

THE ISLES ARE SINGING

Chapter 15

Having No Hope

*¹²That at that time ye were without Christ,
being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,
and strangers from the covenants of promise,
having no hope, and without God in the world:*

*¹³But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off
are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:11,12

Since there were no roads into the village of Owena and no airstrip where a plane could land, our supplies were flown to the Aziana airstrip and carried over the mountains to our Owena home by the Owena people. During our early years in the work, there was a supply buyer in town who would purchase our supplies and pack them in boxes for transport on the plane. That was a great blessing and enabled Lewis to spend more of his time in the work. Occasionally, Lewis would take the whole family to town for a time of rest and refreshment for body, mind, and soul. That meant for both going out and returning home, there would be an eight-hour hike across the mountains to the landing strip in Aziana for the four of us and whatever personal items we needed for our stay in town. We were thankful for Owena men and women to help carry the personal supplies and carry Christy and Connie when they became tired. On these trips, we would buy our own supplies and take them back with us on the plane to Aziana, and then carriers from Owena would convey them across the mountains. At the times when we were dealing with health issues, we found it necessary to hire a helicopter to transport us in and out of the village.

From the beginning of our ministry in Owena, we had prayed about building an airstrip of our own. A couple other missionaries and missionary pilots helped us look over some plots of land to see if they would be suitable, but everything seemed to be too short and/or too steep. One morning in January 1980, the men and boys of Owena gathered in Lewis and Kevin's office to air their grievances over the fact that we weren't giving them an airstrip. They had somehow come to the conclusion that we or our "bosses" were holding back something from them and not letting them build an airstrip. "We are strong and can work hard to level off this land," they insisted. "And besides, we can't carry your cargo for you from Aziana anymore because we are afraid of our enemies lurking along the trail."

The Owena people were crying for schools, an outlet for their cash crops, and a means of bringing in material goods. An airstrip would certainly help meet those demands, but the government regulations must be followed in choosing a site, and the mountainous terrain in Owena just did not seem to meet the qualifications. The situation seemed hopeless and was beyond our control and also beyond the people's understanding. But God did understand, and it was He upon whom we depended to meet our needs and the needs of those people. As we left the situation in God's hands, He worked in the hearts of the people and made them willing to continue carrying for us again.

~~~~~

Ever since she was three years old, our daughter Connie's greatest ambition was to grow up and be a mother. At age five, she still talked about having babies and taking care of

them. Does every young girl look forward to growing up? What did the future hold for young Owena ladies back in 1980? It was in March of that year that Marge Jenson and I had the opportunity to witness the rites carried on when a girl reaches puberty. For these girls, this was a time of fear, pain, and darkness. Each young woman had to spend a whole week huddled on the dirt floor in one dark corner of the menstruation/birth hut. She was not allowed to leave the hut nor her given corner. Every day for that week, she was beaten on the back with sticks while she remained crouched on the floor. Although she cried and screamed with pain, her tormenters (the older women of the village) only laughed. At the end of the week, she was taken to the river for a ceremonial washing and a final beating – with stinging nettles. In the end, she would be a good strong woman who could carry large amounts of firewood and food from the garden.

A week in physical darkness and torment! How horrible! But what is that compared to a lifetime on this earth in spiritual darkness and then all of eternity in the darkness and torments of hell? How incidences like these made us long even more to learn their language and culture well enough to be able to tell them about a loving Saviour who longed to deliver them from their hopeless condition!

~~~~~

The boys, too, were conducted through various stages of initiation. Most of these were dreadful times of fear and pain. Somewhere between the ages of five and seven, both boys and girls faced an initiation in which they were decorated with grass skirts, leaves, flowers, shells, and other things. The septums of their noses were pierced, and a small piece of bone or reed was placed in the septum. At this time, these young boys would be taken from their mother's home to a home built just for boys and overseen by one or two of the older men of the village. Here the boys would be instructed in how to become true Owena men. From now on, the young boys were not allowed to go to their mother's house nor eat any food that their mother had cooked.

(As in Aziana, husbands and wives did not live together. A couple large houses were built on higher ground where the men all lived together. Each wife had a separate home on lower ground where she lived with her daughters and uninitiated sons. The men had their own trails into the village, and women were never allowed to use the men's trails or go to the men's or boys' houses. The men could go to their wives' houses which were divided so that the wife always sat on the lower part of the house, and the men went to the upper. Women were never to cross over into the upper part of the house.)

As they got older, the boys went through some gruelling initiation rites which Lewis was never invited to witness. He was allowed to see their initiation adornment which the women were never allowed to see. The women were strictly forbidden from observing any of the initiation rites as well. Like the girls, the boys were beaten with stinging nettles; but they also had a second nose piercing, this time a sharp reed being forced up their noses until blood flowed out. The boys also went through the painful experience of having their private body parts pierced with a sharp instrument. For several days, the boys were tormented with cruel beatings and blood-letting to be sure that they were cleansed from their mother's blood.

Praise God that the Gospel has since delivered these people from such dark, fearful events and that, not the shedding of their own blood, but the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed many from sin forever! No longer without hope!