THE NAZARENE SECT

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The word that the Turtle[1] uses in referring to Paul's religious association, while Paul is standing trial before Felix, is commonly translated as 'sect.' It's written that Paul was 'a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes' (Acts 24:5).

The word 'sect' is Greek is 'αιρεσεωσ (*hay-ray-see-ohs*), and is used six times in Acts, and always refers to a sect (of the Sadducees, 5:17; of the Pharisees who believes in Yeshua, 15:5; our verse in 24:5; 24:14 where Paul calls it such; 26:5 where Paul again uses it, and 28:22 where the Jews in Rome ask Paul about 'this sect').

In half of the places, 5:17; 15:5; and 26:5, the word can and does stand on it's own merit, as 'sect'. Wesley Perschbacher tells us that the Greek word means, 'strictly a choice or option; hence, a sect' or a 'faction'.[2] Timothy Friberg also says that and adds,

> 'a separatist group characterized by loyalty to a certain school of thought and practice', a 'sect, party, school' and list Acts 5:17 as such.[3]

For the three places of Acts 24:5, 24:14 and 28:22 I think it would best translated as a 'heretical sect' and not just as 'a sect.' Why? Because in these three places, 'the sect of the Nazarenes' is being disparaged and should read, the 'heretical sect' of the Nazarenes. In Acts 24:5, the Turtle is not wanting to lend any validity or credence to the Nazarenes, and so he wouldn't imply that they were an entity that was valid. He speaks of Paul belonging to the Nazarenes, but says that Paul stirs 'up trouble among the Jews all throughout the world', and that 'he even tried to desecrate the Temple' (24:6). The implication is that this sect is not righteous or valid and hence, the Turtle was saying it was a heretical sect, thereby casting a dark shadow over Paul and his activities.

Paul, in defending himself, would repeat the Turtle's implication, calling it a heretical sect also: 'But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a heretical sect,' (Acts 24:14). And when Paul comes to Rome, the Jews that come to him would think of it as a heretical sect also. They would have said to Paul, 'For concerning this heretical sect, it's known to us that it's spoken against everywhere.'

The implication when the word is used in this kind of negative context, implies that the translators should have used, 'heretical sect', and not just 'sect.' This is also part of the Greek word's definition as both Perschbacher and Friberg bring out. Perschbacher says that by implication, it can mean, 'discord' or 'contention'. Friberg adds, 'in a religious sense, of belief contrary to established doctrine', and therefore, 'heresy' or 'false teaching.'[4] And when we step back for a moment, and listen to how the Greek word

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[1] I call him the Turtle because his name in Greek is Ter-tu-los, which to me sounds like a turtle. In English it comes across as Tertullus, which in itself is close to turtle, but the Greek really presents this 'great orator' as such. In Hebrew, this 'orator' is known as a '*ba'al dih-var-reem*' (a master of words). That's quite a title for a turtle.

[2] Wesley J. Perschbacher, Editor, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1990), p. 9.

[3] Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva Miller, Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 37.

[4] Ibid.

sounds, *hay-ray-see-ohs*, we can hear where we get our English word for 'heresy.'

What we have in Scripture, about our Jewish believing brethren is obvious to see. Peter and Paul were called heretics by the ones who had a stranglehold on the established religion of their day. Should we find it strange that we, both Jewish and Gentile believers, are called heretics by the Church (for keeping His Torah)? You may want to realize that as hard as you try to be model believers, most will continue to think you're part of a heretical cult (like the Mormons or Jehovah Witnesses who also 'claim Jesus').

And we who are Jewish believers, are also called heretics by our Jewish people and the supposed democratic state of Israel which refuses Jewish believers Israeli citizenship. They tell us that we are 'not kosher Jews'. How a democratic state could even go into the area of 'orthodoxy' is one giant problem. And for them to go there and then to deny us citizenship because we say we've found Messiah in Yeshua, is truly an example of the political situation here. But the God of Israel has placed His Land in our hearts, and He has brought us back home. He will also keep us here. Praise Yahveh! We're in Good Company, or should I say, God's Company? :)

I've listed the six places below so you can see them at a glance and determine for yourself if 'heretical sect' should be in the English translations at Acts 24:5, 14 and 28:22.

The Three Places Where 'Sect' is a Proper Translation

Acts 5:17: 'But the High Priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.'

Acts 15:5: 'But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."'

Acts 26:5: 'since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.'

The Three Places Where 'Heretical Sect' is a Proper Translation

Acts 24:5: 'For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the heretical sect of the Nazarenes.'

Acts 24:14: 'But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a heretical sect, I do serve the God of our Fathers, believing everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets.'

Acts 28:22: 'But we desire to hear from you what your views are. For concerning this heretical sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.'