

Revelation 12:17 in the Navajo Bible

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Ákohgo na'ashó'itsoh éí asdzání yich'í' báhóochíidgo, asdzání ba'áłchíní daadziihígúí, Diyin God yee has'áanii yik'eh dahó'íinii índa Jesus baa hane'ii dayoodlánígúí yich'í' anaa' ánéidoodlíiigo dah diiyá. (Revelation 12:17)¹

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17)²

Introduction

There is a subtle issue in Rev 12:17. Nothing is incorrect, but it will be appropriate to comment on the verse. The issue has to do with the words *Diyin God yee has'áanii* ("what God commands"). This expression could refer to any requirement God lays upon His people. For specifically, it could be God's "commands" or His "commandments." Translators have some latitude here. Depending on context, either rendering would be appropriate. Consider some examples, taking NIV as our starting point. These fall within different categories.

1. "orders," "instructions"
2. "my commands," "his commands"
3. "what I command," "what he commands"
4. "the commandments"
5. "God's commandments"

Examples

In what follows I quote the passages that illustrate the above types of usage. I underline the English word of special interest and then, in square brackets, give the Greek (in English letters) and the Navajo.

Group 1: "orders," "instructions"

^{NIV} **John 11:57** But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders [Greek: *entolas*, Navajo: *yee dahó'á'go*] that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

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 not otherwise marked are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

^{NIV} **Colossians 4:10** ¶ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions [Greek: *entolas*, Navajo: *t'áá údǫǫ' bee nihit hweeshne' yéegi át'éego*] about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

Group 2: "my commands," "[H]is commands"

^{NIV} **John 14:21** Whoever has my commands [Greek: *tas entolas mou*, Navajo: *bee nahosét'áanii*] and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

^{NIV} **John 15:10** If you obey my commands [Greek: *tas entolas mou*, Navajo: *bee nahosét'áanii*], you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands [Greek: *tas entolas tou patros mou*, Navajo: *T'áá shiTaa' yee nahas'áanii*] and remain in his love.

^{NIV} **1 John 2:3** We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *Diyin God bibik'eh ó'oo'níitii*].

^{NIV} **1 John 3:22** and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *yee has'áanii*] and do what pleases him.

^{NIV} **1 John 3:24** Those who obey his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*] live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

^{NIV} **1 John 5:2** This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *yee has'áanii*].

^{NIV} **1 John 5:3** This is love for God: to obey his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *yee has'áanii*]. And his commands [Greek: *hai entolai autou*, Navajo: *yee has'áanii*] are not burdensome,

^{NIV} **2 John 1:6** And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *Diyin God bibik'eh ó'oo'níitii*]. As you have heard from the beginning, his command [Greek: *hē entolē*, Navajo: *Bik'eh ó'oo'níitii*] is that you walk in love.

Group 3: "what I command," "what [H]e commands"

^{NIV} **John 14:15** ¶ "If you love me, you will obey what I command [Greek: *tas entolas tas emas*, Navajo: *bee nahosét'áanii*].

^{NIV} **1 John 2:4** The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands [Greek: *tas entolas autou*, Navajo: *bibik'eh ó'oo'níitii*] is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Group 4: "the commandments"

^{NIV} **Matthew 19:17** "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments [Greek: *tas entolas*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*]."

^{NIV} **Mark 10:19** You know the commandments [Greek: *tas entolas*, Navajo: *Bee haz'áanii*]: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

^{NIV} **Luke 18:20** You know the commandments [Greek: *tas entolas*, Navajo: *Bee haz'áanii*]: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

Group 5: "God's commandments"

^{NIV} **Revelation 12:17** Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring- those who obey God's commandments [Greek: *tas entolas tou theou*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*] and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

^{NIV} **Revelation 14:12** ¶ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments [Greek: *tas entolas tou theou*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*] and remain faithful to Jesus.

Discussion

These examples range all the way from instructions Paul gives about welcoming a certain individual (Colossians 4:10) to the ten commandment law of God given on Sinai. The Greek, in different contexts, will support this entire range of meanings. How can we know which meaning the writer has in mind? Context.

Gospels

For example, in Matthew 19:17 Jesus speaks of "the commandments" (or "the commands"). Is this the ten commandments, or something else He wants us to do? In this passage it's the ten commandments, because Jesus is talking to a young man who, in the next verse, raises this very question, i.e., which commands Jesus has in mind.

"Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 19:18-19)

Here Jesus refers to six of the ten commandments. Notice He does so in an unusual order: #6 (murder), #7 (adultery), #8 (stealing), #9 (lying) – so far, so good – and then #5 (honoring father and mother). And then a commandment that is not one of the ten (love your neighbor). Why did Jesus include this last commandment, which doesn't fit with the others He

has just mentioned? But it does fit. Loving one's neighbor is not just a state of mind; it does not mean merely having warm thoughts toward other people. It means not killing them (#6), not cheating on them (#7), not stealing from them (#8), not lying to them (#9), and – in the case of our father and mother – honoring them (#5).

Saying that loving our neighbor fulfills the law seems to let us off easy. Now we don't have to do all those other things. But this is not so. For example, if you love someone you want them to live, so loving carries within it the idea of not killing (#6). Similarly, if you love someone you want them to have a happy home life, so loving carries within it the idea of not breaking through the sacred circle of the family relationships that make for human happiness (#7). And so on down the list. All of these things go together.

Mark 10:19 is parallel to Matthew 19:17. Here Jesus mentions commandments #6 (murder), #7 (adultery), #8 (stealing), #9 (lying), and then seems to repeat #9 (defrauding = lying). Or is it #8 (defrauding = stealing)? He concludes with #5 (honoring father and mother).

Again, Luke 18:20 is also parallel to Matthew 19:17. Here again Jesus mentions the commandments in an unusual order, but it is different from the first two. Here we have #7 (adultery), #6 (murder), #8 (stealing), #9 (lying), and #5 (honoring father and mother).

Revelation

In NIV, which is clearly an Evangelical translation, *tas entolas tou theou* ("the commands/commandments of God") is interpreted as, specifically, "the commandments of God." This is the case in both Revelation 12:17 and its parallel Revelation 19:10. Thus,

^{NIV} **Revelation 12:17** Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring— those who obey God's commandments [Greek: *tas entolas tou theou*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*] and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

^{NIV} **Revelation 14:12** ¶ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments [Greek: *tas entolas tou theou*, Navajo: *Diyin God yee has'áanii*] and remain faithful to Jesus.

Below I summarize the interpretations put forward in a number of English translations of these two verses (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). From this summary it is clear that the interpretation that we find in the Navajo translation is a minority opinion. Most translations take *tas entolas tou theou* in these verses to mean "the commandments of God" (if and to the extent that this is different from "the commands of God"). Thus, most English translations in the present sample take both passages as referring specifically to the ten commandments.

Table 1
Revelation 12:17

Version	Rendering of <i>tas entolas tou theou</i>
ASV	commandments of God
BBE	the orders of God
CJB	God's commands
CSB	the commandments of God
DBY	the commandments of God
DRA	the commandments of God
ERV	the commandments of God
ESV	the commandments of God
GNV	the comandements of God
GWN	God's commands
KJV	the commandments of God
NAB	God's commandments
NAS	the commandments of God
NET	God's commandments
NIV	God's commandments
NJB	God's commandments
NKJ	the commandments of God
NLT	God's commandments
NRS	the commandments of God
PNT	the commaundementes of God
RSV	the commandments of God
TNT	the commaundmentes of god
WEB	the commandments of God
YLT	the commands of God

Table 2
Revelation 19:10

Version	Rendering of <i>tas entolas tou theou</i>
ASV	the commandments of God
BBE	the orders of God
CJB	his commands
CSB	the commandments of God
DBY	the commandments of God
DRA	the commandments of God
ERV	the commandments of God
ESV	the commandments of God
GNV	the commandements of God
GWN	his commands and keep their faith in Jesus
KJV	the commandments of God
NAB	God's commandments
NAS	the commandments of God
NET	God's commandments
NIV	God's commandments
NJB	the commandments of God
NKJ	the commandments of God
NLT	his commands
NRS	the commandments of God
PNT	the commaundementes of God
RSV	the commandments of God
TNT	the commaundmentes
WEB	the commandments of God
YLT	the commands of God

In both tables I bold those cases which do not use the word "commandments," in whatever spelling. (Some of the translations are old, some quite new.) Six out of 24 don't use the term "commandments" in table 1, and five out of 24 in table 2. So a strong majority of translations in the present sample do interpret *tas entolas tou theou* to mean "the commandments of God."

Conclusion

The Navajo rendering of Revelation 12:17 does not rule out the idea that the writer has the ten commandments in mind as he wrote. It just not limit the discussion to these ten, leaving open the question whether others are included. Obviously, ignoring any command of God is an act of disobedience. The point of the passage is that God's end time people will not be characterized by disobedience. They will follow all God's instructions – including the ten commandments. Let me rephrase that – including all ten of the ten commandments. Ignoring any command, or any commandment, is an act of disobedience.

God's people are His because He extended His grace to them and they accepted it by faith. The question is not, and has never been, how God's people are saved. They are saved by grace through faith. On this all agree. The question is, How do such people live? Do saved people do as they please, or do they live to please the One who saved them? If they live to please God, they keep all ten of His commandments.

If God's people follow Him in the way they live, which commandment would they want to break? Whichever one it is, that's the one God has not yet been able to write on their hearts (see Hebrews 8:7-12). Loving God is not just a state of mind; it does not mean merely having warm thoughts toward Him. It means not putting other Gods before Him (#1), not making idols to bow down to (#2), not taking His name lightly (#3), and it means setting the seventh day of each week aside to spend with Him, and with other fellow believers, in spiritual fellowship. People who do this will come from every different part of the earth. They will represent every nation and people group. And they will live in obedience to all God's commandments.

Appendix Versions Cited

- ASV The Holy Bible, American Standard Version 1901 (ASV), similar to the English Revised Version of 1881-1885, both being based upon the Hebrew Masoretic text for the OT and upon the Westcott-Hort Greek text for the NT.
- BBE The English Bible in Basic English 1949/1964 (BBE), ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.
- CJB Complete Jewish Bible. Copyright © 1998 by David H. Stern. Published by Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc.
- CSB Holman Christian Standard Bible. Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers.
- DBY The English Darby Bible 1884/1890 (DBY), a literal translation by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.

- DRA The Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition. Public Domain.
- ERV English Revised Version (1885)
- ESV ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION (ESV). Copyright © July 2001 by Crossway Books/Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL, tel: 630/682-4300,
- GNV Geneva Bible 1599. Text edited and provided by Mark Langley (mlangley1@cox.net).
- GWN GOD'S WORD® translation. Copyrighted © 1995 by God's Word to the Nations.
- JPS JPS HOLY SCRIPTURES 1917 (English). The Bible text designated JPS 1917 is from The Holy Scriptures (Old Testament), originally published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1917.
- KJV King James Version. Public Domain.
- LXE The English Translation of The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, 1844, 1851, published by Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, original ASCII edition Copyright © 1988 by FABS International (c/o Bob Lewis, DeFuniak Springs FL 32433). All rights reserved.
- NAB "New American Bible. Copyright © 1991,1986,1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1194, USA, is used by license of copyright owner.
- NAS The New American Standard Bible (NASB) (NAS [1977] and NAU [1995]). Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995, and La Biblia de Las Americas. Copyright © 1986, both by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.
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- NJB New Jerusalem Bible. Edited by Henry Wansbrough. Copyright © 1985, by Darton, Longman & Todd Limited and Doubleday
- NKJ The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved.
- NLT Holy Bible, New Living Translation, second edition. Copyright © 2004 by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.
- NRS NRS - New Revised Standard Version Bible. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
- RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Copyright © 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.
- RWB The English Revised 1833 Webster Update 1995 with Pierce's Englishman's-Strong's Numbering System. ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.
- TNK JPS TANAKH 1985 (English). The TANAKH, a new translation (into contemporary English) of The Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text (Masoretic). The Jewish Bible: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim. Copyright © 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society. All rights reserved. This fresh translation began work in 1955.
- WEB The English Noah Webster Bible 1833, The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version, with Amendments of the language by Noah Webster, LL.D. ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.
- YLT The English Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible 1862/1887/1898, by J. N. Young. ASCII version Copyright © 1988-1997 by the Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship of Ontario, Canada.

