

THIRD-WORLD AWAKENING: GREEK ROADBLOCKS OR A HEBRAIC ROAD?

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Victor started out as a young atomic scientist in the early 1950s. After reading a Wycliffe Bible Translator's magazine ad, he began to pursue the science of analysing previously-unwritten languages. The final goal was scripture translation, and the transformation of tribal hearts. In 1961, he entered into the lives of the emerging stone-age Waola tribe of Papua New Guinea. Victor is currently Bible translator and Senior Advisor to the Tiliba Christian Church of Papua New Guinea, and Director of South Pacific Island Ministries, Inc, Cairns, Queensland, Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The Waola are a tribe of about 50,000 speakers of the Angal Heneng language, in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Under the ministry of the Tiliba Christian church, the Angal Heneng New Testament, a background reader of Old Testament Bible stories, plus a well-tested quality primer, were published, almost at the same time, in 1978. By 2004, the New Testament had gone into its fifth printing, while evangelism has birthed some 100 congregations. Gospel outreach also followed the young Waola work-seekers from as far away as the plantations of Mt Hagen, Kimbe, and Rabaul, in addition to the town centres of Mendi and Port Moresby. The last overseas missionaries, who had stayed on the longest to aid the Waola in technical matters, left Papua New Guinea in the mid-1990s. All the while, the rate of church growth continued and actually even increased in the later years under stable local leadership. The divine formula: The Word of God in the vernacular + an indigenous spiritual appetite = tribal transformation.

THREE REVIVALS

Revival is always a welcome occasion in any fellowship. The first Waola revival came in 1981, by the response of hundreds of young people, who had learned to read the Bible in their literacy classes. The Southern Highlands Department of Education had graciously allowed the “cultural hour” time-slot in their primary school curriculum to be used for the Angal Heneng speaking students to study their own mother tongue. This *tsunami* of young Bible readers turned into a flood of spiritual response to a Book that spoke directly to them. It was a visible and touchable source of information that replaced a previous word-of-mouth message. But, it was not only the young students that were inspired. Not to be outdone, a large number of adults – mostly men, who had, up to then, lagged behind their gospel-hungry wives – joined a flow that ended with some 800 baptisms over the next 18 months.

A few years later, a second revival, of a much different beginning, followed the pattern of the traditional Pacific Island-style revivals that tend to catch the attention of almost everyone – from curious to committed – within the wider community. This second awakening typically included significant expression of the numerous spiritual gifts listed in the scriptures. The leadership, at the time, quite wisely focused the church on the Giver, over a superficial or personal fascination with the gift, looking at the purpose behind the experience, rather than mere exuberance. But, once again, many hundreds more came to faith in a deep personal relationship with their Lord. But, both these initial group-responses paled in contrast to the third revival that gained momentum in 1990, and actually continues into the present.

FIRST THE BOOK – THEN THE LAND OF THE BOOK

In 1982, I was privileged to tour the land of the Bible, the dream of a lifetime for any Bible scholar. Sad to say, our tour guide had an ethnic background of strong anti-Israel bias, which deeply tainted his personal view on biblical truth, leaving our group a bit uncomfortable.

But, six years later, I had a second chance to return to the land of Israel, this time, not as a tourist, but as an ordinary traveller. In a routine flight

from Europe to the South Pacific, my wife and I broke our trip in Jordan,¹ and returned to Jerusalem by bus and taxi. This time, not annoyed by a prejudiced tour guide, we sensed, on our own, the prophetic significance of Jews, regathered to their ancient homeland from over 100 nations. In sharing this second experience with our Waola family, the enthusiasm of their response in the months that followed was both unexpected and unmistakable.

The Angal Heneng scriptures became alive with entirely new understanding. Why?

The Hon. Sitiveni Rambuka, former Prime Minister of Fiji, gave some interesting insights in his speech at the opening of the Fiji branch of the ICEJ² in 1995. When the first Christian missionaries told the Fijians about places like Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Hebron, they immediately thought that such wonderful holy places could be found nowhere else but in heaven! Places like Jericho and the Jordan River might be seen in a dream, but never in real life! But, when the Fijian soldiers were assigned a peacekeeping role with the UN in Lebanon, Israel, and Sinai, new knowledge began to dawn for the ordinary Fijian.

Even though the Waola acceptance of the gospel gave the Bible stories a higher place than the ancient folklore, which involved talking snakes and crocodiles, or sacred trees, no one ever thought it possible to one day see these special creatures! So, when the Bible tales came along, former thinking patterns promptly put all new biblical geography into that same never-to-be-seen world beyond reach.

Thus, when our report of walking where Jesus once walked opened the eyes of the Angal Heneng family, the church awakened to a level of understanding not known before. When they saw that Jerusalem – spoken of 800 times in the Bible – was a real city, which could be

¹ Amman, Jordan, is about 80 km from Jerusalem, and we were permitted to return in three weeks to complete our flight to the Pacific.

² The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, a non-political Christian organisation, with a biblical vision to support and encourage Jews worldwide to return to their ancient homelands.

visited, it lifted the entire biblical record far above the level of their old worldview.

Since that breakthrough, many hundreds of Papua New Guineans have also visited Jerusalem, and seen those ancient sites for themselves. And, more than the sites, ancient Bible prophecies are often recognised in the daily news. It is amazing! Even when the world media has little understanding of the prophetic meaning of their reports, a Bible-sensitive Melanesian does. “Israel awareness” has now spread from those beginnings among the Waola to the far reaches of Papua New Guinea, not to mention the other Pacific Island nations. A surprised visitor will even find biblically-named villages like Judea, Samaria, or Bethany. Even so, nowhere has the effect been quite as significant as in the continuing third revival among the Waola, which has now spread to some five neighbouring tribes. Certain historical factors may have helped the movement, nevertheless, revival is revival.

THROWING OUT THE KNIFE WITH THE POTATO PEELINGS

Millennialist³-linked cargo cult thinking has had its roots deep within Papua New Guinea, and group movements, which practised taking up sizable collections from their people (except for those offerings sanctioned by the church and for the church), have long been viewed with scepticism since the beginning of missions.

But there are also times when suspicions, caused from lack of cultural knowledge by well-meaning Western mentors, can too soon dampen the fires of valid enthusiasm. Ironically, huge meetings and community-wide celebrations are as natural to Papua New Guinea as yams and *kaukau*. So what better way is there to impart the gospel message than into a sea of popular response?

³ Millennialism is the belief that a better age will, someday, be experienced. Melanesian cargo cult practice adds the belief that, if one attaches the proper magic to that belief, great material wealth will also be received.

So, when Melanesians have gathered to march in identity with Israel, from the streets of Port Moresby, or Highlands airfields, the Hebraic⁴-rooted mindset of massive community gatherings finds itself right at home. One has only to think back to the multitudes that came to listen by the Sea of Galilee, the massive three-times-a-year Jewish festivals at the Temple in Jerusalem, or the million-plus congregation, following the wilderness Tabernacle, to see a connection. This sort of living-faith event is far more popular in Melanesia than it might be in Melbourne or Minneapolis, and speaks out about an unmistakable cultural identity.

Added to that, many hundreds of Papua New Guineans have, by now, seen this type of huge parade gatherings with their own eyes at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Thousands more have seen it at home on videos, which these pilgrims⁵ brought back from Israel. The cultural bond could not hit any closer to home.

Thus, there are no secret purposes in collecting funds to help bring the extremely poor Diaspora Jews⁶ out of the collapsed Soviet Union. And there are no doubts about helping to feed the hungry underprivileged in Jerusalem. With many Jews severely undernourished, due to almost four years of war with Palestinian terrorists, these living reminders of Bible people have become *wantoks* in their Christian faith. The teaching of Rom 15:27 could not have a closer parallel in today's world. Their collections are hardly for pie-in-the-sky⁷ cargo cult advantage, but a most natural Melanesian outreach to brethren in need.

I will never forget the eye-opener I got from the greeting given by a Highland elder to two Jewish visitors to his village. The ladies had just

⁴ The focus of this paper is to contrast the earlier Hebrew way of thinking with the more-recent worldview of the Greek philosophers, who significantly moulded the present Western way of thought.

⁵ A pilgrim differs from the ordinary tourist in his special interest in visiting sacred sites or holy places.

⁶ Jews, driven from their homeland from before the time of Christ, and again by the Romans in 70 AD and 132 AD, are now scattered over the globe. Having kept their Jewish identity, they are called the Diaspora.

⁷ "Pie-in-the-sky" is a word picture for something that will never happen.

offered the two guests huge gifts of food, as the leader explained, “We know you’re not Christians, but you are Jews, just like in our Bible. That means we are one family, and we want to welcome you!” Can we feel the amazement this made on two secular Jewish tourists, whose history of religious persecution for almost 2,000 years had only led them as far as a deep distrust of Christianity?

God’s original choice of using Israel to present the world with its Messiah cannot be forgotten. Therefore, to miss the value of using a regathered Israel in our message today, means to overlook scripture that should, likewise, never be neglected.

OVERLOOKING OTHER TOOLS OF HISTORICAL TRUTH

Unfortunately, there has been a lack of appreciation by many Western missionaries, and their sending bodies, for a vast amount of scripture focusing on natural Israel. They failed to understand – or at least teach – the significance of the final regathering and redemption of Israel, at the close of the Great Commission to the nations.

Successful evangelism has learned long ago that personal salvation through Jesus Christ – though central to the message – cannot be fully appreciated without seeing Him within the full background of biblical history. The meaning of sin in the Garden of Eden, followed by the Patriarchs of redemption – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – are the first ancient paths for the human family of God. Moses, the deliverer, teacher, and first earthly link to the God of Sinai, is, likewise, a vital part of the picture. Then Messiah Jesus came, in His Father’s perfect timing, to become the very heart of the whole plan.

Yet, after seeing all this, if we miss the promised redemption to the faithful remnant of Israel, we have lost the message of 16 of 17 Old Testament prophets. And it is to miss the clear teaching of Rom 9, 10, 11, at the very core of that most highly-esteemed New Testament book. It is also to overlook the “one new man out of two” model of Eph 2, 3, 4. Finally, it is to fail to see God’s final act in the evangelism of the nations, which – according to the Hebrew prophets – cannot be separated from

the Father's final welcome-home to Israel, His long-lost son. Indeed, if our experience with the Waola is to be usefully interpreted, we dare not miss one of the most useful tools in getting a last-call message out to a lost world. If even the Jews are coming home, it's time for everyone to get involved!

Highlighting what we have just said, we can see that many Papua New Guinea believers have begun to understand what God is doing. Yet, this is an attraction that is not only in Melanesia. We have also seen South American, African, and Asian Christians visit Jerusalem, as well as becoming involved in Israel-related ministries over the last 20 years. Connecting world outreach to Israel's final hour is a growing awareness in the third world at large. Excitement among believers has a powerful appeal to those yet on the sidelines. Unfortunately, a similar Western awakening still lags somewhat behind.

UNDERSTANDING THE GREEK WORLDVIEW

Third-world revival movements are often misunderstood, and certainly underestimated by the "developed" Western world. Individualistic humanism⁸ versus the worldview of the extended family creates a great valley that classically divides the secular West from a much more spiritually aware third world. That same giant gulf lies between the ancient Hebrew way of thinking and the general Western cultural outlook, which has developed over the centuries, from ideas taught by the ancient Greek philosophers.

Greek pagan culture began its attack upon the Hebraic worldview, a little under two centuries before Christ. In 168 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem, and shamefully defiled the Temple. In spite of the Jewish Maccabees'⁹ brave victory against this military invasion, the spiritual influence of the godless Hellenistic¹⁰ mindset was never entirely

⁸ A simple definition of secular humanism is that mankind has the ability to act as its own god, i.e., a present popular form of idolatry.

⁹ The family of Mattathias Maccabee, and their supporters, though greatly outnumbered, drove out the Greek military invaders.

¹⁰ Hellenistic is another name for the ancient Greek culture.

overthrown. We can note its later effect upon the Sadducees, who, in contrast to the Pharisees, denied the spirit-world (Acts 23:8). We can also see definite differences between the Jewish apostles (including Paul the Hebrew) and the eventual non-Jewish and strongly Greek-influenced, church Fathers, who took little time to cast off their Jewish roots.

Some of the “fathers” of the faith seriously trapped themselves by the less-than-biblical pitfalls of Hellenism. Certain post-Apostolic leaders, in trying to separate the Greek-invented “spiritual” realm from an “earthly” one, were the reason that many early bishops assumed that the Creator’s command to be “fruitful and multiply” was too “human” for the leaders, and they would be more “spiritual” if they kept celibate. To the Hebrew mind, you cannot separate “spiritual” life from “physical”. All of life is a spiritual journey. And yet, other theologians, past and present, unthinkingly also copied the Greek-influenced Sadducees, by blindly denying a spirit-world of both good and evil. All this and more show, most clearly, the sharp divide between a Hellenistic and Hebraic worldview.

And so it was! Although Judea was the all-important cradle of faith, a less-than-watchful Europe knew little about divine shielding from heathen Greek philosophies. Pagan Rome had become the preschool of a yet-immature Gentile faith. In contrast to Abraham, who received direct revelation, the wisdom of the Greek thinkers accepted little at the supernatural level. They distrusted all inspiration from non-human sources, and debated any and all things spiritually spoken. Whatever unseen power they may have yet thought might exist; these forces were, indeed, helpless to create life, let alone a universe!

But if we think that this is all a failure of long-ago church history, a surprising amount of today’s short-sightedness must again be pointed out, such as a continued neglect, by both scholars and laymen of Rom 9, 10, 11. It dare not go unnoticed that Apostle Paul placed these three chapters, on Israel’s final restoration and redemption, in the exact centre of his most thorough study of New Testament doctrine! To miss Paul’s

point is to miss God's indissoluble love for half His family – the Jewish half, with whom He began.¹¹

Moreover, popular end-time theories, which reflect much more Greek individuality than Hebraic hope, have been invented over the last two centuries. Strangely, these focus on a dramatic deliverance of the Gentile church, while taking little note of those end-of-days' promises to the remnant of Abraham's seed. Sorry to say, but the picture presented has its wide popularity from much repetition, and not from biblical research. If the matter is honestly and biblically studied, however, the suggestion that God is about to cancel His end-of-days' promises to redeem His beloved, but errant, Jacob,¹² at this high-point of history, is seriously short of scholarship. One has only to read the prophets. It would mean the rejection of far too much text of both Old and New Testaments, an unsafe position for all who recognise the scriptures as authoritative, and God-breathed.

Alas, the "enlightened" culture, which eventually rotted in a seedbed of atheism in 18th century Europe, turned out to be those same seeds of Hellenist thinking that perverted true faith, from Greco-Roman times. The Reformation, and follow-on reformers, tried hard – and certainly with much success – to restore a watered-down witness back to the faith of Abraham. However, much like the ancient reformist kings of both Israel and Judah, even though they did accomplish much of "what was right in the eyes of the Lord", there were always a few blind spots overlooked. In the end, a few of "*the high places, however, were not removed*" (cf. 2 Kings 12:2-3; 15:34-35). If that meaning is too hidden for a half-hearted Israel, Rev 2:4 makes it even a bit clearer for a Bible-honouring church, which did its best to get most – but not all – of it right: "Nevertheless, I have this against you."

And what might He yet have against us? Thinking like Greek humanist philosophers, rather than thinking like more down-to-earth Hebraic

¹¹ See Jer 31:35-37; Is 49:14-16; Hos 11:8-9; Ps 89:20-37; and countless parallel assertions to Israel.

¹² Jacob refers to the name of Israel *before* his life-changing encounter with God.

believers! Ironically, a West, which obediently sent messengers with the Good News to the ends of the earth, now has the opportunity to learn some non-humanist approaches from our much more Hebraic family in the third world.

Perhaps, an ideal summation is a most-perceptive insight, passed on by author and Bible lecturer, Dr Michael Brown: “What began as a movement in Jerusalem, became a philosophy in Greece, an institution in Rome, a culture in Europe, and an enterprise in America.”¹³

WHAT MUST WE NOW COMPREHEND?

So, herein is our discovery. While modern Europe and the West have borne the brunt of Greek scepticism, humanism, the profane, and the secular over the ages, a more blessed third world has largely escaped much of the curse! A growing consensus of those with clear vision, recognises that the massive future of evangelism now lies in the developing third world. Moreover, the significance of a parallel with the Hebraic roots of Israel has a depth of meaning within that last-call message. As the prophetic hope for a biblically-restored Israel is being fulfilled before our eyes, the third world catches a vision that a Hellenistic view cannot. Sceptical Western theologians have long dismissed this truth, but it has hardly gone unnoticed by the Waola people, their Highland neighbours, and, more recently, throughout other areas of Papua New Guinea.

True, the third world can use a lot of assistance. But that development lies neither with a global marketing mentality, nor multinational interference from a humanistic and greed-oriented West. The Good News, brought within the context of a Hebraic-ordered mindset, is touching the heart of Melanesian culture, and parallels a much more spiritually-ordered universe than the Greek philosophers ever knew!

Therefore, it is most appropriate for the Waola, and their friends across the Southern Highlands, and, indeed, all of Papua New Guinea, with the

¹³ Michael Brown, *The End of the American Gospel Enterprise*, Shippensburg PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 1993, p. 75.

rest of Melanesia, to shamelessly declare where their spiritual heritage and culture lies, and be the stronger for it. Like many in the Western church, who are also discovering an added depth to the Hebraic foundations of the gospel – the simplest road to Jesus just happens to run through Jerusalem!