

Acts 1:6-8 in the Navajo Bible

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6 Hódahool'aahii ahúikaigo, nidahódééłkidgo ádadíiniid, Bóhólníihii, da' k'adish Ízrel bee bóhólníihgo bił haz'aanii bá hasht'édééłdíí? 7 Áko ábizhdíiniid, Ałkéé' bee dahwéelzhíishii ında dayíłkaahii nihił béédahózin doogo doo nihaa deet'áa da, éiyee' aTaa' t'áa bí bee bóhólníihgo yee nihon'á. 8 Nidi nihí Níłch'i Diyinii nihik'i hoole'go bee adziilii nihee dahodooleeł, áko Jerúsalemgi, ında Judiyagi t'áa át'ée ní't'ée' áádóó Samériyagi, ında nahasdzáán nidanees'áágóó shá dahotne' dooleeł. (Acts 1:6)¹

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6) ²

Introduction

Below we discuss a small point of grammar, but it is one that brings out a spiritual lesson.

Where Is the Emphasis?

Notice vs. 8 especially. In English Jesus says "you will be my witnesses" and then lists the places where this witnessing will take place, i.e., "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." In Navajo He gives the places first and then ends with the words *shá dahotne' dooleeł* ("you will speak for Me, witness to Me"). This is not different emphasis. English has one syntax and Navajo has another. Both are translations. The translators are working with the language resources they have in order to say the same thing.

The difference is in the language itself, not in what the translators are trying to get across. However, the fact that the verb tends to come at the end of a sentence in Navajo, allows that language to bring out a useful point about what Jesus is saying.

He is not telling His disciples where to go, He's telling them what to do once they get there. He is not saying they must start in Jerusalem and go from there to the rest of

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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Judea, next to Samaria, and so on. He's saying, yes, you will go to these places, but when you do that, talk about Me - *shá dahotne' dooleet*. That's His point.

A Parallel Passage

Incidentally Jesus is making the same point at the end of the gospel of Matthew. There's He's giving final instructions to His disciples before returning to heaven.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt 28:18)

"Therefore go," and do this and this. In English this sounds like a command to go, with the rest of what He says following from that starting point. In Navajo it comes across as it really is, not as a command to go, but as a command to make disciples. I'll quote just vs. 19.

Éí baa nihílááh, a'aa dine'é t'áá áttso ídahool'aahii daniljigo ádaahle', aTaa' áádóó aYe' índa Níłch'i Diyinii bízhi' bee tó bee daahsíh, . . . (Matt 28:19)

The important thing to notice here is that *nihílááh* is not a verb. Clearly, Jesus does not His disciples all to remain in one place, but the word *nihílááh* is not a verb. Yes, it is used to say something like, "go on now," but it literally means "beyond you." In the Greek also, the word Jesus uses is not fully a verb in the present sense. It is a participle. Greek πορευθέντες (*poreuthentes*) does not mean "Go!" It means "Having gone." In this passage also, Jesus is not telling His disciples where to go. He's telling them what to do in whatever place they might find themselves. Where is "there?" It doesn't matter. Wherever they go, they are to make disciples. This is the heart of what Jesus is saying in Matt 28:19. And the Navajo translation captures the thought perfectly. *Éí baa nihílááh, a'aa dine'é t'áá áttso ídahool'aahii daniljigo ádaahle'*. "So go on now, and from every people group, make disciples!"

Conclusion

We can serve Jesus wherever we go. One point we could draw from this discussion is that, where we are matters less than what we do there. Wherever we might be we should make disciples for Jesus. God is not telling us we have to travel widely in order to serve Him. Just the opposite. Right in your own community you can serve Him now and fulfill the gospel commission where you are.