca that Esau, the elder, would serve Jacob (later Israel), the younger child (9:9-13). Such an arrangement ran counter to Jewish law. Everything was to go to the eldest male child. Yet, while both Esau and Jacob were “equal” (before birth), God said the promise would go through Jacob. Paul is referring to clear, well recognized and remembered Jewish history to point out inarguable scripture where God had exerted His will and design that ran counter to “Jewish tradition.” The doubting Jewish reader of Paul’s letter could not dispute these examples, but there are hypothetical arguments one might attempt to make here.

Paul addresses such hypothetical arguments a dubious reader, Jewish or not, would make throughout Romans, and he does one here in 9:14. One hypothetical argument could be that God appears to choose one and reject another not on account of their actions and choices but rather for His own entertainment. It is in answering this argument that we come across the “Willer” and the “Runner.”

*(15) For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

Paul specifies that when God is gracious, it is not because of human will or human action. This is not at all to say our actions are useless, because this would then directly conflict with the entire logic Paul put forth leading up to now. Rather, Paul is noting that we don't make deals with God where God is then in obligation to give His "end of the deal" (9:15). Unfortunately, we have likely had such pleas where we've prayed that we'll do X and Y for God if He would only grant us our plea A and B. Because we've prayed for that and done X and Y, does that mean God must now meet our demands and give us A and B? God is not indebted to his creations. God does not "work for us;" we work for Him. That is Paul's point here. Provided that, then who is "*him that willeth*," and "*him that runneth*?"

Keep in mind that Paul has been making one reference after another to important characters in the story of the Israelites: Abraham, Sara, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob. Most recently, Paul noted the unique situation between Esau and Jacob. He's not done referring to them in Romans 9:16. Verse 16 is likely a specific reference to Genesis 27, where Isaac blesses Jacob rather than Esau. What was "supposed" to happen in Genesis 27? Isaac intended to bless his eldest, Esau. So, he told Esau to head out and bring back venison. The blessing did not go as planned by 1) Isaac and 2) Esau. This is despite Isaac willing, or intending, to bless Esau (27:4) who ran, or set course, to get the venison (27:5). So, Isaac is "*him that willeth*," and Esau is "*him that runneth*" in Romans 9:16. This is a specific reference in Paul's larger ongoing point in Romans 9 that neither the human intention, desire, or will, nor the course or run dictates what God has chosen. In this specific reference,

Jacob was chosen by God's grace and mercy.

As discussed last month, the "Willer" and the "Runner" (along with the "Called") are often brought up in discussions of "predestination" where predestination is used to mean God has preselected the people who will be saved and in eternal glory with Him. Those who believe that God has preselected the who rather than the what - the gift (see last month's Harvester in Part I) will use Romans 9:16 as evidence that our choices and actions do not matter; we're preselected or we're not. Again, this is not what Paul conveys in Chapter 9 (or in the rest of Romans, for that matter). After noting the "Willer" and the "Runner," Paul brings up Pharaoh to specifically note that Pharaoh was not raised up to be destroyed in a show of God's power. Rather, Pharaoh was raised to be in a position to make a choice, and he ultimately chose to resist God. It's another topic worthy of deeper study, but a quick summary examining Pharaoh's heart being hardened in Exodus (e.g., Exodus 7:13) will show that Pharaoh made himself stubborn. When Pharaoh reached uncertainty, God gave Pharaoh the resolve to be himself. In other words, God had Pharaoh be himself, and Pharaoh had determined himself resistant to God.

Paul "answers" one more hypothetical argument that would claim our choices and actions do not matter in Romans 9:19. A skeptical, hypothetical Jewish reader might argue to Paul that "no nation can withstand God's power, so how could God find fault with us?" Or in other words, "why try if we have no free will?" Paul's response in 9:20-21 tells us what we should already know; the "Called," the "Willer," and the "Runner" all have free will but should humble themselves before God.

*(20) Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? (21) Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

Paul essentially says, “If God has removed free will and nullified any choice and action on our part, then why are you so freely able to protest Him? Would He not just destroy you based on your logic?” Paul is not saying we are nothing but helpless clay in God’s hands. Paul is reminding his readers that God has such power, and as creator He has the same right as a potter would over clay. God has preeminent knowledge of all (foreknowledge), but He has let us form ourselves as vessels. Some have chosen to form vessels that live after the flesh, but only those who answer the call to believe, obey, repent, and be baptized are those who receive the predetermined gift of joint inheritance - eternal glory - with Jesus.

BEN

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## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What was taken off and handed over to signify the agreement between Boaz and the kinsman?
2. Who asked for an understanding heart to judge God’s people?
3. Where did Jonah try to run to instead of going to Nineveh as God had commanded?
4. Who decreed that a census of the entire Roman world should be taken at the time of Jesus’ birth?
5. What was Paul’s home town?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God’s harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

The Harvester

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## “HOW READEST THOU?”

It is one thing to read the Bible through,  
Another thing to read to learn to do.  
Some read it with design to learn to read,  
But to the subject pay but little heed.  
Some read it as their duty once a week;  
But no instruction from the Bible seek;  
While others read it with but little care,  
With no regard to how they read, nor where.  
Some read it as a history, to know  
How people lived three thousand years ago.  
Some read to bring themselves into repute,  
By showing others how they can dispute;  
While others read because their neighbours do,  
To see how long 'twill take to read it through.  
Some read it for the wonders that are there –  
How David killed a lion and a bear;  
While others read it with uncommon care,  
Hoping to find some contradictions there!  
Some read as though it did not speak to them,  
But to the people at Jerusalem.  
One reads it as a book of mysteries,  
And won't believe the very thing he sees.  
One reads with father's specs upon his head,  
And sees the thing just as his father said.  
Some read to prove a pre-adopted creed,  
Hence understand but little that they read;  
For every passage in the book they bend,  
To make it suit that all-important end!  
Some people read, as I have often thought,  
To teach the book instead of being taught,  
And some there are who read it out of spite –

(cont. on page 8)

## GOSPEL MEETINGS

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DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
February 2 - 4	Taylor's Cross Roads Roanoke, AL	Stacey Houghton (Rex, GA)

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(cont. from page 7)

I fear there are but few who read it right.  
So, many people in these latter days,  
Have read the Bible in so many ways  
That few can tell which system is the best,  
For every party contradicts the rest!  
But read it prayerfully, and you will see,  
Although men contradict, God's words agree.  
For what the early Bible prophets wrote  
We find that Christ and His apostles quote:  
So trust no creed that trembles to recall  
What has been penned by one and verified by all.

UNKNOWN

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### FROM THE SCRIPTURES: THE BIBLE IS WRITTEN WITH A PURPOSE

*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:31)*

*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)*

*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (1 Cor. 10:11)*

*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)*