

Hebrews 4:2 in the Navajo Bible

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Háálá hane' yá'át'éehii bee Ízrel dine'é bił dahóóne'ígí át'éego nihí ałdó' bee nihit dahóóne'. Nidi ídą́á' hane' nilíinii deidiizts'á'ígíí t'áadoo biniyéhígóo deidiizts'á'ígíí, háálá deidiizts'á'ígíí t'áadoo dayoosdlaadgo nídeidiiláa da. (Hebrews 4:2)¹

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (Hebrews 4:2)²

Introduction

In this verse the NIV says, "we also had the gospel preached to us, just as they did." In the Navajo the emphasis is reversed: *Háálá hane' yá'át'éehii bee Ízrel dine'é bił dahóóne'ígí át'éego nihí ałdó' bee nihit dahóóne'*. Here the sense is that the good news preached to Israel long ago has been presented also to us. The effect is the same. But my question is, what was the good news (or Good News) that God presented to Israel long ago? Another way of asking this question is, what is the gospel that God has presented to us?

What Is the Message?

Asking this question should make us ask exactly what the gospel is. The Bible writer says that, in some sense, the two messages (to them and to us) are the same. If we define our terms in such a way that they are irreconcilably different, we should ask a different question, i.e., whether our concept of the gospel is fully biblical.

I don't claim – and the writer doesn't claim – that no distinctions are possible. After all, he just finished saying that, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1-2). That's a distinction, but it's not a difference in the sense of making what was said by the prophets and by the Son incompatible with each other.

If we make the "old law" fundamentally different from the "new law," is that position consistent with Hebrews 4:2? Notice how the writer distinguishes between what the people heard then and what we hear now. He says, "the message was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith" (Hebrews 4:2, above). This is not a different message, but a different response. The people then did not exercise faith, whereas now, after the cross, we do exercise faith.³ This is a different response, but not a different message. If

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.

³ Not all people refused to exercise faith. The Israelites did eventually enter Canaan.

"message" (in the second part of the verse) is the same as "gospel" (in the first part of the verse), as the author implies, that part remains constant.

What Is the Response?

We just said that "those who heard did not combine it [the message] with faith" (above), whereas we do combine the message with faith. But what does it mean to lack faith? The present example can help us answer this question. During Moses' lifetime the issue was whether or not to enter Canaan and possess the land God had promised. The message was, Go in. The response was, We can't.

The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? (Numbers 14:11)

This passage says the people did not believe God. They would not go in and let God give them the land He had promised. In Numbers 14:11, and also in Hebrews 4:2, not believing God is described as a lack of faith. But there is one more thing to notice. Consider vs. 11.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:11)

In vs. 2 the people lack faith. In vs. 11 they lack obedience. These are two parts of one whole. There is a relationship between faith and obedience – between believing God and doing what He says. And from comparing these two verses we would have to say it's a pretty close relationship.

Conclusion

The problem in the first place, and the reason why the people would not obey God and take over the land, is that they didn't think they could do it. They didn't believe God. Their disobedience followed from a lack of faith. Their lack of faith led to disobedience. These are two sides of one coin. What we believe always shapes our actions. Our actions always follow from what we believe.

The good news in every generation is that God loves us and accepts us despite our weaknesses and faults. He is willing to do things for us and give us the help we need. In these last days He has told us this by His Son. Through Christ God has given us some wonderful promises. One thing He has promised, and is always willing to give us, is His Holy Spirit – a Spirit of believing and of obeying.

All the principles that are present in the message God has given us by His Son were present in the message God gave His people in earlier generations through the prophets. So let us combine the message with faith! God has not changed. He was faithful long ago, and He is faithful now. He will fulfill all His promises to us if we believe and obey Him.