

Philippians 2:5-11 in the Navajo Bible

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T'áá Christ Jesus aa nitsíkees yéegi át'éego nihí ałdó' ákót'éego ahaa nitsídaahkees. ⁶ Azhá Christ éi Diyin God jíłí nidi, Diyin God ts'ídá bił ahijłt'ée ndi doo t'áá baąh dah dziztí da nít'ée', ⁷ nidi éi t'óó átséed nahjí' nizhdiní'á, áádóó á naal'a'í ízh'diilyaago nihokáá' dine'é ahooldhíłigi át'éego ho'dizhchí. ⁸ Áádóó nihokáá' diné dzizłí'go a'ohgo ádaa nitsídžíkeesgo ízh'diilyaa, áádóó dazdootsaahjí' nidi ak'eh hodzis'iid, azhá tsin ałnáosid baąhjí' dazdootsaahjí' nidi ts'ídá ak'eh hodzis'iid. ⁹ Éi baą Diyin God aghánáhóó'áadi dah honeesdá, áádóó yízhí danilíinii t'áá ałtso biláahgo yízhí ts'ídá aláahdi át'ėii haidiní'á. ¹⁰ Áko yá'aashdi dahojłóonii áádóó nahasdzáan bikáa'gi dahojłóonii ında nahasdzáan biyi'di dahojłóonii ts'ídá t'áá ádzítso Jesus bízhi' bee ha'oodzı'go bich'i' nitsidahizhdidoogoh. ¹¹ Áádóó Diyin God aTaa' baa ha'niih doo biniyé diné t'ááłá'í jinitínigo Jesus Christ éi Bóhólníihii nilí dajinígo bee hadahizdoodzih. (Philippians 2:5-11)¹

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)²

Introduction

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the really great passages in the New Testament. In this paper we analyze the passage and talk about some of the wording. Here we see the attitude of Christ, who was willing to descend to this earth and empty Himself to the point of death in order to give us life. In Isaiah we have the opposite counterpart of this. Lucifer was the highest angel in heaven, but wanted to ascend still farther and be equal with God. The pre-existent Son of God already had everything Lucifer aspired to obtain, but was willing to lay it all aside if only He could help and bless us. There's such a contrast here. The two could not be more different.

The point to notice is that Christ did not first come into existence when He was born a human infant in Bethlehem. He became the Son of man by reason of human birth, but was always – from all eternity – the divine Son of God. As we study this passage, let us not leave out vs. 6, which speaks of Christ's pre-existence with the Father.

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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The Passage

Christ is one with the Father

First part of vs. 6. There's an issue in vs. 6 that NIV struggles with. The Greek says that before the pre-existent Son of God came into this world He was *en morphē theou* ("in [the] form of God"), and most English translations don't treat this as anything that might be sensitive. NIV, however, and with it the New Living Translation (NLT), draw back from saying it this way. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" (NIV). "Though he was God" (NLT). The Navajo translation joins NIV and NLT by saying, *Azhá Christ éi Diyin God jílíi nidi* ("Although Christ was God").

Trying to stay slavishly close to the Greek at this point might have forced the Navajo translators to use words which would imply that Jesus wasn't really God – that He only pretended to be. This is exactly what Paul is not saying. So in the end it's just as well that the Navajo reads as it does, although as a matter of record it is true that the Greek says, *en morphē theou*. I should add that the entire clause here is, *en morphē theou huparchōn* ("being in [the] form of God"). The fourth word of the clause represents an unusual way to say "being," so perhaps this influenced the above versions in translating the clause as they did.

Second part of vs. 2. One reason why it is right (although free) to translate the first part of vs. 6 as, *Azhá Christ éi Diyin God jílíi nidi* ("Although Christ was God") is what Paul says next, in the second part of vs. 6. *Diyin God ts'ídá bit ahijít'ée ndi* ("although He was equal with God") completes the thought begun in the first clause and confirms its meaning. The two clauses stand in parallel to each other. Thus, the whole verse could be brought over from Navajo into English as follows: "Although Christ was God, although He was fully equal with God, He did not cling to that."³ Thus, the flavor of Philippians 2:6 in Navajo is similar to that of John 1:1, with its repeated clauses, in English ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God"). We will see another example of clause repetition in vs. 8 (below).

He became a man

Verse 7. One interesting feature of vs. 7 in Navajo is the way the verse ends: *nihokáá' dine'é ahoolchíłigi át'éego ho'dizhchí* ("He was born as other men are born"). This could refer to the process or the result. There was never a question about the manner of Christ's birth. He was born. The question has to do with His nature – not the nature of His birth but the relationship of His inherent humanity and divinity. "So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Verse 8. Notice that vs. 8 lays heavy emphasis on the fact that Jesus was obedient. Twice in Navajo we read *ak'eh hodzis'íid* ("He was obedient"). To what? Well, let's think about this. Jesus knew His Bible well (see John 7:15). What purpose did this knowledge serve? Is it the case that Jesus knew the Bible said this and this, but that wasn't what He obeyed? Instead, God sent angels to tell Him what to believe and what to do? I don't think so! He was obeying the Scriptures He had studied so carefully.

³ In Navajo there is no second comma, but the sense is as represented here.

My concept of the Old Testament is that it was entrusted to mankind first and foremost as a set of instructions for God's Son. It is our privilege to read these instructions too, but the Bible was given and preserved down through the centuries so that, when the Son came into the world, He would be well equipped to defeat Satan. This is the reason why the Old Testament has so much to say about Christ. And this, in turn, is the reason why it makes so much sense for us to study it. As one writer says,

In every page, whether history, or precept, or prophecy, the Old Testament Scriptures are irradiated with the glory of the Son of God. So far as it was of divine institution, the entire system of Judaism was a compacted prophecy of the gospel. To Christ "give all the prophets witness." Acts 10:43.⁴

If we can't see Christ in the Bible – with special reference here to the Old Testament – it's because we can't see. It's that simple. He's there to be seen if we will see Him. The proof of this is that Jesus saw Himself in Scripture. In the New Testament, which was written after the fact, references to Christ lie on the surface. They are easy to see. In the Old Testament we have to know how to look for them, as He did. Christ studied the Old Testament and came away understanding His mission. If I'm right, that's what the Old Testament was for. And if we study it like He did, we also will come away understanding His mission. The Holy Spirit will show us these things if we look for them and if we ask.

My point here is that what Christ obeyed in vs. 10 (above) was not conversations with angels, but the written word. Jesus was not obeying impulses. He was obeying Scripture. And why should He disobey it? The next question is, Why should we? I haven't found a reason yet.

He ascended to glory

In vs. 10 we won't be able to see everything we should see without comparing passages. When Paul wants to praise Christ in the very most dignified, elevated way possible, he gives us a freely worded but easily recognizable reference to the fourth commandment. The fourfold structure of vs. 10 is drawn directly from Exodus 20:11. See table 1.

Table 1
Philippians 2:10 and Exodus 20:11

Navajo	English	Exodus 20:11
Áko yá'aashdi dahojíloonii	in heaven	the heavens
áádóó nahasdzáán bikáa'gi dahojíloonii	and on earth	and the earth
índa nahasdzáán biyi'di dahojíloonii	and under the earth	the sea
ts'ídá t'áá ádzíltso	every knee will bow ⁵	and all that is in them

Notice that in the Navajo column of table 1 all four phrases are stated in what we call fourth person – showing that the reference is not to rocks and trees, but to living things. Fourth person is normally used to refer to people, but of people don't live in the air or in the sea. Paul's point is that all creation – the entire biosphere – will join in praising Christ for what He has done.

⁴ Ellen White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 211.

⁵ In NIV this phrase comes before the others.

Another point is that in Philippians 2:10 the order of the phrases is different in Navajo and English. NIV puts "every knee will bow" first; the Navajo puts *ts'ídá t'áá ádzítso* ("absolutely all") last. This is not different content; it's just different syntax. When comparing the Navajo of Philippians 2:10 with what we find in Exodus 20, however, the order of phrases is the same. Thus, *ts'ídá t'áá ádzítso* corresponds, in sequence and in meaning, to the words, "and all that is in them" (Exodus 20:11). The parallel with Exodus is much clearer in Navajo than in English.

Discussion

Five passages. Philippians 2:10 is not the only place in the New Testament to speak this way. Consider the following five passages from Revelation, all of which refer back to Exodus 20:11. But these five references are closer to their source than the one in Philippians 2 because they use all three of the terms, "heaven," "earth," and "sea." (In Philippians 2:10 the third term was *nahasdzáán biyi'di dahojíloonii* ["under the earth"].) The first passage in the Bible to bring these three terms together is Exodus 20:1.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13)

And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! (Revelation 10:6)

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." (Revelation 12:12)

He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Revelation 14:7)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (Revelation 21:1)

Two more New Testament passages. Consider two more verses (Acts 4:24; 14:15). Here we have not just an identifiable memory of Exodus 20:11 (as in Philippians 2:10), or a clear but free reference (as in Acts 4:24; 14:15), but word for word, accent for accent, direct quotation from the Greek translation of the earlier passage in Exodus. Below I compare the two passages from Acts with each other and with Exodus 20:11. In this comparison I include Greek (in English letters) because that is where the comparison lies. See table 2 (below).

Table 2
Acts 4:24 and Acts 14:15

Acts 4:24		Acts 14:15		Exodus 20:11	
Greek	English	Greek	English	Greek	English
su ho poiēsas	"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made	hos epoiēsen	"[T]he living God, who made	epoiēsen kurios	[T]he LORD made
ton ouranon	the heaven	ton ouranon	heaven	ton ouranon	the heavens
kai tēn gēn	and the earth	kai tēn gēn	and earth	kai tēn gēn	and the earth,
kai tēn thalassan	and the sea	kai tēn thalassan	and sea	kai tēn thalassan	the sea,
kai panta ta en autois	and everything in them."	kai panta ta en autois	and everything in them."	kai panta ta en autois	and all that is in them.

I don't claim that Exodus was originally written in Greek. (It was originally written in Hebrew.) But Greek is the language the author is writing in and using in his quotes, so I show his wording in order to facilitate comparison. Let me add that the comparison is even more impressive when using Greek letters, because when transcribing Greek we don't normally indicate the accents, whereas with Greek letters we would. In Greek every mark – every letter and every accent – is copied exactly as it reads in the Greek translation of Exodus 20:11.

Seven Old Testament passages. In addition to the eight New Testament passages we have talked about so far, there are seven Old Testament passages that also point back to Exodus 20:11. These are Nehemiah 9:6; Psalms 69:35; 96:11; 135:6; 146:6; Jeremiah 31:37; Amos 9:6; and Haggai 2:6.⁶

What do you say when you want to praise God in a way that goes beyond words? In cases like that you bring to God your humble awareness of His infinite power as Creator of all things in sky, and land, and sea. Our God is a holy God and unimaginably powerful. To a degree we can understand Him through the things He has made. Paul tells us this in Romans 1:18-20. But we will only understand Him fully by studying the one Thing in all the universe – "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35, KJV) – that He did not make, i.e., Christ. Christ was with God in the beginning. Only He knows the Father perfectly, and only He can reveal Him.

Conclusion

The passage under review shows Christ in the beginning fully equal with the Father, but willing if necessary to descend to the earth in complete subjection to the Father's will and purpose. Afterward He returned to heaven to receive glory, honor, and praise – not just from us, but from the entire universe; not just now, but forever. Our attitude should be like His. We also should be willing to obey the Father in all things. If we follow Him, and are true to Him, and remain in Him, we will receive everlasting life from Him and then we will have all eternity to praise Him. Let us start doing that now.

⁶ For discussion see http://www.historicism.org/Documents/Sabbath_NTQuoted.pdf.