

LESSON 7

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

There are about 2,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean. We shall not deal with Australia and New Zealand except as sending bodies since their Christian population came more from colonization and migration than mission activity. We shall simply trace the beginnings and progress of mission work on some of the principal islands of the three groups: Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. The Polynesian Islands lie between 140 and 180 degrees west of Greenwich; the Melanesian and Micronesian Islands 140 to 180 degrees east of Greenwich. The Melanesian Islands are south of the equator and the Micronesian Islands north of the equator. Polynesia means *many islands*. Its inhabitants are generally taller and fairer than those of the other two groups. Melanesia means *black islands*, referring to the colour of the people more than to the colour of the islands. Micronesia means *little islands*; this group contains no large islands. The origin of these peoples is shrouded in mystery, but Malayan and Mongolian traits are present in both physical appearance and language. The total population of these combined islands will not exceed four million. The population of natives has decreased greatly through wars, slave trade, and the white man's diseases. There has been an influx of labourers from India and other parts. The islanders were polytheists, mostly animists or spiritists, capable of being ferocious and cruel and of becoming gentle and saintly.

Polynesia and the Hawaiian Islands

Hawaii

Captain James Cook, exploring the Pacific for the British Government, discovered the Hawaiian Islands in 1778. It was here that he was killed by a native. Even before missionaries reached these islands the Hawaiians had abolished many of their taboos and cults. There was some knowledge of Christianity through the presence of a few white settlers. In 1820 the *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* sent *Hiram Bingham* (1789-1869) and *Asa Thurston*. The king received these Congregationalists with favour. Missions were opened in several centres. Schools were started by the hundreds. A great revival led by *Titas Coan* broke out in 1837. Between 1839 and 1841 more than 20,000 out of a population of 100,000 were baptized. By 1850 half the population was Christian. The Congregationalists turned the work over to the Hawaiians in 1863 and in 1870 withdrew entirely. In 1863 the Hawaiians formed the *Hawaiian Evangelical Association* to send missionaries

Circle the correct answer.

There are about 1,700; 2,500; 2,000 islands in the Pacific Ocean.

(2,000)

The three main groups of islands in the Pacific are given below. Write the meaning of each name in the blank.

Polynesia _____

Melanesia _____

Micronesia _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The combined population of these islands will not exceed four _____.

(million)

The islanders were p_____.

(polytheists)

The first missionaries to Hawaii were H_____ B_____ and A_____ T_____.

(Hiram, Bingham, Asa, Thurston)

By 1850 _____ the population was largely Christian.

(half)

to Micronesia. The *Anglican Church* entered Hawaii in 1840 and the *Methodists* in 1857. Other groups which have mission work in Hawaii are *Assemblies of God*, *Southern Baptists*, *Missouri Lutheran Synod*, *Missionary Church Association* and the *Pentecostal Holiness Church*. By popular vote in 1959 Hawaii became the fiftieth state of the United States of America. The islands have a cosmopolitan population representing Japan, the Philippines, Portugal, Korea, Puerto Rico and the United States. Only about ten per cent are pure Hawaiians.

Society Islands

The *London Missionary Society* sent twenty-nine missionaries aboard their mission ship *Duff* in 1796. Nineteen landed at Tahiti, the largest of ten islands in this group; ten proceeded to Tonga. The missionaries had heard of, but were not prepared for, the cannibalism which was common to many of the islands at that time. King Pomare was a cannibal and resisted every effort to plant Christianity. Three of the missionaries were killed, some fled; by 1800 there remained only five men and two women missionaries in all of these islands. When Pomare II succeeded his father he also opposed Christianity. In July of 1812 the London Missionary Society called a meeting in London to pray for the conversion of Pomare II. Within a month he threw away his idols. He constructed a huge church, and in it was baptized in the presence of four thousand of his people. Within two generations paganism had practically disappeared in Tahiti. In 1838 the Bible was published in Tahitian. After the French gained control of the island in 1843 the London Missionary Society turned its work over to the *Paris Society for Evangelical Missions*.

Tonga

As we have just noted, in 1796 the mission ship *Duff*, besides leaving missionaries in Tahiti, left ten in the Tonga Islands. This venture failed. Three missionaries were killed, one went native, and the remainder were picked up by a passing ship and taken to Australia. This aroused the interest of *Australian Methodists* who sent *Walter Lawry* to Tonga in 1822. His stay was brief due to the poor health of his wife. In 1826 *John Thomas*, an iron worker of Worcestershire, England, came and stayed 25 years. Progress was very slow until *Taufaahan*, the leading chief on the island of Haabai, was baptized in 1830. He took the name of King George, extended his authority to all the island group, and promulgated a code of Christian laws for the islands. In the 1880s King George constituted the Tongan Christians into a free Church, retaining the Methodist organization.

Samoa

In 1828 a Samoan visited Tonga, heard the gospel from the Methodists, and returned to Samoa to share it with his people. Two years later, when *John Williams* left eight Tahitian teachers in Samoa, they found a nucleus

There was a prayer meeting in London to pray for the conversion of _____ II.

(Pomare)

Circle the correct answer.
Paganism had practically disappeared from Tahiti within 1, 2, 3, 5 generations.

(2)

When _____ baptized in 1830, *Taufaahan* became _____.

(King, George)

In 1830 *John Williams* left eight Tahitian _____ in S_____. European

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of believers. Five years later, when the *London Missionary Society* sent European missionaries to these islands, they found Christians meeting for worship in sixty-five villages. Methodists and Congregationalists worked side by side in harmony. Within a few years virtually all of the population professed Christianity.

It is doubtful if there is another people on the face of the earth who, in proportion to their numbers, have given so many missionaries to the Church, or have paid so great a price in sacrifice and martyrdom. At home, not only do they build and maintain all their own churches, schools and other institutions, but they sustain their missionary guests as well. And they regularly support the world-wide work of their churches.¹

Cook Islands

In 1821 *John Williams* stopped at Rarotonga Island and in conversation with the chief told him how the Tahitians had overthrown their idols. The chief asked him to send Christian teachers. Within a year after the arrival of Tahitian teachers the seven thousand inhabitants of the island had renounced idolatry. In 1830 Williams completed the translation of the New Testament for these people.

Micronesia

Gilbert Islands

In 1857 the *American Board of Commissioners* sent missionaries who were later reinforced in these islands by the *Hawaiian Evangelical Association*. *Hiram Bingham, Jr.*, son of the pioneer to Hawaii, translated the Bible for these islands. In 1899 the *London Missionary Society* began work in the southern islands of this group.

Caroline Islands

Missionaries under the *American Board of Commissioners*, together with Hawaiian evangelists and teachers, entered these islands in 1852. After the organization of the *Hawaiian Evangelistic Society* in 1863 it reinforced the work here. The *Ziebenzeller Mission* came to work here in 1906. There has been close cooperation between German and American missionaries. For a while during World War II the islands were mandated to Japan and the work was restricted again, but afterwards missionaries were permitted to return to these islands. The transformation of these islands has endured. The island of Kusai, for example, has no jails, very little disease, and divorce is unknown.

Marshall Islands

The Christianization of these islands is similar to that of the Carolines. The *American Board of Commissioners*

¹ Henry P. Van Dusen, *They Found the Church There* (New York: Friendship Press, 1945), p. 94. (A most valuable work on mission work in the Pacific.)

missionaries arriving there five years later found _____ Christian congregations.

(teachers, Samoa, 65)

Is the following statement true or false?

Henry P. Van Dusen severely criticizes the Samoan Christians in his book *They Found the Church There*

(false)

In 1857, the American Board of Commissioners sent missionaries to the G_____ Islands.

(Gilbert)

The first missionaries to the Caroline Islands were sent by the _____ of _____ Commissioners.

(American, Board)

The Island of Kusai has no _____, little _____, no _____.

(jails, disease, divorce)

Describe the Christianization of the Marshall Islands.

Continued on the next page.

was soon reinforced by the *Hawaiian Evangelistic Association*. The Congregationalists have had these islands to themselves. It was necessary for the A.B.C. to leave for a while during World War II, but they returned. With the islands practically evangelized the A.B.C. now has work only on the island of Majuro.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Mariana Islands

Before the United States received these islands from Spain in 1898 the religion was predominantly Roman Catholic. The United States annexed Guam to this group in 1900. Two years later the *American Board of Commissioners* sent workers to Guam. *American Baptists* worked here for a short time after 1911. *Free Will Baptists* have work on Guam, as have *Southern Baptists* since 1961.

Write the name of the mission board that first sent missionaries to the island groups listed below.

Gilbert Islands _____
 Caroline Islands _____
 Mariana Islands _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Melanesia

Fiji Islands

In 1834 Christians from Tonga, who had been converted by the *Wesleyan Methodists*, crossed in canoes to Lakemba for the purpose of trading. Their Christian witness to the Fijians was effective. The next year the Methodists sent *William Cross* and *David Cargill*. They were given a cold reception, but their sacrificial service during the Epidemic of 1853 and their patient perseverance broke down all barriers. A revival broke out in 1845. Chief Thakombau, who had opposed Christianity, was converted in 1854 and the spread of the gospel continued at a rapid pace. In subsequent years about 160,000 Indians went to the Fijis to work on plantations. The *Young Fijian's Society* was organized to work with the Hindus and Muslims, but success has been less than desired. Most of the 200,000 natives are Methodists, but *Anglicans*, *Presbyterians*, the *Brethren*, *Seventh-day Adventists* and *Assemblies of God* also have churches here.

Barriers in the Fiji Islands were broken down by _____ service and patient _____.

(sacrificial, perseverance)

Most of the 200,000 inhabitants are _____.

(Methodists)

New Caledonia (including the Loyalty Islands)

About 1834 the gospel came to Maré (of the Loyalty group) through a Christian from Tonga. In 1841 the *London Missionary Society* sent two Samoan Christians to this island as teachers. The gospel spread on this island and then to Uvéa. The French, who began to exercise authority over New Caledonia in 1853, favoured Roman Catholicism and attempted to expel evangelical workers. In 1884 the L.M.S. established a Bible school for training natives to carry on their work in New Caledonia. In 1922 it passed its work here to the *Paris Evangelical Mission Society*

Native Christians from T _____ and two S _____ t _____ were the first to plant _____ Christianity _____ in N _____ C _____.

(Tonga, Samoan, teachers, New, Caledonia)

New Hebrides

Thirty of the seventy islands in this group are inhabited. Three *Johns* had a principal part in opening the New Hebrides to the gospel.

John Williams (1796-1839) has already been mentioned. Sent by the *London Missionary Society*, Williams took his bride to Tahiti in 1817. His energies and vision

Is the following statement true or false?
 John Williams took his young bride to Tahiti in 1816. He

Continued on the next page.

could not be confined to Tahiti. He considered all the South Pacific his domain. In 1834 he reported to his Society that "no group of islands, nor single island of importance, within 2,000 miles had been left unvisited." His method was to train native workers, leave them on an island as teachers, and get the Society to follow up by sending missionaries. During twenty-one years in the Pacific he built or financed the building of five ships which were used exclusively in mission work. In 1839 he took twelve native teachers on his new ship the *Camden* to the New Hebrides. Williams and *James Harris* went ashore on the island of Erromanga. In a surprise attack they were clubbed and dragged into the forest for a cannibal feast. When the news reached Samoa of the death of Williams and Harris twenty-five Christians volunteered to go to Erromanga. No less than five missionaries were sacrificed before the gospel was established on this island.

John Geddie (1815-1872) and his wife, representing *Canadian Presbyterians* were the first white missionaries on Aneituyum, arriving in 1848. He reduced the language of Aneituyum to writing, translated the New Testament, set up a printing press, and established a school for training national leaders. When Geddie left Aneituyum after twenty-five years a marker was erected which stated that there were no Christians on the island when he arrived, and no heathen when he left.

John G. Paton (1824-1907) is perhaps the best known of the missionaries to the New Hebrides. In 1858 he was sent by the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland* to the island of Tanna. After four years of severe opposition he and his wife moved to the smaller island of Aniwa. His autobiography is a story of miraculous preservation and triumphs during thirty years among a people who in the beginning were cannibals. When he left Aniwa practically all the inhabitants of this island also were professing believers. During his latter years he raised money to buy the ship *Dayspring* for use in evangelizing the New Hebrides Islands.

Solomon Islands

Bishop *John Selwyn* of the *Anglican Church of New Zealand* was architect of mission work in the Solomon Islands. He founded the *Melanesian Mission* in which work he was joined by *John Coleridge Patteson* (1827-1871). Patteson was made missionary bishop of Melanesia in 1861 and for ten years directed the work on these islands. Travelling with some workers, he went ashore alone at Nikapu in 1871, was ambushed, killed, placed in a canoe to float back towards the ship. He was found covered with a palm branch in which were tied five knots. In his chest were five spear wounds. It was revenge for the recent kidnapping of five islanders by white men. The Solomon islanders were quite resistant to the gospel, but eventually success came. The *South Sea Evangelical Mission*, *Plymouth Brethren*, *Methodists* and

was lazy and undisciplined. He was recalled by the LMS since he had made no effort to evangelize Tahiti.

(false)

What can be learned about John Geddie from the Marker erected for him?

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The best known missionary to the New Hebrides was _____ G. _____.

(John, Paton)

Are these statements true or false?

Inhabitants of the Solomon Islands received the gospel from the day missionaries arrived. _____

John Coleridge Patteson was given a tribute of honour when he visited Nikapu. _____

(false, false)

Seventh-day Adventists have all had work on these islands.

New Guinea

The southwest third of New Guinea is called Papua. It was a possession of Australia, until 1975 when it gained independence. *Congregationalists, Methodists, Lutherans* and *Anglicans* all have work here. The pioneer work was staked out by the *London Missionary Society* in 1870 when they sent *Samuel McFarlane* and in 1877 *James Chalmers*. Chalmers had been in Rarotonga for some ten years. He was a great explorer and planted a string of mission stations along the coast of Papua. In 1901, while he and a Mr. Tompkins were exploring the island of Goaribari, they were clubbed by cannibals. In 1886 *John Flierl* of the *Neuendettelsau Missionary Society* (Lutheran) founded a mission at Finschafen destined to become the largest in the South Pacific. Lutherans in New Guinea have about 350,000 members. Anglicans arrived on the eastern coast of Papua in 1891 as did the Methodists. Bodies working in other parts of New Guinea other than Papua are: *Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Utrecht Missionary Union, Christian and Missionary Alliance, New Tribes Mission* and *Church of the Nazarene*.

Circle the denomination which has the largest membership in New Guinea: Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Lutheran, Nazarene.

(Lutheran)

Summary

The general pattern of evangelizing the islands of the South Pacific was this: (1) introduction of the gospel by Christian teachers from neighbouring islands; (2) sending of American or European missionaries to islands which had in some cases been softened up; (3) attempts to win the chief of the island. After a slow beginning there was usually mass assent to the gospel; (4) establishment of schools to train native workers; (5) translation of the Scriptures to the language of each island or group of islands. Before World War I most of Polynesia, all of Micronesia, and part of Melanesia had accepted Christianity.

List the points in the pattern for evangelizing the islands of the South Pacific.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1,2 and 3). After reading the study guide, answer the following questions.

1. Approximately how many islands are there in the Pacific Ocean?

What is the approximate total population?

2. Describe the physical and racial characteristics of the inhabitants of Polynesia

Melanesia

Micronesia

3. Describe the religion, nature, and spiritual possibilities of the island people.

4. Briefly state the history of missions in Hawaii and the part the Hawaiians had in evangelizing other Pacific islands.

5. What happened to the twenty-nine missionaries of the London Missionary Society who arrived at the Society Islands on the ship *Duff* in 1796?

6. How did King Pomare treat the missionaries and what changed Pomare II?

What effect did this have on Tahiti?

7. How was the gospel established on Tonga?

8. How did Van Dusen describe the Samoan Christians?

1. Study the map on page 521. Locate the Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian groups of islands. Circle lightly the sub-groups treated in this chapter. Remember that the islands of the Philippines and Indonesia have been dealt with. Australia and New Zealand had Christianity by virtue of colonization.
2. Tahiti, now known as French Polynesia, is still nominally Christian, but the character of the church has changed drastically from what it was in the 19th century. What is the condition today, and what factors contributed to this condition?
3. Relate the story of the eighty-three Fijian students who volunteered to take the gospel to the wilds of New Guinea.

Advanced activity (*Level 3*).

1. Summarize in one paragraph each the beginnings of mission work in Papua-New Guinea by the Congregationalists, the Methodists, the Lutherans, and the Anglicans.
2. How did Japanese occupation of New Guinea affect mission work during World War II?
3. How many known languages are there in the Papua-New Guinea area?
What faith missions are attempting translations of Scriptures?
- 4 .Describe the work of the Mission Aviation Fellowship in the Papua-New Guinea area.

Seminar Discussion

1. Consider the problems which were faced by the first missionaries to the Pacific Islands.
- 2 .Evaluate the missionary methods which were practised by John Williams.
- 3 .Who should we consider the more effective evangelizers of the 19th century in the Pacific Islands? The native Christians or the European and American missionaries? Why?
- 4 .What can be said of these two types of missionaries acting in cooperation?
- 5 .Consider acts of God which in the early years changed the course of mission events.
- 6 .Discuss the effect of martyrdom of missionaries on Christians on their fields and in the homeland.