

# Revelation 19:10 in the Navajo Bible

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

Áko biyaaji' nitsidinígo' bich'í' nahodeeshłaał biniyé, nidi áshidíniid, T'áadoo ánít'íní! Ní áádóó nik'isóó **Jesus baa hane'ii** dayoodlánígíí yíł nidaal'a'í ła' ásh't'í. Diyin God bich'í' nahółá! Háálá **Jesus baa hane'ii** bee náásgóó ádahoodoníłi bee baa dahojilne'. (Revelation 19:10)<sup>1</sup>

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to [tōn echontōn] **the testimony of Jesus** [tēn marturian Iēsou]. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

There are two main things about this passage that require discussion. First, there is the meaning of the term *Jesus baa hane'ii* ("the testimony of Jesus"), which has two meanings in English but in Navajo only one. In Navajo these words mean the testimony that people bear concerning Jesus. People talk about Him. In doing this they bear testimony to Him.

I said there were two meanings in English. There are two meanings in Greek as well, and ideally all of this would be passed along to the reader. In English "the testimony of Jesus" could mean that a group of people bear testimony to Jesus, as the Navajo has it, or that Jesus bears testimony to a group of people. This second alternative might sound odd, but the wording allows it in the original and scholars debate which meaning is appropriate here. (Greek *tēn marturian Iēsou* allows the word "Jesus" to be read as a grammatical object or as a grammatical subject.)<sup>3</sup> So the question is, In Revelation 19:10 who bears testimony to whom? The answer can't be determined from the words alone. For this we must go to context, informed by parallel passages.

In Greek the words *tōn echontōn* ("those who have") occur just before "the testimony of Jesus." This predicate is consistent with either of the meanings mentioned above, i.e., it is consistent with taking "Jesus" as a grammatical object or as a grammatical subject. NIV's English, however, does not capture this aspect of the original. Saying "those who hold to" in English is only consistent with taking "Jesus" as a grammatical object. For this reason it would be more accurate to translate, with KJV, "[those] who *have* the testimony of Jesus" (emphasis added). In this way the full flavor of the Greek survives its journey into English.

---

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> The *New Jerusalem Bible* (Darton, Longman & Todd Limited and Doubleday, 1985) says, "who have in themselves the witness of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17; 19:10). This is an attempt to convey the sense that the word "Jesus" should be understood as a subject and that He, rather than they, performs the act of witnessing.

The second point requiring discussion – apart from what all these words mean in Revelation 19:10 – is what they mean in other passages and the relationships between the parallels and the verse we are studying. I would like to take the above tasks in reverse order.

## Parallel Passages

We begin with three parallel passages (Revelation 1:2, 9; 12:17) and work our way back to Revelation 19:10. Of the three, Revelation 12:17 will be the one of greatest interest to us because it, together with Revelation 19:10, provides the identifying characteristics of God's end-time remnant people.

### Chapter 1

who testifies to everything he saw– that is, the word of God and **the testimony of Jesus Christ** [*Jesus Christ baa hane'ii*]. (Revelation 1:2)

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and **the testimony of Jesus** [*Jesus bá hashne'go*, "my testimony to Jesus"]. (Revelation 1:9)

A large bloc of words is repeated from vs. 2 to vs. 9, but we can't just say this much and assume that we have interpreted both passages. When John says "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ", syntax requires us to understand that he is describing "everything he saw" (vs. 2). Seeing is not saying, nor is it doing. What he saw is not what he himself said or did, so in the earlier passage the genitive is subjective. John is not testifying to his own testimony. The word of God came from God and the testimony of Jesus came from Jesus. But this leaves open the question of how to interpret the later passage.

Bear in mind that in vs. 2 John is explaining his testimony, while in vs. 9 he is explaining his imprisonment. John's testimony was a response to something God the Father and His Son Jesus said. His imprisonment was a response to something he said. Rome would have no reason to punish John because Jesus said something to him, or about him, or even because Jesus poured out on him the spirit of prophecy. There is nothing to punish until John himself starts to speak. But of course the moment he does so the genitive becomes objective. So although the wording is almost identical in the two passages, the genitive must be interpreted differently – as a subject in vs. 2, as an object in vs. 9.

We must not forget John's description of himself as one "who testifies" (vs. 2). The testimony John bears in vs. 2 explains the imprisonment he suffers in vs. 9. But this explanation works only under the assumption that John was imprisoned because of his relationship with, or his response to, "the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," and not because of Jesus' words in and of themselves. Had John remained silent concerning "everything he saw" (vs. 2), the world would have loved him as its own and would not have found in him anything to punish. We can't account for John's presence "on the island of Patmos" (vs. 9) without assuming that, in the later passage, John is the one bearing testimony and that the object of his testimony is Jesus.

Thus, in vs. 9 the Navajo translation *Jesus baa hane'ii* works, while in vs. 2 it would not be equally appropriate.

## Chapter 12

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 [echontōn] the testimony of Jesus [Greek *tēn marturian Iēsou*, Navajo *Jesus baa hane'ii*]. (Revelation 12:17)

In chap. 12 the meaning is perhaps not so obvious as in chap. 1. On the one hand, the reason why the dragon is enraged at the woman is that she – like John – bears testimony to Jesus. The dragon will be enraged at anyone who does this. And yet, the purpose for indicating who the dragon dislikes is to identify who the woman symbolizes. For the most part Protestants agree that the woman is a symbol representing the church. But what part of the church? Later on (chap. 17) there is another, widely different, woman who also represents the church. So there are some distinctions to make. One of these is that the two passages have different timeframes. But here my point is that we would not want to join a church represented by the fallen woman, thinking it was the church represented by the pure woman. We need some way to be sure we understand the distinction between them.

Revelation 12:17 gives two identifying marks of the church represented by the pure woman. This church keeps God's commandments and "has" (KJV), or "holds to" (NIV), the testimony of Jesus. One of the marks ("God's commandments") is clear in vs. 17; the other ("the testimony of Jesus") is less so. Some who claim to follow Jesus keep God's commandments; others who claim to follow Him do not. It shouldn't be hard to tell who does and who does not keep God's commandments. That's the first mark. But holding to the testimony of Jesus is something any Christian could claim to do. So we need more information about the second part of the description in order to distinguish successfully between the two women and the types of churches they represent. The further information we need is supplied, not here, but in chap. 19 (Revelation 19:10), where John tells us what "the testimony of Jesus" is.

## Discussion

Consider another passage. In Acts 2 what exactly happened on the day of Pentecost? On that occasion did Jesus bear witness to His church, or did the church bear witness to Him? Actually it worked both ways. When God poured out His Holy Spirit at Pentecost He was demonstrating to the people of Jerusalem that He really was with His disciples. He was validating their experience by His presence among them, showing that people should listen to what these believers had to say. Their witness was worth listening to because it focused attention on Jesus. At Pentecost it really is true that Jesus was bearing witness to His church, but the result of all this was that the church bore witness to Him.

We normally associate Pentecost with the gift of tongues because when the disciples received this gift they spoke in other languages. But having received this ability, what use did they make of it? They used it to prophesy. Notice what Peter says when he explains to those present what was happening. He doesn't get up and say, Brothers we can speak in other languages! Instead he focuses on the substance of what was being said by means of them. The disciples' purpose in speaking was to convey information prophetically. The passage Peter quotes was this one from Joel:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Even on my

servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.  
(Acts 2:17-18)

## The Target Passage

In Revelation 19:10 "the testimony of Jesus" is defined as "the spirit of prophecy." I take the word "Jesus" in the first phrase to have not just subjective meaning, or objective meaning, but both. When one speaks by the Spirit of God, what s/he says will call attention to Jesus. But when one is able to do this prophetically it demonstrates that God is with His people and that they are being led by His Spirit. His presence among them validates their experience and this validating process bears testimony to them. But once the church receives such gifts, they use them to bear testimony to Him. So which type of meaning does the phrase have? It has both.

Prophecy is often associated with the prediction of future events, but this is not always the case. The word "prophecy" refers to the act of speaking for God. Thus, Peter was occupying a prophetic role when he said, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38), just as John the Baptist was when he said these same things (see Luke 3:3). John was not only a prophet because he said One more powerful would come after him (see Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27; Acts 13:25), but also because – on God's behalf and in God's power – he said "Repent" (Matt 3:2).

## More on the Parallels

We must study Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 together for either passage to have its full impact. If we study only Revelation 12:17, we learn that "God's commandments" and "the testimony of Jesus" are both important but we don't yet know what His testimony is. If we study only Revelation 19:10, we know what "the testimony of Jesus" is but don't know why it matters.

### God's commandments

Notice John does not limit himself to the New Testament commandments of Jesus, e.g., "Love one another" (John 13:34), but instead speaks of "God's commandments." I submit that these are the ten commandments, as given at Sinai and reviewed by Jesus in the sermon on the mount. Actually, in Matthew 5 Jesus was not starting a new sermon, but continuing an earlier one begun at a different time and on a different mountain (Sinai).

### The testimony of Jesus

I have said that, in "the testimony of Jesus," the word "Jesus" can function as subject or as object. This much lies on the surface. But here the claim is that the word carries both meanings. It must be understood as both subject (Jesus bears testimony to the church) and as object (the church bears testimony to Him).

*Jesus as subject.* The testimony of Jesus is mentioned in chap. 12 but is not defined until chap. 19, so we must remember the earlier passage when we study the later one and bring the two together. When God tells people how to identify His remnant, that has the effect of focusing attention on them. But once He does this, the remnant use His gifts to focus people's attention on Him. Both meanings are required. It is not a matter of choosing between them.

Taking the word "Jesus" first as a grammatical subject, what is the testimony He bears? How does He go about identifying who His remnant people are just before He comes? He does this in two ways. We talked about keeping the commandments above, but here the point is that He pours out on them the spirit of prophecy. Many shy away from the implications of saying so, but this means that God's last remnant church will have a prophet among them.

*Jesus as object.* The part about having a modern prophet frightens some people, but should not – especially if that modern prophet is carrying out his or her role within a biblical framework. Biblical prophets always respected earlier revelation. Prophets that spend their time talking about the stock market, or which celebrities are going to get divorces, are not prophets. What I'm talking about is someone who will say, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isaiah 8:20).

Was John the Baptist drawing attention to himself when he told people to repent and be baptized? At the time it might have seemed that he was, but no, he was bearing testimony to Jesus – the One who would come after Him. What John said, when asked, was, "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30). His ministry was to call attention to Christ's ministry. This is one mark of a genuine prophet.

Could John have borne a stronger testimony to Jesus if he had not been a prophet? Was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit a liability to him? Did it weaken his ability to focus people's attention on someone else, i.e., on Jesus? No one would say so. But if not, then why should such qualifications be a liability to the prophet who would one day be active among the remnant? Could the bear their message more clearly if they were unencumbered by the prophetic gift? Not at all! The gift was given specifically so they would be able to bear their witness to Jesus most effectively. He is the One who is to come after them. If the remnant has someone who is especially enabled by the Holy Spirit to bear testimony to Jesus, that fact is in every way consistent with Jesus being the center of their message.

## More on the Navajo Text

No part of the Navajo translation of either Revelation 12:17 or 19:10 is incorrect. But it is incomplete. The words "who have" (KJV), or "who hold to" (NIV), correspond to *dayoodlánígíí* ("those who believe"). This is only consistent with seeing the word "Jesus" as a grammatical object. The words "the testimony of Jesus" correspond to *Jesus baa hane'ii* ("talk that has to do with Jesus"). This part is in Revelation 12:17.

In Revelation 19:10 the word "prophecy" corresponds to *náásgóó ádahoodnítii* ("things that will happen in the future"). This is not the main point of the paper, but translating in this way does limit our view of prophecy to the foretelling of future events. And that's certainly part of it.

Navajo is a very rich language, but whenever possible it loves to be specific. Many more words would have been required to convey every shade of meaning mentioned above. Perhaps this can be left to exegesis. The Navajo translators chose to focus on certain elements of meaning in the text, and were correct in doing so. But there is still more to say.

## Discussion

How many groups have the above profile of characteristics? A number of churches claim to keep God's commandments (Seventh Day Baptists, Seventh Day Church of God, Seventh-day Adventists). Others claim to have the spirit of prophecy (Mormons, many independent churches and ministries, Seventh-day Adventists). The only group that appears on both lists is Seventh-day Adventists. This combination of characteristics is their identifying mark.

If God testifies by identifying His remnant in this way, what is their testimony concerning Him? Let me offer a brief overview:<sup>4</sup> Seventh-day Adventists teach that the pre-existent Christ, in union with the Father, brought our world into being (see John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3). They teach (as Paul taught) that the pre-existent Christ led Israel through the desert (see 1 Corinthians 10:4). They teach that Jesus became the Son of man by reason of human birth, but that He has always been – and remains – the Son of God. They teach that anyone saved, before or after the cross, is saved by grace through faith in what Jesus accomplished by the sacrifice of Himself (see John 8:56; Hebrews 11).

They teach that Jesus ministers the benefits of His sacrifice at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly sanctuary and that He continues doing this until time for Him to return to our world in glory (Hebrews 8:1; 7:25). They teach that saved human beings do not go to heaven until Jesus comes personally to escort them there, and that lost human beings do not burn until Jesus comes and destroys them (see Revelation 20:7-15). They teach that the seventh-day Sabbath is their special time with Jesus and that setting aside an extended period of time – a full day – with Him every week is a foreshadowing of the time they will one day have with Him in eternity. When Seventh-day Adventists put their work aside every Sabbath they acknowledge by doing so that they must put their own works aside as a basis for salvation. We do not put good works aside when it comes to meeting the needs of humanity, but acknowledge through Sabbath rest that salvation is the free gift of God.

There are other theologies out there. How do they compare with this one? Notice a few points with me. Some teach that we go to heaven automatically when we die. No intervention necessary. Is that more Christ-centered than saying Jesus must come personally to take us there? Some teach that people in Old Testament times are saved by works and that only after the cross are people saved by faith. Is that more Christ-centered than teaching that everyone who has ever been saved, without exception, is saved through faith in Jesus? Some teach that it is work to set aside an entire day for rest and that Christians should avoid going to such extremes. (Rest is work? That logic has always escaped me.) Is such a view more Christ-centered than teaching that the Sabbath is a day for special fellowship with Jesus?

Not every theology that claims to be Christ-centered actually is. Not every theology which people suspect of drawing attention away from Jesus actually does.

---

<sup>4</sup> For further information about who Seventh-day Adventists are and what they teach see <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/index.html>.

## Conclusion

God loves every part of His church. I have talked about the remnant as a special group, and they are, but please don't think that I think that God loves no one else, or that He accepts no one else. He loves every member of every church. More is true. God loves every person who is not a member of the church. He loves those who know nothing about Him. God's love is not a variable; it's an expression of His nature. The remnant is not defined by how much God loves them. It is defined by the special message they bear. This message is uniquely adapted to the needs of people living now, just before Christ returns. In bearing it they occupy a prophetic role (see Revelation 14:6-12) and this role is aided and nurtured by the gift of the spirit of prophecy.

The last end-time message prominently includes God's commandments and it draws fully on the prophetic gift to present Christ in all His fullness as Creator, Law Giver, Savior, High Priest, and soon coming King. The message is what makes the remnant who and what they are. Only the remnant bears the special end-time message God has entrusted to them. If someone wishes to doubt this, I ask who else bears it. Many bear messages, but I mean this message.

There is an irony here, because on the one hand the giving of the message is compared with an "angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Revelation 14:6). The key words here are "eternal gospel." This is the gospel that has always been the gospel, and always will be. Eternity goes both ways. And yet there is also a combination of timeless and present truths that is unique to the remnant.

To identify the remnant we must understand its defining characteristics. To learn what these are we must study Revelation 19:10 together with Revelation 12:17.