

Galatians 6:16 in the Navajo Bible

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Kót'éego dajjináanii t'áá ádzíltso Diyin God éí Ízrel dine'é náyiizlá'ígi át'éego náhwíizláa'ii hach'í' hózhó náhodoodleę, áádóó Diyin God haa jooba' doo! (Galatians 6:16)¹

Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:16)²

Introduction

The wording in the Navajo conveys a slightly different thought than in the English, which is supported by the Greek.³ The sense of the Navajo is that there is a body of people who follow Paul's instructions and that body of people is just like the Israel of God. There are two groups and they resemble each other. The sense of the English (and the Greek) is that there is a body of people who follow Paul's instruction and that body of people is itself the Israel of God. In this model there is only one group.

What Is Israel?

The term "Israel" has always had a spiritual component. The reason for this is that they were, and are, the people of God. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Where God is, things are spiritual. So if Israel is the people of God, they are a spiritual people because of their connection with Him.

What happens when Israel turns its back on God? Well, in such a case it stops being the people of God. A group can only be the people of God if they have a connection or relationship with God. When that link is broken, they are like everyone else – just another gene pool.

What happens when ordinary people, who have no link to a special pool or special ancestors, come to God in simple faith believing the promises He has made? What happens in this case is they become heirs of those promises.

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.

³ Outside the present context, the Greek (*kai epi ton Israel tou theou*) would translate literally, "and upon the Israel of God." There is a special name for this type of *kai* ("and"). It is called "epexegetical," and in context it could be translated "even." It is being used to equate the two phrases, before and after the *kai*.

The Jews are not God's special people today

There are those who want to believe that the Jews can never cease being the special people of God. I simply disagree. That is not biblical.

It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. ¹⁵ But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. (John 19:14-15)

To understand the enormity of what was being said, it is necessary to consider a few other passages.

Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. (Psalm 5:2)

Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. (Psalm 24:8, also 10)

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. (Psalm 29:10)

How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great King over all the earth! (Psalm 47:2)

For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. (Psalm 47:7)

For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. (Psalm 95:3)

And in John 19:15 once more, "'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered." They should never have said those words. It was a truly frightful thing for them to say. They might not have intended these words in their fullest context, but many things in the gospel have more meaning than appears on the surface at first.

This does not mean God refuses to save Jews. Paul was a Jew. But what it does mean is that after they firmly and intelligently rejected the gospel, the Jewish nation, as a nation, could no longer be called God's special people. After that point they were on the same spiritual level with everyone else. God's special people are those who by faith accept God's special Person.

Christians are God's special people

Paul makes exactly this point repeatedly and with emphasis. In an earlier passage of Galatians he says,

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

"The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, . . ." What exactly does this statement mean? It means the promises Abraham received were not given to the Jews. *Not* given. "The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, . . ." The promises were given to Abraham and his Seed, who is Christ. Jews received these promises from Abraham by faith in the One who was to come.

Eventually He came. And now, when a person from any background comes to Christ, he becomes an heir of these same promises. He or she receives the promises by obtaining them directly from the One for whom they were originally intended.

Discussion

This fact has implications. Even if you live on the loneliest place on the reservation, you belong to God if you belong to Christ. When you accept the Son, you get the whole package – heaven, eternal life, the promises, the blessings, all of it. It doesn't matter who you are at this time in earth's history. The only thing that matters is your faith in Jesus. As one Christian writer puts it,

The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift.⁴

Conclusion

So no, the church is not merely *like* the Israel of God. The church *is* the Israel of God. By being His spiritual people, they are His special people.

⁴ Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 21.