

Acts 4:15 in the Navajo Bible

Copyright (c) 2009 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

Nidi t'áá bí t'éiyá haa nídadóot'ííł biniyé diné ándaha'áii naháaztánídóó áłtsé ch'ínóh'aash daanúigo yee dahooł'a[.] (Acts 4:15)¹

So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. (Acts 4:15)²

Introduction

In Acts 4 Peter and John are questioned by the Jewish authorities for their part in healing a cripple. The problem is they had done this in the name of Jesus and then went to the temple teaching about the resurrection of the dead. Jesus had just returned to heaven in chap. 1, and then the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost in chap. 2. The church had grown to about 5000 people by this time, but was still young and people didn't quite know what to think about what the disciples were doing. Anyway, that's some of the background.

If this were the only verse in the story, and if English were our only language, we would know even less, because the English says simply that the Jewish leaders ordered Peter and John to leave the room and then "conferred together" (vs. 15). It doesn't say what they conferred about. Of course, when we read the rest of the story we know they were discussing what to do with Peter and John, but in vs. 15 the English simply says they "conferred," i.e., they talked it over.

Technically the Navajo goes beyond the Greek here, but the fact is that the Navajo translation catches the idea exactly when it adds the words, *haa nídadóot'ííł biniyé . . .* (vs. 15), which means roughly, "what to do." The situation was puzzling to them. They weren't just talking among themselves, they were talking about what to do with Peter and John. How do you punish people for healing a cripple?

Why Were the Leaders Puzzled?

This same issue arises two more times in the chapter. So there is a question whether we see the leaders being puzzled two times over how to punish the disciples (in vss. 16 and 21), or three times (in vss. 15, 16, and 21). In English it's two times, in Navajo it's three times. We'll come back to this, but there is another question to consider.

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

² English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version®*. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Acts 4

Why were the leaders puzzled about what to do with Peter and John? Why didn't they just falsely accuse them of some capital offense and have them executed? They clearly wanted to find some pretext for punishing the disciples, but didn't how. Why didn't they know how? This is the really interesting question. There were offenses – like Sabbath breaking – that would have allowed them to put the disciples to death. Why didn't they just accuse these men of Sabbath breaking? After all, the church had been keeping Sunday since that first Sunday in the upper room. Or is that really true?

The simple fact that the Jewish leaders didn't accuse the disciples of Sabbath breaking tells me they couldn't. The Jewish leaders and the followers of Jesus were divided by some issues (i.e., Jesus), but not by others. Those Jews who hated Jesus (the Pharisees) and those who loved Him (the disciples) were all still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath at this time in the church's history. If the church had not been keeping it, none of the disciples would have lived to see the day of Pentecost.

Acts 7

But they did live to see that day and were held in highest esteem by the people up through the first seven chapters of the book of Acts. Then persecution broke out and the church was scattered – telling about Jesus everywhere they went. And notice that the reason for that first period of persecution was not that church members were breaking the Sabbath, but because Stephen spoke of Jesus in such a loving and respectful way (see Acts 7:56, below). At his trial, Stephen accused the people's leaders of not obeying the law. They were not accusing him, he was accusing them.

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51)

Even this was something they could listen to. They didn't like it, but at least they were able to listen. But when Stephen spoke of seeing Jesus at the right hand of God they could no longer stay in their seats.

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:55)

At this point the council members covered their ears so they could hear no more and rushed at Stephen in a frenzy. They took him outside the city and stoned him to death. But was Stephen a Sabbath breaker? No one ever accused him of that.

The Other Two Passages

I said there were two other passages where the Jewish leaders were puzzled about what to do with Peter and John. Here are the verses.

"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it. (Acts 4:16)

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. (Acts 4:21)

The meaning of these verses has been discussed above. It goes far beyond anything that might lie on the surface. It's easy to read this story and think only about Peter, John, and the cripple. By contrast, the Jewish leaders were searching for other possibilities. They were considering all options. Should we do this? How about this? But the idea of accusing the disciples of Sabbath breaking never occurred to them, because the disciples were not Sabbath breakers. They were Sabbath keepers.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

This verse doesn't say "a large number of priests" became disobedient to the law. It says they became obedient to the faith. These two facts are perfectly consistent with each other. Consider one other verse. I'll quote it in both English and Navajo. The same meaning comes through equally well in both translations.

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (Rev 14:12)

Dí biniinaa Diyin God bidiyíí', éí Diyin God yee has'áanii yik'eh dahó'íinii índa Jesus dayoodlâago ádayósinii hada'óníi doo. (Rev 14:12)

This verse tells me that obeying God's commandments is consistent with remaining faithful to Jesus. Obeying God is not the same as disobeying Christ. The Father is in perfect agreement with His Son. By obeying the one, we obey the other.

Conclusion

Later on, as time went by, a gradual change would occur and much of the church (never all of it, but much of it) would abandon the Sabbath and worship on Sunday, but in Acts 4 this hadn't happened yet. Two or three years later, in Acts 6 and Acts 7, it still hadn't happened. The earliest followers of Jesus were Sabbath keepers. And we should be too. Jesus hasn't changed a bit during the time between then and now. There are good biblical reasons why Christians today should still worship on the seventh day of the week (Saturday) rather than Sunday, but we'll discuss those things in another paper.