

Acts 19:15 in the Navajo Bible

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

Nidi níłch'i bi'iiníziinii haadzí'go ábidíniid, Jesus bééhasin, Paul áldó' bééhasin, nidi nihíshá' éí háí ádaah't'í? (Acts 19:15) ¹

One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15, NIV) ²

Introduction

We're starting in the middle of a story here. Paul had been working in the city of Ephesus, telling people about Jesus. This was a pagan city in what today would be called Turkey. In this city there were some Jews who cast evil spirits out of people by using the name of Jesus. They did not believe in Jesus themselves, but used His name because of the power associated with it. A Jewish leader named Sceva had seven sons who went around doing this. This is the background for our verse.

Discussion

On one occasion the seven sons of Sceva attempted to cast out an evil spirit, but the spirit wouldn't leave. Instead he said, . . . Well, but that's the question. What exactly did he say? In Navajo he said *Jesus bééhasin* and *Paul áldó' bééhasin*. This sounds like he said the same thing twice. Some English translations give the same idea, e.g., New Revised Standard: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"³

The New International Version (quoted above) makes it sound like the two statements are not the same. In NIV what the spirit means when he says "I know Jesus" is different from what he means when he says "I know Paul." In this, NIV has conveyed the right meaning. The two statements are not the same. In the original, different Greek words are used for knowing Jesus and knowing about Paul. The first time the Navajo says *bééhasin* the Greek word is *ginōskō*. The second time it says *bééhasin* the Greek word is *epistamai*. You don't have to know Greek to see that *ginōskō* and *epistamai* are not the same. They are different words. The one means "know," the other means "know about."

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

² Quotations designated (NIV) are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

³ Quotations marked NRSV are from *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.

I'm not saying the Navajo translation is wrong here. Both Greek words do mean "know," so it is not wrong say *bééhasin* twice. The point to notice is that, while they both mean "know," they convey different shades of meaning.

The reason why it's important to understand this is that knowing about Paul is not on the same level with knowing Jesus. Paul was a good man who preached about Jesus and wrote many of the letters now preserved in the New Testament. But when the verse says the evil spirit knew Jesus, that was something entirely different from what that spirit meant when he said he knew about Paul.

In heaven the Son of God had always been the Commander over all the angels. He could tell them to do because He had first told them to be. What I mean by this is that He was not only their Commander; He was their Creator. Then at some time in the distant past Lucifer deceived some of the angels and many of them joined his rebellion and were cast out of heaven along with him (see Revelation 12:7-9). These fallen angels well knew who Jesus was (although He wasn't called "Jesus" until He came to this earth a long time afterward), because He is the one who cast them out of heaven.

In Matthew 8:29 some demons say, "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. 'Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?' They knew exactly who Jesus was. In another passage James says, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder" (James 2:19). These fallen angels know what they have lost. They know they will come to a painful end, and that it was all unnecessary. They could stayed where they started, if they had been willing to obey the Son of God. But they didn't want to do that. They thought Lucifer (now called the devil or Satan) could offer them something better than what they already had.

Conclusion

We also need to know who Paul is. We need to read his letters for ourselves. But when it comes to Jesus, it's not enough to know who He is. And it's not enough to know Him in the same way that the evil spirit knew Him. Instead we need to know Jesus as our Friend and Savior. To us Jesus represents everything God wants to give us. Every good thing we can gain comes to us through Jesus. And more is true.

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

It's not just that we receive good things through Christ. He Himself is the Gift we receive. Once we have Jesus, that one blessing brings all others. He is what makes heaven what it is. Until we know Him, this Gift will seem small. As we experience Jesus day after day, and come to realize who He is and what He means to us, this one Gift will be more and more and other blessings will take their place behind this one, until Jesus becomes everything to us. Everything.

This kind of knowledge does not come in a day. It takes time to have an experience with Jesus and to come to know for ourselves how much He loves us and

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

that He is trustworthy under every circumstance. As another verse says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). If you have just come to know Jesus, don't give up. You have tapped into something good.