

# 1 Corinthians 7:1 in the Navajo Bible

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K'ad t'éiyá bee ak'eda'shoołchíinii baa nídeesht'ííł: . . . (1 Corinthians 7:1)<sup>1</sup>

Now for the matters you wrote about: . . . (1 Corinthians 7:1)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

There is a question what judging and judgment mean in the Bible – not just in the Navajo Bible, but in Scripture generally. The verse quoted above seems to have nothing to do with judging, but actually it provides a wonderful context for studying what judgment in the Bible is all about. The above passage brings us to the heart of the matter. When Paul says, Now what you wrote about *baa nídeesht'ííł* ("I will deal with it"), he is offering to evaluate the church's questions and take action on them. In the same way, when God judges, these two elements are always present and both the decision He reaches and any action associated with it can be either positive or negative. If we think God's decisions are always negative, what does this say about our concept of God?

## The Book of Judges

Where should we start when searching for insight into the idea of judgment and judging in the Bible? I would suggest the book of Judges. Consider chapter 2 for example. Below I quote the last eight verses of this chapter for the reader's convenience. Verses 1-15 say basically that when Israel went into Canaan, they served the Lord during the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived Joshua, but after that they were tempted to worship other gods. The reason for this is that they had not obeyed the Lord's command to break down the altars of the peoples they conquered. When they started worshiping these peoples' gods, the God they should have served no longer fought to save them from their enemies and the Israelites were in deep trouble. They had no power to overcome their enemies in battle and raiders went here and there through the land making their lives miserable. That brings us to vs. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Then the LORD raised up **judges** [šöptîm], who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. <sup>17</sup> Yet they would not listen to their **judges** but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the LORD's commands. <sup>18</sup> Whenever the LORD raised up a **judge** [šöpēt] for them, he was with the **judge** and saved them out of the

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<sup>1</sup> 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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hands of their enemies as long as the **judge** lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. <sup>19</sup> But when the **judge** died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways. <sup>20</sup> Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant that I laid down for their forefathers and has not listened to me, <sup>21</sup> I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. <sup>22</sup> I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their forefathers did." <sup>23</sup> The LORD had allowed those nations to remain; he did not drive them out at once by giving them into the hands of Joshua.

Notice the six examples of "judge" or "judges" in this passage. The popular concept of judging is that God judges the world by condemning it. Thus, judging means condemning. Is this what happens in Judges 2:16-19? Did God raise up leaders to condemn Israel, or to deliver Israel? "Then the LORD raised up judges [*šōpṭîm*], who saved them out of the hands of these raiders" (vs. 16). The task of a judge in the book of Judges was not to condemn, but to deliver or save. The judges were not sent to make things worse, but to make things better.

## Other Old Testament Examples

You will say, though, that this is just one passage. If we were to study the words further we would surely see that these verses are the exception and that judging really means getting down on people's cases. True or false? Well, let's look at the words. Actually there are two that we need to examine in their various forms – not "judge" and "judges," but the roots \**špṭ* and \**dyn*. Both mean "to judge," but we should be aware of any differences between them. In Judges 2 the word for "a judge" is *šōpēt*, from \**špṭ*.<sup>3</sup> In other passages we find *dîn* ("a cause"), *dān* ("to judge"), and *dayyan* ("a judge"), and other forms, all from \**dyn*.

### "Judge" from \**špṭ*

Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He **had led** [*šāpaṭ*] Israel twenty years. (Judges 16:31)

For the LORD is **our judge** [*šōpṭēnû*], the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us. (Isaiah 33:22)

The first example above (Judges 16:31) uses a verb form (*šāpaṭ*) which shows that "judge" (from \**špṭ*) can mean "lead." The judges that God raised up for Israel in the book of Judges led and governed the people. They did this in order to bring relief and

<sup>3</sup> For the corresponding verb form "to judge" see Gen 16:5. "Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge [*yīšpōṭ*] between you and me."

deliverance from their enemies. The second example (Isaiah 33:22) uses a form that functions as a noun. (It's actually a participle.) In this verse the Lord is "our judge," which is roughly equivalent to "our lawgiver" and "our king." If the Lord is our Lawgiver and our King, what does that mean in practical terms? It means, according to this verse, that He "will save us." This is the same concept of judging that we find in the book of Judges, where God raises up judges for the purpose of saving His people from their enemies.

### "Judge" from *\*dyn*

Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated [*dān*] me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan. (Genesis 30:6)

May the LORD be our judge [*l'dayyan*] and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand." (1 Samuel 24:15)

A father to the fatherless, a defender [*w'dayyan*] of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (Psalm 68:5)

He defended [*dān*] the cause [*dīn*] of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 22:16)

There is no one to plead [*dān*] your cause [*dīnēk*], no remedy for your sore, no healing for you. (Jeremiah 30:13)

There's a footnote to the first passage above (Genesis 30:6), which says that "Dan here means he has vindicated." This might not be a word we use every day. What does it mean to "vindicate" someone? It means to establish or declare that the person is in the right. Vindicating is the opposite of condemning.

In the second example we have a noun form (*dayyan*) which means "a judge." Here David is talking to King Saul. David was saying, I'm in the right. If God takes up my cause against you, He will vindicate me and deliver me from your hand. The same form occurs in Psalm 68:5, where it is translated "defender." God is "A father to the fatherless, a defender [*dayyan*] of widows." The word literally means "judge," so in the context of Psalm 68:5 "judge" means the same thing as "defender."

In both examples from Jeremiah (above) we find the same idea. When God defends someone's cause in Jeremiah 22:16 and 30:13, "defend" is from *dān*, "cause" is from *dīn*, and both of these forms are from the same Hebrew root *\*dyn*.

### Discussion

Have we come to the part about condemnation yet? Not yet. The examples we've given all convey the idea of helping, delivering, saving, defending. As you might suspect, this is only part of the picture. Not every decision a judge makes will be favorable. In some cases he will vindicate, in others he will condemn. A decision can be of either kind.

This fact raises an important point. Judging in the Bible means taking matters in hand, not letting things slide, doing what needs to be done. If Israel is surrounded by enemies, taking matters in hand means raising up a military leader to defeat God's enemies. This is the same idea as delivering or saving. But of course if someone is the wrong, then judging will have to take the form of condemning and punishing the wrong doer. My point is not that God's judging excludes condemnation, but rather than it includes deliverance and salvation. He does not always condemn.

## New Testament Examples

Consider two examples of judging from the New Testament. One of these is from Paul, the other from the gospels.

### Paul

Toward the end of Paul's life he looks back over what the Lord has done through him and forward to what is in store for him when Jesus comes again and says this:

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8)

Notice that, for Paul, receiving the crown of righteousness is something that takes place in the context of judgment. The One who gives him this crown is "the Lord, the righteous Judge." He does so "on that day." On what day? On the day when the Lord sits as Judge, i.e., the day of judgment. Since we're talking here about a day of judgment, the only thing Paul can only look forward to is condemnation. Is this correct? No. He speaks of the day of final judgment as a time when God will freely give him the crown of righteousness – the sign and seal of a life lived in obedience to God. Is that bad news? It doesn't sound bad to me. Paul's concept of judgment might be different from ours. If so, which one is right?

### The gospels

We have another glimpse of the day of judgment in Matthew 25, where Jesus speaks of separating the sheep from the goats. I'll let you read the story. It occupies the last third of the chapter – vss. 31-46. Notice that in the story of the sheep and the goats everyone is surprised. "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'" (vs. 37). As for the goats, "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'" (vs. 44). Thus, the sheep are surprised to be sheep and the goats are surprised to be goats. No one gets what s/he expects.

### Discussion

Notice that if the Lord separates two classes of people on judgment day, he is giving two different types of decisions. One group is condemned – I grant this – but the

other group is vindicated. They can't be separated and put in different groups if all receive the same judgment. On the day when the Lord sits as Judge, Paul expects to be vindicated. He will be put on the right with the rest of God's sheep, i.e., with those who were willing to follow Him. Is he the only one? "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

How many people over the ages have longed for Christ's appearing? We don't have to guess. The Bible tells us.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9)

When do these people receive their white robes and palm branches of victory? On the day of judgment. Paul speaks of a "crown of righteousness"; John speaks of people with "white robes" and holding "palm branches in their hands," but it is all part of the same thing. These people are saved and their salvation is announced and confirmed on the day of judgment. These people have longed for Christ's appearing and God accepts them (see 1 John 4:17).

## The Navajo Text

What does all of this have to with the Navajo text of 1 Corinthians 7:1? The key here is in the words *baa nídéesht'ííł* ("I will deal with it"). With these words Paul is saying, now we'll take up the matter you wrote about and deal with it. This is what judging was all about in the book of Judges and what it is through the rest of Scripture. Are there foreign enemies menacing Israel? Instead of letting them continue doing whatever they want, let's deal with them. Is there a dispute to settle? Let's get it settled. Judging means taking matters in hand and establishing a solution that is just and right.

Now that we've seen how judging can be either against someone or in his/her favor, we have a context for reviewing the negative references to judging. Here is a sampling of New Testament passages that should be studied together with 1 Corinthians 7:1. The context is different and therefore the meaning is different, although not entirely different. In all of these examples, including 1 Corinthians 7:1, the syntax is identically the same – in *baa nídéesht'ííł* ("I will deal with it," 1 Corinthians 7:1), and *baa nídíít'ííł* ("you [sg.] will deal with it"), and *yaa nídóot'ííł* ("s/he will deal with it"), and *haa nídóot'ííł* ("s/he will deal with one"), and so on.

I should mention that the passages quoted below are a representative sample of passages that could be brought into the comparison. This is not a comprehensive sample. But all – including 1 Corinthians 7:1 – can be, and must be, studied together.

Do not entertain an accusation [*baa nídíít'ííł*] against an elder [*hastóí da'oodlání alaqjí' naazíinii*] unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:19)

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge [*yaa nídóot'íitii*] the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: (2 Timothy 4:1)

For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," {30 Deut. 32:35} and again, "The Lord will judge [*yaa nídóot'íit*] his people." {30 Deut. 32:36; Psalm 135:14} (Hebrews 10:30)

to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge [*yaa nídóot'íitii*] of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, (Hebrews 12:23)

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged [*niihaa nídahódóot'íitgo*] more strictly. (James 3:1)

Since you call on a Father who judges [*haa nídóot'íit*] each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. (1 Peter 1:17)

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged [*baa nídahódóot'íitígi*] according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. (1 Peter 4:6)

For it is time for judgment [*baa dahwiidínóot'íitji'*] to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17)

to judge [*haa nídahódóot'íit*] everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 1:15)

They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge [*baa nídiit'íit*] the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10)

The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging [*baa nídahódóot'íit*] the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great- and for destroying those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:18)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment [*baa náhódóot'íitii*] of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. (Revelation 17:1)

Notice that four passages above deal with judging those who have accepted Christ and claim to be His (1 Timothy 5:19 ["an elder," i.e., *hastói da'oodlání alaqji' naazíinii* "a man who is a prominent Christian leader"]; Hebrews 10:30 ["his people"]; Hebrews 12:23 ["the spirits of righteous men made perfect"]; Revelation 6:10 ["the inhabitants of the earth"])

James 3:1 ["we who teach," i.e., in the church]; 1 Peter 4:17 ["the family of God"]), two deal with judging those who have clearly done evil (Revelation 6:10 ["the inhabitants of the earth," i.e., those who shed the martyrs' blood]; Revelation 17:1 ["the great prostitute"]). God does not hesitate to condemn the guilty, even when they are His and ought to know better, nor does He hesitate to condemn those have never accepted His authority (see 1 Peter 4:17). The case of the prostitute requires study. She is what she is, not because she doesn't know God, but because she does know Him – and has other lovers anyway.

## Discussion

### General references

Of special interest are the remaining six passages (above), which deal more generally with all mankind (2 Timothy 4:1 ["the living and the dead"]; Hebrews 12:23 ["all men"]; Peter 1:17 ["each man's work"]; 1 Peter 4:6 ["those who are now dead"]; Jude 1:15 ["everyone"]; Revelation 11:18 ["the dead"]). The reason why these six passages are especially interesting is that they include different types of people, who will receive different types of reward.

When John says "the dead," that takes in a lot of territory. In this group are some good people (Paul died, the martyrs of Revelation 6:10 died), and some bad people (those who brought about the deaths of Paul and the other martyrs). All of these died, good and bad, and all will be judged. Will all be condemned? Paul says that he, for one, will not be. On the day of judgment he will receive "the crown of righteousness" (see 2 Tim 4:8). The martyrs John mentions – those who, like Paul, died for their faith in Christ – will not be condemned either. They will be judged, but not condemned. The great prostitute, on the other hand, will be condemned. So judgment is not the same as condemnation. Nor should we confuse it with punishment. Instead, we should see judgment in the Bible as a form of evaluation.

"As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. <sup>10</sup> A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." (Daniel 7:9-10)

"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him." (Daniel 7:27)

### Judgments (plural)

When the Bible says "judgments" (plural) that can mean punishment, but here also this need not be. There are eighteen verses where NIV translates a Hebrew word as "judgments." In nine cases the meaning is negative (Isa 26:9; Jeremiah 1:16; 4:12; Ezekiel 14:21; Daniel 9:11; Hosea 6:5; Revelation 16:5, 7; 19:2). In eight cases the

meaning is positive (Deuteronomy 33:21; 1 Chronicles 16:12, 14; Psalms 48:11; 97:8; 105:5, 7; Romans 11:33). And in one case it is neutral (1 Corinthians 2:15). So we must be willing to make the necessary distinctions.

God's judgments against people who do wrong will always appear hostile,<sup>4</sup> even though He has good reason for what He does and never acts unfairly or in a way that is inconsistent with His character of steadfast love. If anyone thinks God was harsh in the Old Testament, they should do some more reading. Read not only what God did to His people, but what His people did first that provoked God. Also read about how long God put up their ways before bringing about the punishment they richly deserved. We can be glad that we have so wise and loving a God, and they should have been glad that He punished them so lightly. In our study we need to come to know God. The enemy has roundly misrepresented Him.

## Conclusion

Was Paul "judging" the question the church put to him? Yes. In a sense, he was. He was evaluating it and taking the matter in hand, dealing with it for the church's benefit. In English Paul's casual reference to dealing with "the matters you wrote about" (1 Corinthians 7:1) seems to be totally void of any doctrinal interest. But when compared with the Navajo, a very important doctrinal issue emerges. Discussing it from this perspective has been, in my view, entirely useful. Don't under-estimate the value of your Navajo Bible.

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<sup>4</sup> See Deuteronomy 33:21; 1 Chronicles 16:12, 14; Psalm 48:11; 97:8; 105:5, 7; Isaiah 26:9; Jeremiah 1:16; 4:12; Ezekiel 14:21; Daniel 9:11; Hosea 6:5; Romans 11:33; 1 Corinthians 2:15; Revelation 16:5, 7; 19:2.