

VANUATU'S SPIRITUAL BATTLE ZONE

By Cheryl and Chris Mason



Vanuatu, the 'Untouched Paradise', is a popular tourist destination. An increasing number of tourists are coming for a tropical island holiday, lying by a resort swimming pool and maybe experiencing a little of the culture. The ni-Vanuatu people are known for their warm smiles and generous hospitality. As a family we enjoy being here, even though getting things done can take longer as most folk work on 'island-time'. But living in Vanuatu isn't all sunshine and coconuts. There is another side to life here.

'Sorcerer's tales haunt Port Vila' is splashed across the front page of Monday's Daily Post newspaper. There is much talk about town of a new type of black magic being used against people. Many are gripped with fear. In the midst of this crisis of occult activity one man is dead and police have just charged three suspects.

At the same time as the sorcery crisis was unfolding, Chris was blessed to work with Pastor Jonathon. During their time together, this humble ni-Van brother in Christ shared some of his own personal struggles and deliverance from the tangible attacks of the enemy. And he continues to trust the Lord to restore his wife's hearing after she too was the victim of black magic last year. And so we have been reminded yet again that 'our struggle is not against flesh and blood' (Ephesians 6:12). This is a battle zone.

Pastor Jonathon is with the Presbyterian Church, the largest denomination in Vanuatu, and comes from Malekula Island. However, he was briefly in the capital, Port Vila, where we live. He was able to work with Chris to record a few short messages in his mother tongue, Neiouleiene. One of those messages, titled 'Freedom from Fear', speaks of Jesus being more powerful than curses, demons and Satan. Another

message titled 'God or Baal' emphasizes God being all-powerful, using the example of Elijah's encounter with the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

These messages are highly relevant for so many in this nation where sorcery is a widespread reality. We hear there are even some church leaders who still have special leaves or stones around their homes as a form of spiritual protection. Many from the West would discount all this as mere superstition. However, the Constitution of Vanuatu acknowledges its reality, with the Penal Code stating, 'No person shall practice witchcraft or sorcery with intent to cause harm or detriment to any other person.' Surely our Heavenly Father must long for all his precious children to enter into the reality of Christ's victory and no longer be fearful — and what a liberating message to bring to those who have not yet chosen to follow Jesus' road.

"But you don't speak the language. How can you make the recording?" you wonder.

Each language is usually handled differently, but as an example let's look briefly at the process of recording with Pastor Jonathon. His language is an oral one; it has not



been put into writing. So starting with the Bislama (Pidjin English) script, they focussed on several sentences at a time. Pastor Jonathon considered the best way to express this in his language, then Chris started the portable digital machine and they recorded those sentences. It can be a slow process. At the end they listened carefully to the entire message, checking for mistakes and ensuring that it flowed.

Later, back at home, Chris copied the message onto his computer for editing. Long gaps, false starts, excessive mouth noises, and even some background noises are taken out. Sometimes incorrect sentences have to be replaced with the rerecorded correct sentence. (It's essential to take careful notes when recording!) This stage is definitely the most time consuming and often tedious, taking days, weeks or longer. In fact, when Chris worked with SIL Bible translators to record a dramatised version of Luke, the detailed editing took months! At this point in the process Chris may check back with the speaker or another person from that language if he is uncertain about something — remember that he doesn't know the language. But it's amazing how much you can follow if you have the Bislama script as a guide and when you come to recognise some of the key words/names in the language.

When the editing is finished a program is pieced together, often with culturally relevant Christian music. Sometimes this end product is burnt onto a CD. But with Pastor Jonathon's language, Chris will copy the program onto a Saber player. A Saber is Global Recording Network's rugged hand-wind solid state player. These can be used in areas where there is no electricity. Pastor Jonathon is keen to use

this tool as part of his church's outreach. The completed messages may also be available to download from our Mission's database should there be other missionaries or local believers who have contact with this group.

This is just one language of the estimated 105 in the Vanuatu archipelago. Chris is also trying to arrange a recording trip up to Santo and Malekula Islands. He has had initial contact with some Christians there who would like to have the Christian message recorded in their languages. For Chris this trip will involve a plane flight, a few hours in the back of a small truck on terrible 'roads', and then a speed boat to get to one language area — but it's worth it. With so many unable to functionally read (and quite a number of languages are not written at all), audio recordings have so much potential.

With our eldest son starting high school, we expect to return to Australia at the end of this year. Please pray with us that in the coming months the Lord will lead Chris to those languages in which he should be working. May the Lord also anoint the recordings already being played in different locations, and may He open up new avenues of getting these messages out to the people who still live in fear.

PHOTOS - FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Chris promoting GRN materials at Pastors Conference, Carving Tam Tam - a drum used for ritual purposes, Recording Gospel of Luke in South East Ambrym language, Mason family, Saber handwind player, Pastor Jonathon