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Navajo Nation

by William P. Wilson, M.D.

-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

I had not realized that there is a third world country in the USA, but there is. It is the Navajo Nation. This country is a huge area in New Mexico, Arizona and Utah that is mostly desert and mountains. I recently spent nine days in the area doing a pastors' conference, preaching and lecturing. The country is awe inspiring for the stark beauty of the landscape. There are huge buttes, volcanic cones and mountains with enormous areas of desert that will only grow sagebrush, tumbleweed, and in some places, pinon pine, and juniper. In the mountains there are ponderosa pines and in a few places aspens. There is almost no animal life to be seen except for a few small herds of sheep and occasional cows and horses. While there I went to Canyon de Chelly with its Anasazi ruins and a few modern Navajo homesteads. We went into many areas on the reservation that were really off the beaten path. The two towns where we stayed were Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation, and Shiprock another town of comparable size. They really are no more than large villages with widely scattered houses and projects built by HUD. There are almost no business establishments in these towns. Only Window Rock has a restaurant. Both have a motel and a supermarket, and a few other stores that range from small mercantile establishments to a Radio Shack. There is an agricultural project run by the tribal government, but I was told it lost \$1,000,000 last year.

When you leave the reservation and go to Farmington, AZ or Cortez, CO you are once again in the USA. These are thriving towns surrounded by irrigated agricultural enterprises. These are owned by Mormons who make the desert bloom. In those two towns there are motels, restaurants, stores of all kinds, auto dealerships and well-kept homes. There is activity in the business areas, and small industries abound. Infrastructure exists to support the economy. Interestingly some of the businesses are owned and operated by Navajos and Utes. Native Americans seem to patronize all of the businesses there.

Sadly, on the reservations there is a 44% unemployment rate. The educational level is not very high and there were only 300 college graduates out of a population of 298,000 last year. There is a community college on the reservation, but I was not able to find out how many persons attend the two branches in Window Rock and Shiprock.

Medical care is supplied by the Indian Health Service, a US government operation. They have a nice hospital in Shiprock. It has 60 beds and a large clinic area. There are acute care units distributed around the reservation. I had a chance to talk to one of the psychiatrists there and he gave me an overview of their mental health program that they run like a community mental health unit in any town.

George King, a Methodist evangelist who had arranged for me to go on this mission, is one of the most aggressive witnesses for the Lord I have ever traveled with. He witnessed to everyone who would listen. On one occasion, while in the Museum at Window Rock, George began witnessing to the girl who was telling us about the

exhibits, he would move toward her and she kept backing off. Finally she went behind her desk to escape him. She was rescued by a phone call. In addition to his witnessing and preaching, George had a pickup load of clothes he had taken to distribute among the churches. They either give them to their parishioners or sell them in yard sales to make money for the church.

God opened doors for us to proclaim the gospel. A pastors' conference was scheduled for Friday and Saturday. The woman who was supposed to be the speaker had not confirmed her appointment and when every effort to reach her failed, the director of the training center asked me to speak. I gave five lectures on the spiritual life of man and how it changes the lives of those who live it. There were 22 Navajo Methodist pastors and their wives at the conference. Elmer Yazzie, a local pastor, told me that what I had taught was just what they needed. Roger Tsohis, the director of the training center was most grateful for our presence. On Saturday afternoon when we had finished we drove up to Window Rock where I stayed with Paul West. He is the director of the Four Corners ministry of the Methodist church. He had arranged for me to preach on Sunday in the First Methodist Church of Window Rock. I preached there on the cross and its meaning to Christians. The service was not well attended, but it had nothing to do with me being there. The church has problems. On Sunday night I preached at the biggest church in the area. It was an independent Pentecostal congregation of about 550 people. The Sunday morning service was packed out, but the evening service was only 50% filled. We did, though, have a good response to the sermon and prayed for healing for a number of people. I loved the music. It was almost all country, western and black gospel. They played and sang songs like "Send the Light, I'll fly Away, Jesus on The Main Line (tell Him what you want)" and others. When we began the service only the song leader and the pianist were there. Soon a guitarist showed up and finally the drummer came and picked up the beat. Since I love that kind of music, I was in "Hog Heaven." The pastor of the church said that he thinks they probably have the largest Native American congregation in the world. I felt honored to preach there.

On Monday and Tuesday we distributed clothes to outlying churches. In the process we toured the reservation. Canyon de Chelly was a unique experience. We went up a dry river bottom with cliffs that gradually increased in height on both sides. They eventually reached 800 to a 1,000 feet in height. On several cliff sites there were ruins of the Anasazi Indian culture. We could not go into them since they are quite fragile. But they were impressive. There were rock paintings at two of the sites. Near by was Mesa Verde where you can go into the ruins. It is near Cortez, Colorado. I had been there before.

On Wednesday night I lectured at the Victory Life Church. It is both a rescue mission and a church. I did a teaching on demonology. Robert Soh, the Native American pastor has a deliverance ministry and was glad for me to speak on the subject. Interestingly we had two persons who were demonized come forward for deliverance, two for salvation and a number of others for various reasons. We prayed for them all.

The most disturbing thing about my time is the fact that there are signs everywhere telling the Navajos to keep their traditions. This includes their native religion that is pure animism. There is an undercurrent that says don't mess with the white

man's religion. Many of the Navajos think they are still shepherders. Such a belief discourages entrepreneurialism. In the same way since land is tribally owned and can only be leased for no more than 60 years, industries do not come. The rather uneducated work force and a 50% incidence of alcoholism among the males would make any company think twice about putting any kind of industry in the area. One other hindrance is the lack of water. Navajos cannot own their own homes. This is something that could motivate them to work harder so they can have the pride of ownership. With all these handicaps it is not surprising that we have a piece of government sponsored third world in our country.

There is one bright spot. The Navajo youth of today are refusing to speak the Navajo language and are dressing like kids everywhere. If they can be persuaded to continue their schooling and can be taught a value system that makes a favorable difference in their lives it may all get turned around. Pray for them.