

BROKEN STICK

MISSION TO THE
FORBIDDEN
ISLANDS

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THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

He stood totally camouflaged, peeking through the dense tropical forest vegetation.

Behind him, hidden on the high rock, crouched 40 to 50 of his warriors. Each held a war club and five-meter-long spears, each with sharp poisoned points made of black palm. Standing tall and strong, the leader watched, fierce anger burning within. How dare intruders violate their sacred beach! No stranger dared step on this special place, declared to be holy by the gods that ruled this island of Bellona in the Solomon Islands. And if they should dare, none lived to tell about it. With intense loyalty he would defend the domain of his hero gods—spirits controlled by the devil.

His keen eyes noted each man that climbed down the ship's ladder to the dinghy. He followed every stroke as they rowed silently to the shore then beached the dinghy and stepped on the sand. Slowly they walked toward the caves and hidden houses of the island gods within the caves.

This South Sea Island explorer and his sailors paused, glancing around to discern any sign of life. They did not see the man nor his well-camouflaged warriors who silently watched from the cliff overlooking the beach.

Then unable to contain his anger any longer, the leader let out a mighty yell. It reverberated against the volcanic cliffs like peals of thunder. The intruders froze in their tracks, feverishly looking around to see where the sound came from. In terror they saw the warrior leap off the overhanging rock followed in rapid sequence by his army. The warriors landed on the sand and yelling in concert, raced with clubs and spears to capture and kill the intruders.

To this South Sea explorer they seemed to come at him as fast and deadly

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as a flash of lightening. The frightened men turned and fled from the murderous charge. Reaching their dinghy just ahead of the mob, they shoved it into the surf and rowed furiously toward their boat. Close behind, the still raging warriors plunged into the waves, waving their clubs and throwing spears at the fleeing men.

Three days later the explorer entered Kopiu Bay on the open sea side of the large island of Guadalcanal. As his ship came closer he saw islanders that seemed to be working with a White man and woman. Two small White children played with several Black children. He anchored the ship and took a dinghy to shore.

The young man with dark curly hair stepped forward and extended his hand to the explorer. "Welcome to Kopiu village. I'm Norman Ferris, a missionary here on Guadalcanal. This is my wife, Ruby, and our children."

The traveler smiled. "That's a much different welcome than I received a few days ago when I landed on a small island about 90 miles southwest of here. I was nearly killed!"

"You must have stopped at the little island called Bellona," Norman told him. "I've heard a lot about these tall, strong, well-built Polynesian people. They don't let anyone come ashore. In fact, they maintain a direct communication with the devil and among many other things, he enables them to levitate."

The explorer nodded. Anything seemed possible with those frightening men.

"Using this supernatural power," Norman continued, "they rise and float in the air for short distances. Many of the bays around Bellona are dedicated to their gods, and fishing in the forbidden bays or even going near the caves and houses where their devil-gods are supposed to live means certain death."

"I believe it! Their chief warrior almost did us in! You can be sure I'll never go there again." Ending his terrifying story, the visitor added, "That island will always be off limits for me. I'm no match for the huge guy I call 'Thunder and Lightning.'"

After the man left Norman's thoughts constantly turned to the devil worshipers on Bellona and the nearby island of Rennell. He felt deep sympathy and compassion for the man the explorer labeled Thunder and Lightning, for his devoted warriors, and the people who lived there under the devil's control. Norman learned that the chief's actual name was Tiekika. He also learned that the Bellonese claimed a voice that spoke through strange creatures demanded they attack and kill anyone who came near the dwelling places of their special gods.

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Norman hated the way Satan manipulated the minds of these poor people.

The Bellonese and Rennellese are taller and stronger than the indigenous Solomon Islanders. The average Guadalcanalian seemed very *laissez faire* compared to the people from Bellona and Rennell who were much more warlike. Bellonese tribal chiefs were always male, whereas Guadalcanal society was more matriarchal and allowed women to own land and have the final say in many things.

Norman Ferris also knew that the government had passed a law to keep these two islands as an anthropological study site without contact with any outside influences. These restrictions affected all missionaries of all denominations who were forbidden to stay overnight on either island. Considering all these factors, how could he bring them the gospel of love and peace?

His concern deepened as he remembered Jesus' parting command, "Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). Was God calling him to face these murderers? Should he try to get government permission to visit these islands? His mental turmoil heightened as he asked himself, "Does God want me to put my life in danger and possibly bring great sorrow to my wife and children?" Day after day he struggled with God in prayer, pleading, "Please God, show me Your will." Soon after, Norman received an answer. He felt that God spoke to him personally through 2 Timothy 1:7: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

That promise gave him peace. With it, he knew that he need not fear but trust the power of God's love. Now he could tell Ruby of his great burden.

That evening after the children slept he took her hand and said, "Ruby, let's talk a while. I need to share with you my struggle about the people of Bellona and Rennell."

Ruby listened thoughtfully and quietly. When he had voiced his convictions Norman paused a few moments to let her think, then asked, "Ruby, could God be asking me to be the one to open the way of the gospel of grace to these wonderful Polynesian people? They, too, must know that God's great plan of salvation by grace includes them. Remember the promise in Ephesians 2:6 that says that God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in heavenly places. Doesn't that 'us' include these wild, devil-controlled people?" he asked.

Ruby looked puzzled. "Are you saying that a man like Tiekika and his murderous warriors, by accepting God's grace, can someday sit with Jesus on thrones in heaven?"

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Norman pointed to his Bible. "Why not? If God can save us, isn't His grace big enough to include them? I'll admit I don't completely comprehend verse 7 and the awesome meaning of the 'exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.' But I can believe that whatever God says, He does. God specializes in doing what to us humans seems impossible."

Ruby smiled. "I get what you mean." Her smile grew to a chuckle. "Can't you imagine those tall, fierce warriors of Bellona sitting humbly on thrones with Jesus, praising Him for the riches of His grace!"

They talked, prayed, and read more promises together. Then Ruby looked at him and said, "Norman, you will not go to Bellona alone. God will go before you. He'll be with you and never leave you. There's no need to be afraid."

Norman put his arms around her. "Let's give our all to Him again. Let's renew our dedication. Let's trust that God will use our surrender to open the way to bring His love to Bellona."

During the next few months Norman made favorable contact with Chief Tapongi of Rennell Island. Since no stranger could stay on that island overnight, the chief allowed Norman to take six of the island boys with him to learn to read and write. Among them was his son, Moa, who quickly learned the English language, learned to sing, and translated hymns into Renellese.

Norman felt the Holy Spirit's impression that the time had come to go to Bellona. First, he stopped at nearby Rennell Island to pick up his young friend, Moa, who had translated the song "Jesus Loves Me" into the Bellonese and Renellese languages which are almost identical.

Evidently the village people at Bellona saw the ship far out at sea. In amazement they watched the ship anchor in one of the sacred bays. Immediately a crowd of villagers gathered on the high cliffs above the beach to see the strangers killed by their hero-god, for treading this holy ground would have meant death to even a Bellonese. In wonder their eyes followed as the White man with the boat's crew rowed ashore and landed on the sacred beach. Why did he gather them in a semicircle? Why did they stand and make that noise? They could understand the words, but what did "Jesus loves me" mean? Fear turned to anger. Were these strangers asking their god to do evil to them?

By this time Tiekika and his men had rushed to the rock above the sacred beach. Behind Tiekika, his faithful warriors crouched with spears and clubs. "No one will get away this time," he snarled. "Their heads will swing in our god's house very soon!"

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Then he heard that strange noise. Never having heard singing, he muttered in a hoarse whisper, "They must be putting a curse on us!" The anger and hatred in his mind increased. His savage eyes watched the intruders' every move. He saw the man and his crew kneel down on the sand and bow their heads. He heard words he couldn't understand. Could they be praying to his devil gods?

When Norman rose from his knees he noticed an old man and some children farther down the beach, probably looking for clams. He turned to the crew. "You stay here and watch the dinghy," he told them. "I'll go alone to see if I can make contact with the people of this island. Maybe we'll be able to communicate."

He picked up his medical bag and a black book. Putting his hat back on his head, he started walking toward the old man, who seemed friendly. This led him further up the beach near the high rock.

Suddenly, a great yell thundered out across the bay. Norman looked up just in time to see a tall, muscular man leap from the rock followed by 40 or 50 warriors. They landed on their feet running swiftly toward him, spears held at the ready. Norman had no chance to run, nor any idea of running. With a glance skyward and a prayer to his heavenly Friend for wisdom and protection, the lone missionary knew he could face any situation.

Then he took off his hat and placed it on the sand. This, he knew, would be taken as a challenge by the heathen warriors surrounding him. It was a custom of the island people that drawing a line on the ground, or placing an object on the ground, constituted a challenge. With his hat on the sand, Norman stepped back a foot or two waiting for them. An attempt to flee would mean certain death.

Norman had come to Bellona to stand for God in whom he put his trust. He knew the devil fled before God's mighty power, so now he waited. Breathlessly, the crew and Moa watched with fear in their eyes. If Norman and God failed they too would die.

Thunder and Lightning, as swift as the name suggested, ran to the lone figure standing with nothing in his hands but a bag and a book. He stopped at the hat, accepting the challenge before him, while his warriors encircled the man. Thunder's murderous eyes looked directly into the eyes of the White man. But something seemed wrong! The man's brown eyes looked straight back at him with no sign of fear. Who could refuse to cower before him? Why did he not run in terror? Why did those eyes burn deeply into his?