



Native Sons



Equipping Native Leaders; Empowering Native Christians

GOVERNMENT WISDOM

- Quitman, GA—If you own chickens it is illegal to let them cross the road. So much for that joke.
- VT—It is illegal for a woman to get false teeth without her husbands permission. *Personally, I'm gonna let her get the teeth.*
- KY—It is illegal for a woman to marry the same man more than three times. *Do they really want to do this in KY?*
- AZ—It is illegal to have a donkey sleeping in your bathtub after 7 PM. *I guess you need to wake it up and put it to bed after 7.*
- AL—It is illegal to drive blindfolded. *I could understand why you would want to do this in NYC or LA.*
- LA—It is illegal to send a surprise pizza to someone. The fine is \$500. *Glad I live in AZ, it's OK if you send me a pizza!*

PRAYER POINTS

- Levi, Alicia, and the boys.
- Guidance developing the CNLDs.
- For God to raise up Native pastors and missionaries to Native people.

DELBERT GORDON

"Growing up, I was into Navajo traditionalism. I thought all religions were the same. But Christ is like clear water. Traditionalism is not clear; it has stuff in it." Delbert Gordon was talking about his life with Christ. He is Navajo Christian and silversmith from Calvary AG in Yahtahey, NM—the church where Pastor Bob Smith ministers (Sept. 2021 newsletter). Gordon was one of ten children and was raised in traditional Navajo spirituality. He has four brothers and five sisters. Often, in large Native families, the parents do not keep all their children with them. Instead, aunts, uncles, and grandparents help raise them. Likewise, Gordon's father's parents raised him. His parents were around, but he did not see much of his other brothers.



Delbert Gordon

Gordon's family lived in Fort Defiance, AZ, but when he was 5-6, he was sent to boarding school in Tohatchi, NM. He did not like it and ran away back home. Navajos are, and always have been, shepherders. Gordon says, "I grew up herding sheep, and I learned a lot. I never thought I would stand before people and teach them about Jesus. Teaching people is a lot like herding sheep. You learn to care for them. You learn to tell when they are hungry, need water, and other things. Teaching at church is like standing before the gate of the sheep corral. They are ready for the gate to

open to go out and graze. God's Word is food and water for us. We get food and living water from the Bible; it is the Lord taking care of us." Gordon teaches the adult Sunday School on Sunday mornings.

When Gordon was 12, his mother died, which was very hard on him. Around this time, his family wanted him to return to school. So, the family moved to NM, and he re-entered the public boarding school. He attended from 4th through 11th grade. However, he did not graduate. He says, "I had a lot of things going on as a teenager. I am not blaming anyone, but I was also holding onto something that I never told anyone about."

Delbert indicates that boarding school was

very hard. "They give you a room with a bed, locker, and other things. You need to learn to take care of these things for yourself. I learned how to sweep, mop, and do other chores. You learn discipline at boarding school." Although boarding school was hard for Delbert, he says, "I thank God for it because I learned a lot, and I learned discipline. I know that God helped me while I was there too."

Delbert is a self-taught silversmith. "I started in my teens, maybe around 18-19. It was really a hobby. Some people like to draw. I thought I would try silversmithing. I started with simple stuff. I have been learning as I go. People come and say, 'can you make this?' It just goes on. I make both big and small things." Delbert does not wear his own jewelry, nor does he set up booths at the various arts and crafts festivals. Many local stores carry his work, and people from as far away as Japan have him create custom items for them. He never advertises; the stores and individuals come to him. Others know about his work by word of mouth or by seeing his name on something he made. Delbert keeps very busy and makes some very elaborate jewelry. He says, "It's true, God gives you gifts, and He works

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Theresa and I are well. Theresa's mother Shirley flew in from VT in early November and will be with us again until May. Theresa continues to enjoy teaching. I continue to work on the Centers for Native Leadership Development. I have also begun seeking to recruit others to teach courses and create video PowerPoint lessons.

Levi, Alicia, and the boys are doing well. Levi is enjoying his new job, and Alicia continues to enjoy nursing. Unfortunately, Levi & Dillon caught COVID in early December. They are fine, but the entire family had to quarantine for 10 days.

Caleb and Erin are now married. We flew out to GA at the end of October to attend the wedding. Levi officiated. It was a very unusual

wedding. They had a combination of an "Until Death Do Us Part" and a Viking theme. Caleb and Erin did all their own decorating. Erin made her own wedding outfit, and Caleb forged a sword he wore across his back during the ceremony. They also both wore wolf skins. All the groomsmen carried Viking hatchets, and the best man also had a long sword across his back. Theresa met Erin for the first time just before the wedding, and they hit it off well. We finally met many of those that Caleb works with and Erin's family.

Anyway, as always, thanks for all your prayers and support!

HAVE A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS & WONDER-FILLED NEW YEAR!



Caleb & Erin's Wedding

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through these gifts. I do not boast about myself. Jesus told me, 'I gave you your gift with your hands.'" If you Google Delbert's full name, you can find his jewelry online.

Delbert did not grow up knowing Jesus, and his walk with the Lord has not always been easy. He used to drink, and chew Skol. "I used to think that the Bible was only for white people. I thought, 'I am Navajo. I am not one of those smart people.' But God says His salvation is for everyone who believes in Him. It takes years to grow up. We don't just shoot up when we are born." He says it is very hard moving from traditionalism to Christ. "The Navajo people instill tradition in you, and once you begin to know the Lord, it is a different story. When you read the Bible, it teaches you. We Navajo hold onto traditionalism, and we hold onto a lot of stuff that is twisted (spiritually)." It was often hard for Delbert to come out of traditionalism and his wife, Jennie, are thankful for the missionaries that came and loved the people and taught truth out of the Bible,

Delbert told me that he gave his life to the Lord on his own while working on jewelry. He did not know it, but his wife and family were praying for him. He was living the "Navajo way." He says, "I knew about the churches around, the Christian Reformed and the LES (Lutheran Evangelical Synod). I thought, is it really true? Why are there so many (different) churches? I watched my wife and her family, who were Christians, to see if it was really true. One morning I was hungover and sick. All of a sudden, it came to me, 'I want to know Jesus.' There was a radio on my workbench, and I turned it to a Christian station in Navajo. I was listening to the preacher talk. He said, 'I am going to pray for you.' I wanted him to pray for me. I thought to myself, 'Jesus, I want you. I need this salvation

right now.' Then I felt something coming down from my head like oil. I started laughing and felt it going down all the way to the tip of my toes. I tried to stop it, but I couldn't. I was wondering what was happening. I had never heard anything about receiving the Holy Spirit from anyone." His mother-in-law could hear him and came and asked what was going on, but he told her, "Nothing," as he continued laughing. This encounter with the Lord reminds me of Psalm 133, which compares people living together in unity with the anointing of Aaron. It also reminds me of Acts 2, where many thought the disciples were drunk after receiving the Holy Spirit. Apparently, they were laughing as well. This was around 1980 or 1981. Delbert was healed from drinking and chewing tobacco, and he began going to church steadily.

Sometime later, he fell back into drinking again and had gone away from his family. He was hungover and sick working on jewelry at his aunt's workbench. He says, "I saw little demons. They looked like gremlins. They were small, ranging from 12-36 inches tall. I looked around, and something spoke to me that was not God. It said, 'If you want to end what you are going through, then take this flux.'" Flux is used for soldering and is clearly labeled as poisonous. All the little demons were laughing and encouraging him to take it. "I thought to myself, this will not solve anything. Then I remembered that I had been taught to call on the name of Jesus. I just thought, 'Jesus!' and all the little creatures that had been all around me disappeared." Delbert says, "It was a teaching for me. I fell, but He still loved me. I tell others this. There is a Satan around. I've seen it, and I tell others about this. Satan is around. He is here to hurt us, but if we think 'Jesus,' He will

save us and heal us. He never gives up on us, even though we sin."

About 3 years later, the pastor gave an altar call for those needing prayer. Delbert went forward, saying in his heart, "Lord, I need You." He says, "Jesus spoke to me, 'Do you remember when I came to you, and something came on you? That was Me, and I healed you.' This reassured me that Jesus had saved my life. After that, I did not want to do things I shouldn't. This is how I know He is the real, True God—He changed my life."

In truth, Delbert and Jennie tell of repeated times when he has rededicated his life to the Lord, but he has walked with the Lord for 45 years now. He says, "I can't say my sin is bigger. Sin is sin. I can't explain how God works, but He is a teacher and is with us along the way. I still fail, but He encourages me not to do things again. I used to isolate myself and not communicate with anyone. Now I talk about Jesus, about Who He is, and what He can do for anyone.

Delbert and Jennie said they are very thankful for the many missionaries that came to the reservation when they were young. There were many more of them back then. "Back then, they were more loving and understanding, probably more than today. They went far from home to rural areas (on the reservations), just like those that went to places like Africa. They meant well, and we are thankful that God brought them in. Without them, we would have been lost."

"Growing up, I was into Navajo traditionalism. I thought all religions were the same. But Christ is like clear water. Traditionalism is not clear; it has stuff in it." So, you can't mix Christianity with the Navajo way because they are not the same. There must be clear water, and Jesus is that clear water.



Atsidi Sani

and saddles with silver, which the Navajo admired. The first Native metalsmiths were the Navajo. They learned blacksmithing from Hispanic smiths in the northwest villages of NM.

In the 1860s, several Navajo blacksmiths began using their smithing skills to work with silver. Among these was Atsidi Sani, who was shown how to work silver by the Spaniards around 1865. Other early Navajos applied their smithing skills and gear on silver. This transfer of skills shaped the design & technology of Navajo silversmithing for decades. The earliest Navajo silversmiths made tools from iron and steel scraps. They also

Navajo Silversmithing

traded for commercially produced hammers, shearers, and files when they were able.

The earliest jewelry was decorated by chiseling or filing grooves on the face and edges of the jewelry. "Rocker work" was created by "walking" a flat-tipped edge tool on the silver to make zig-zag engraved lines. Punches were used to make "O" impressions. The ends of files and other textured metals were also used to fashion designs.

Atsidi Sani taught his 4 sons silversmithing, and he and they taught other Navajos. Silversmithing spread quickly among the Navajo because of their love for silver decorations. Henry Dodge moved to a home near Fort Defiance in Houck, AZ. He married a Navajo woman and brought in a blacksmith and a Mexican silversmith. Many years later, the Navajo were freed from their 5-year confinement at Fort Sumner. Afterward, Atsidi Sani came to Dodge's Indian agency and learned from the 2 silversmiths, thus refining his skills further.

Around the 1880s, the Navajo began adding turquoise to their jewelry. This created a huge

demand for their work among the other tribes, throughout the southwest, and eventually among tourists traveling west by train. Indian traders took the Navajo jewelry to CA to sell to those living in the cities. This generated an even greater demand for Navajo silver jewelry. In 1918, Navajo women began silversmithing to meet the growing demand for Navajo jewelry.

In 1872 the Zuni learned silversmithing from the Navajos, and around 1890, the Zuni taught the Hopi. Initially, the Navajo melted US coins for silver, and later they used Mexican pesos. Today, Navajo jewelry remains a distinct art form that is highly valued throughout the southwest and worldwide

Delbert Gordon Pendant & Bracelet

