

# Acts 20:11 in the Navajo Bible

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Áádóó nidziiztáá nít'éí góde Paul hanásdzáago bááh dílzingo yidánígíí niyiizti'go dajíyáá' áádóó bił ahił dahojilne'go hoos'iid, áádóó índá hats'áá' dah diiyá. (Acts 20:11)

Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. (Acts 20:11, NIV)<sup>1</sup>

Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. (Acts 20:11, NLT)<sup>2</sup>

## The Nature of the Meal

There are a couple of interesting things about this passage as it comes down to us in Navajo. In the Navajo, and in the *New Living Translation* into English, the act of breaking bread at midnight is interpreted as a celebration of the Lord's Supper.

This undoubtedly was a celebration of the Lord's Supper, but not in a way that justifies treating this meal any differently from the one in vs. 7. The Greek is the same in both passages. In both cases the words mean simply "break bread." The fact is that every meal Christians ate after Jesus' death on the cross was a celebration of the Lord's Supper, when they thought about the significance of what they were doing.

Once Jesus said, "See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin" (Matthew 6:28). After that, whenever His followers walked by a field sprinkled with lilies they remembered His words and noticed that they didn't labor or spin (thread).

In the same way, when Jesus ate His last meal with the disciples before the crucifixion, "he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19). Do this in remembrance of me. What was He telling them when He said this? Do what in remembrance of me? Breaking bread. Whenever Christ followers broke bread at the beginning of a meal, they were reminded of His words and broke their bread in remembrance of Him. There was no ceremony that commemorated Christ's death that was separate from any other meal. Every time Christians broke bread, they remembered what Jesus had done for them. Every supper was the Lord's Supper. So was every breakfast.

So we don't need to make distinctions that aren't in the text. Breaking bread in vs. 11 is no different from breaking bread in vs. 7. Both of these occasions were meals

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<sup>2</sup>

and therefore both brought to mind what Jesus had done and said the night before He died. So did every other meal they disciples ate. So should every meal we eat. Every time we break bread we should think of Jesus. This is one point.

## The Nature of the Conversation

The other thing to point out has to do with what happened after the meal. In the Navajo translation the implication is that people gathered around and talked back and forth with each other until sun up. And I'm sure that is part of what happened. But the Greek word *homilēsas* ("after talking," NIV) refers to the action of one person.<sup>3</sup> The word is singular. If it referred to a conversation involving many people the form of the word would have been *homilēsan*. I'm not saying that no one but Paul uttered a word on this occasion, but the focus of the passage is on the activity of one person, i.e., Paul. Paul talked until midnight in vs. 7, and he then talked until dawn in vs. 11.

I can only speak for myself here, but I think that if I had been there in Troas that Saturday night listening to the apostle Paul, and knew he would be leaving the next day, and didn't know when I or any of the others would ever see or hear him again, I think I would have spent most of my time listening. The sense that the Navajo translators give the passage (*bił ahit dahojilne'go* "talking with each other") is not wrong, and it surely captures one aspect of what took place, but I don't think it captures the primary thrust of what the Greek text is trying to convey.

## Final Comment

Don't let anyone misunderstand what I'm saying. The Navajo People can get down on their knees and thank God for the fact that they have a Bible of this quality in their language. It is sensitively and honestly translated. I have the greatest respect for the translators, some of whom I know personally. *Diyin God Bizaad* 2000 is an excellent version and one which deserves the closest study. That's why I've been studying it closely. It was my close study of it that caused me to notice the two small points that I've written about in this paper. And since I thought these things were interesting myself, I thought I'd pass them along to you.

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<sup>3</sup> We have a word in English that refers to preaching. The word is "homiletics." This Greek word is where our English word "homiletics" comes from. This would be consistent with saying that mostly what Paul was doing between midnight and sun up was preaching.