

Ephesians 5:14 in the Navajo Bible

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Díí ɓaa kót'éego kót'éego ha'oodzít', Ałhoshí nílíinii, ch'éénídzííd, dasínítsáádéé' nídiidááh!
Áko Christ nik'i' diidíin doo. (Ephesians 5:14)¹

for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (Ephesians 5:14)²

Introduction

In this paper we deal with two textual issues and with a figure of speech. At the beginning of the verse, where NIV says, "for it is light that makes everything visible," the Navajo translators omit that clause. A second item we can discuss, although it has nothing to do with how the verse is translated, is the question of where the quotation comes from. No one knows. The figure of speech is Paul's reference to sleep. In some passages he uses sleep as a metaphor for death. Here he uses it as a metaphor for spiritual inattention or lethargy.

First Textual Issue

T'áá altsoní bida'diidlaadii éi yit'í neheleehígíí éi adinídíin neheleeh. (Ephesians 5:13)

But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, (Ephesians 5:13)

The first part of vs. 14 really does pretty much repeat what was said at the end of vs. 13 (above). The Navajo translators avoid this repetition by beginning vs. 14 at the second clause. They simply leave the first clause untranslated.

There is no doctrinal problem involved in doing this. How could there be if they have just said all the same things in vs. 13? So whatever Paul says is coming through. It's just that they don't include all the words of vs. 14 if that's the only verse you're looking at.

Second Textual Issue

The quotation in vs. 14 is from an undetermined source. It has a biblical ring to it, but there's no Old Testament passage we can turn to and find exactly these words. A number of passages, other than Ephesians 5:14, say, "Wake up!" in one way or another. Below I quote some of them.

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 are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Old Testament

'**Wake up, wake up**, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song! Arise, O Barak! Take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam.' (Judges 5:12)

"They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I **wake up** so I can find another drink?" (Proverbs 23:35)

But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, **wake up** and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead. (Isaiah 26:19)

Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. (Joel 1:5)

Woe to him who says to wood, 'Come to life!' Or to lifeless stone, '**Wake up!**' Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. (Habakkuk 2:19)

New Testament

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to **wake up** from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11)

Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. (Revelation 3:2)

Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not **wake up**, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. (Revelation 3:2)

Discussion

The earlier passage that comes closest in its wording to the one we are studying is Romans 13:11. I'm not saying Paul quotes himself in Ephesians 5:14, only that Romans 13:11 sounds similar.

Actually, the quotation itself does not have an Old Testament flavor to it. One possibility is that it doesn't quote Romans 13:11, but that Romans 13:11 and Ephesians 5:14 both quote a saying that was commonly used by early Christians. A number of these were in circulation.

Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of **the saying**, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. (1 Corinthians 4:6)

Here is **a trustworthy saying** that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners- of whom I am the worst. (1 Timothy 1:15)

Here is **a trustworthy saying**: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (1 Timothy 3:1)

This is **a trustworthy saying** that deserves full acceptance ¹⁰ (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:9)

Here is **a trustworthy saying**: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ ¶ This is **a trustworthy saying**. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. (Titus 3:4-8)

The above six passages record early Christian sayings, that Paul specifically identifies as such. If these all contain sayings, perhaps Romans 13:11 and Ephesians 5:14 contain sayings as well – things that Paul's readers might also have heard.

Death as Spiritual Lethargy

The idea of sleep as a metaphor for spiritual lethargy is straightforward and notice it involves a passing reference to death. "This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you'" (Ephesians 5:14b). There's the quotation we were just talking about. The first time we saw it the question was, Where does it come from? The second time the question is, What does it mean? But as I say, the meaning is not difficult. Being sleepy in a physical way reminded Paul of what it was like to be drowsy and inattentive in regard to spiritual things.

Nine times Paul speaks of death as a sleep. The nine passages where he does this are 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14, 15; 5:10.³ But here he uses the same words to convey a different metaphor.

Discussion

One thing this verse does, which gives it a measure of doctrinal interest, is to place Paul's other metaphors involving sleep in perspective. When he compares sleep with death, that captures the idea that in death we are not conscious of anything that happens in the world. A second bit of instruction hidden away in the many places where Paul compares sleep with death

³ See <http://www.thebooklet.org/Documents/Papers/NavBible1Cor1130.pdf> for related discussion.

is that death is temporary. Being resurrected is like being awakened from a deep sleep. In another place Paul compares death with sin. He isn't saying sin leads to death, although it does, but that death is in some way similar to sin.

As for you, **you were dead** in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when **we were dead** in transgressions- it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1-5)⁴

Conclusion

Ephesians 5:14 is interesting for a number of reasons. First, in the Navajo translation its first clause is omitted. Second, it contains a quotation – or perhaps a popular saying – that comes from a source no one can identify. And third, it uses the idea of sleep as a metaphor for spiritual lethargy to show that we should pay close attention to spiritual things.

⁴ See also Romans 6:11; 7:8; 8:10.