

# *The Isles Are Singing*

The story of how the isles of Papua New Guinea,  
and the inhabitants of the villages of Owena,  
learned to sing a new song,  
a song of praise unto the LORD.

by J. L. T. Young

Sing unto the LORD a new song,  
*and* his praise from the end of the earth,  
ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein;  
the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.

Isaiah 42:10

“I have but one candle of life to burn,  
and I would rather burn it out  
in a land filled with darkness  
than in a land flooded with light.”

--John Keith Falconer

## THE ISLES ARE SINGING

O, hear the isles singing  
A jubilant song,  
No longer in bondage,  
Their darkness is gone.

A song of rejoicing,  
A song of praise,  
A song to give glory  
To the Ancient of Days.

Can you not hear them?  
How the earth swells  
With their melody sweet  
As of vict'ry it tells.

Their souls are set free  
from death and despair,  
The tempter defeated,  
A song fills the air.

Listen, O listen,  
Ye people of light,  
A new song is ringing  
From out of the night.

Chapter 1  
THEY WAITED FOR HIS LAW  
He shall not fail nor be discouraged,  
till he have set judgment in the earth:  
and the isles shall wait for his law.  
Isaiah 42:4

Except to traders and colonizers, the island of New Guinea was virtually unknown to the rest of the world until the middle of the nineteenth century. The first traders began to make journeys to New Guinea in the early sixteenth century after Magellan and his crew proved to skeptics that the earth is round. When other Europeans heard about Magellan's discoveries, they too had an urge to travel and explore distant lands. Some of them made journeys to the island of New Guinea and started trading with the people who lived there.

Before that time, traders came to New Guinea from nearby Asian countries such as China and Malaysia. They brought metal goods, glass beads, cloth and porcelain. For those goods, the New Guineans traded tree bark, spices, and Bird of Paradise feathers. Little could be learned from their contacts, however, because the Asians did not record anything about the New Guinea people.

The European sea captains were the first travellers to write anything about the people of New Guinea. In 1526, a Portuguese sea captain named Jorge de Meneses made a voyage to the island of New Guinea. It is believed that he is the first European navigator to arrive on this island. The people he saw were called "papuas" by the traders from Malaysia. Papua means "frizzy-haired people," and Meneses called the name of the island *Ilhas dos Papuas*, which means "land of frizzy-haired people." If this island had another name before that time, the name is not known. As far as is known, *Ilhas dos Papuas* was the first name given to this island.

In 1528, a sea captain from Spain named Alvaro de Saavedra travelled to the north coast and the Manus Islands. Then in 1545, another navigator from Spain named Ortiz de Retes, sailed along the north coast of the island. The people of this place reminded him of the people of who live in Guinea, West Africa. So he named the island New Guinea.

Seamen came to New Guinea from Holland, England, France, and other countries in Europe. They travelled along the coast of the island and traded with people who lived near the coast. But nobody explored the inland areas of the island until the second half of the nineteenth century.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, more and more ships visited New Guinea. At times the New Guinea people were friendly to them, but oftentimes traders and sailors were killed and sometimes eaten by New Guinea headhunters and cannibals.

Most of the traders were wicked men who brought much evil with them everywhere they went and not just things to trade. They mistreated the people. They brought strong drink and made people drunk. They abused many of the women. In exchange for trade goods, some of them took villagers and carried them to Samoa, Fiji, and Australia where they sold them to work as slaves on plantations.

As more and more men visited New Guinea, people in various parts of the world began to learn about this island. A number of strong European nations had already begun taking new land for themselves in Africa and Asia, and it wasn't long before the colonizers came to New Guinea. In 1828, Holland took control of the western half of New Guinea. The new colony was called Dutch New Guinea (or Netherlands New Guinea). This land is now part of the country of Indonesia.

People from two countries came to New Guinea in 1884 and started colonies in the eastern half of New Guinea. They divided the eastern part and the nearby islands among themselves. Germany took control of the northern part of eastern New Guinea and called it German New Guinea. England took control of the southern part and called it British New Guinea.

The majority of the New Guineans did not want foreigners to rule over them. Much fighting and killing resulted because of the foreign rule. Because the Germans and British had better weapons, however, they eventually won the fights.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Australia became an independent country; and in 1906, Britain gave control of British New Guinea to Australia. Australia renamed this area Territory of Papua. In 1914, World War I began. Australian troops invaded German New Guinea and took control. After the war, the League of Nations gave Australia the right to control the northern part of this half of the island. They then called it The Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The new territories, New Guinea and Papua, each had their own administrative center and capital, but both of these administrations were under the control of Australia.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, European churches also learned about the land of New Guinea. Some of them began to think about sending missionaries to this distant land where the people had never heard about Jesus. They organized missionary societies to help send missionaries to this land of darkness.

Missionaries came from many different religious groups. Some of them did not come with the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. They only came to convert people to their own religious beliefs. These missionaries thought they were doing a good work which would help them get to heaven, but they did not have any good news to give to the people of New Guinea. Their teaching changed people on the outside, but there was nothing to change their hearts and prepare them for eternity.

A few missionaries came with the good news about a Saviour who created them, who loved them, and who wanted them to be God's children and have eternal life. The light of Jesus Christ was beginning to shine in this dark corner of the world. In Isaiah 42:4, God had said that the isles would wait for His law. New Guinea had waited a long time, but now they were beginning to receive that for which they had waited.