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# MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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**A Critique of the *Niu Laip Bilong Olgeta* Movement**  
Sebby Wasmande

**A Biblical Evaluation of Prayer in Baegu Tradition**  
Earnestly Wasimanu

**The Reign of Christ: An Exegesis of Isaiah 2:1-4**  
Doug Hanson

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Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools

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# MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

*Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools*

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology by Melanesians for Melanesians. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at a scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians will be considered.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest.

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## EDITORIAL

All articles have been provided by the Christian Leaders' Training College. Two articles are by graduates of the College, while the third is by a faculty member. The first two articles address issues directly facing Melanesian churches. The third article should be an encouragement to Christians around the world.

Sebby Wasmande critiques the *Niu Laip Bilong Olgeta* movement in the Nuku District, Sandaun Province, Papua New Guinea. He begins by defining cults, and then shows that the *Niu Laip Bilong Olgeta* movement is a cult. He shows their beliefs, and compares them with biblical truth. He concludes with recommendations on approaching those caught up in the movement with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Earnestly Wasimanu explores traditional prayer in his culture, including traditional objects of prayer, traditional mediums of prayer, and the traditional shrine complex. He then looks at biblical prayer, and compares it to his culture's traditional prayer. He concludes with recommendations to people in his culture.

The third article is an exegesis of Is 2:1-4. It is a challenging, yet rewarding, passage to exegete. The passage talks of a wonderful time in the future for the nation of Israel, believers, and the world. The passage should motivate us, no matter what our culture, to live for the Lord today, in light of what He has planned for us.

Not everyone will agree with the conclusions reached by the authors. However, we hope that, as you wrestle through these issues, that the thoughts of the authors will help you to grow in your understanding of God's Word, and what it may say to your culture.

Doug Hanson.

# **A CRITIQUE OF THE NIU LAIP BILONG OLGETA MOVEMENT**

**Sebby Wasmande**

*Sebby Wasmande graduated with a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Christian Leaders' Training College. He is currently pursuing further education at the Dauli Teacher's College in Tari, Papua New Guinea.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the *Niu Laip Bilong Olgeta* (NLBO) was started in Arkosame village, in the Nuku District, in Sandaun Province, it has spread to many areas of Nuku (e.g., Seim, Kafle, Maimai, and Wilwil), and Dreikikir (e.g., Tau, Kibuat, Yakrombok, and Nungwaiya) in East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea, and many churches have been established. Many Christians in Nuku are questioning whether the NLBO movement is a Christian church, or a Christian cult. The NLBO, themselves, claim that their movement is a Christian church.

Because of the opposing views held by Christians and the NLBO about the NLBO movement, the author was motivated to write this paper to interact with the Bible to critique NLBO's doctrines, beliefs, and practices. The purpose was to make clear what type of movement it really is.

There are two parts to this paper. Part one is an introduction to cults, and part two focuses on the NLBO movement.

## **I. AN INTRODUCTION TO CULTS**

There are many cults existing in the world today. Some of them are: Mormons, Bahai, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Age movement, New Apostolic, Unitarians, Unification church, and Christian Science.

Since the NLBO movement is very much akin to the above-listed cults, we shall briefly discuss these cults in general while interacting with the NLBO movement.

## **A. What is a Cult?**

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines a cult as "a system of religious worship, devotion to a person (especially a single deity)". This definition is basically good, but it does not entirely define a cult. When we look at the nature of cults, Christianity, sects, and animistic religion, they all worship a deity, and practise religious worship. Therefore, we can't distinguish, and tell, which one of them is a cult. So we still have to define a cult clearly.

So, what is a cult? A cult, in short, is any system of belief that breaks away from Christianity's faith and doctrines. As Russell Spittler writes, "Cultism is any major deviation from Orthodox Christianity, relative to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith".<sup>1</sup> A cult is any religious group, or beliefs, or movement, or organisation that portrays Christian features and culture, and claims to be Christian, but deviates from Christianity's faith and doctrines: the Bible, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, salvation, sin, hell, heaven, and the nature of mankind. It is a religious movement, or a religious group, that twists and misinterprets the above-stated Christian doctrines differently from the way Christianity approaches and interprets them. For example, the NLBO movement claims that the Bible is not God's Word; it is white men's words.

## **B. The Marks of False Cults and the NLBO Movement**

### **1. How to Identify False Cults**

There are three tests that we can use to identify false cults: "test of doctrine, test of livelihood, and test of goal".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Russell P. Spittler, *Cults and Isms*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1962, p. 12. See also Fritz Ridenour, ed., *So What's the Difference?*, Glendale CA: Regal Books, 1967, p. 118; Bryan Williams, *Learning About Cults*, Fearn UK: Christian Focus, 1997, pp. 7-8; J. Oswald Sanders, *Cults and Isms*, London UK: Lakeland, 1948, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> David Hammer, "Cults and World Religion Class Notes", Banz PNG: CLTC, 1999, p. 7.

*a. Test of Doctrine*

The cults act and behave like the Bible-believing, Christian churches. However, one must carefully compare their doctrines with the Word of God, as the Bereans compared Paul's teaching with the scripture (Acts 17:10-12).

The cults, or any religious group, or a person, may claim to come in the name of the Lord, claim to be led by the Spirit of God, and claim to speak for God. However, if that particular religious group, or a religious person, claim the Lord Jesus is not the Messiah, nor Christ, nor God Himself, but just a man, then that particular religious group, or a religious person, is cultic and does not come from God, and is not led by the Spirit of God (1 John 2:18-24; 4:1-3). They are used and led by the deceptive and counterfeit spirit (1 Tim 4:1-2), the spirit of Satan.

*b. Test of Livelihood*

Secondly, test how the cults live, behave, and act in their community or society. The cults may claim to be true evangelical Christians. However, if the founders, or leaders (and their members), live an immoral life, practising sexual immorality, practising divination, and deceiving their members into giving them money and other possessions for their own use, then they are heretics.

*c. Test of Goal*

Finally, one should test the primary goal of any religious group that claims to be Christian, and a God-worshipping people. The Bible (Ex 20:3-6; Ps 95:6-7; Is 42:8; Matt 22:37) tells us that we are to worship the creator God alone, and give glory to Him, and have only Him as the centre and the main focusing object of our worship, theology, and religion. Therefore, the primary goal of those who claim to worship God, and claim to be Christian, should have God as the central object, and the main focus, of their worship, theology, and religion.

However, if a religious group claims to be Christian and to worship God, yet centres and focuses their worship, theology, and religion on their leaders, or on a founder, then they are definitely cultic.



Also if the leaders and the members of that particular religious movement go around “greasing the people with false hope of money and cargo”<sup>3</sup> to follow their religious movement, then it is a cult movement.

## **2. *The Marks of False Cults and the NLBO Movement***

What are some of the common marks of false cults and the NLBO movement? The following list contains some of the common marks of false cults and the NLBO movement.

### *a. Treatment of Scripture*

The cults believe in the Bible, and have the Bible, but they only select certain verses that suit their particular doctrine. By doing this, the cults destroy the value of the scriptures and make the Bible become ordinary literature, like the *Post-Courier* newspaper.

Also the cults believe in the statement of their founder, who claims to have new interpretation of the Bible, and accept their founder’s new interpretation of the Bible as final and authoritative.

The NLBO movement falls into this same category. The NLBO have the Bible. But the NLBO chooses certain passages that suit its doctrines and beliefs, and preach on those selected passages. The NLBO also believe, and accept, Charles Mewala’s (the founder of the NLBO) new interpretation of the Bible<sup>4</sup> as final and authoritative.

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<sup>3</sup> Hammer, “Cults and World Religions”, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Col 1:24 is one of the passages that Mewala interprets, and gives new meaning to, and his followers believe to be true. In Col 1:24, Paul speaks about his willingness to suffer for Christ’s body, the church. Mewala interprets this as Paul suffered and died to save the Colossians from their sins. Mewala is going to die for everyone in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific, and save them from their sin. However, this is a heresy. Paul didn’t speak about salvation. He spoke about service. Salvation is not the work of Paul or Mewala. It is only the work of God. God alone, being sinless and holy, can save mankind from sin. Thus Christ’s suffering alone brings about salvation (1 Pet 1:11; 5:1; Heb 2:9). Salvation is found alone in Christ (Acts 4:12). We can share in Christ’s suffering, and go through all kinds of trials and pains in His service, but to save people from sin is not our task. It is the work of Christ alone to save people from their sin.

The NLBO also believe Mewala's own spoken words as directly coming from God. Therefore, the NLBO accept Mewala's words as without error, final, and authoritative, and preach Mewala's words as a sermon in its local churches. The NLBO describe Mewala's own spoken words to them as *Singaut i kam long God* (The call or message from God).

*b. The Cults Claim Absolute Truth about God*

The cultist claims, and believes, that their cult group alone has all the truth about God, and their cult group alone is the true religion. They claim that all the Christian churches are wrong. They claim the Christian churches don't have all the real truth about God, and practise a religion that is not the true religion. As Fritz Ridenour writes: "Cultists believe that all Christian churches are wrong, and their cult is a special group that has the real truth about God."<sup>5</sup>

The NLBO claim that their NLBO movement is the only true church. They have checked with the computer, and the computer has confirmed, and approved, the NLBO movement as the only true church.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the NLBO claim that the NLBO church alone will give "blessings" to the people of PNG and the world, and the gospel of the NLBO church will spread throughout the world.<sup>7</sup>

*c. The Cults Have a Prophet*

The cults have a prophet, whom they claim was called and chosen by God. Their prophet often claims to receive special and direct messages or callings, revelations, visions, dreams, wisdom, knowledge, and an inner voice from God Himself, or from an angelic being. Joseph Smith, the

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<sup>5</sup> Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> John Afal, interview by the author, Sebitala village, Seim, Nuku, Sandaun Province, November 25, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with John Afal, Sebitala village, November 25, 1998. John Afal didn't specify what he meant by "blessings". He didn't clarify the specific blessing the NLBO gives. He is probably referring to the work of salvation as a blessing that would come from the NLBO church through Mewala.

founder of the Mormon church, claimed that, in 1823, the angel of Moroni, Mormon's son, visited him (when he was 17) and told him of the plates.<sup>8</sup>

The NLBO claim that Charles Mewala is their new prophet, and the final prophet of this present age, whom God called when he was harvesting yams in his garden at Fawaiyi, Arkosame, in 1976.

*d. The Cults Force People to Give*

The cults force, and demand, their followers to give money and other material possessions to their cult leaders,<sup>9</sup> as does the NLBO movement. The NLBO leaders often claim *Singaut i kam long God* (the call from God), and force their members to give money, pigs, sago, and garden foods to Mewala for his use.

*e. The Cults Deny that Jesus is God*

The cults often see Jesus as an ordinary person born of Joseph and Mary. He was just a good man, full of wisdom and knowledge, a man of good moral standard, a teacher, and a prophet. The NLBO also believe that the Lord Jesus was not God Himself. He was just a man. As Francis Aulong (one of the NLBO movement leaders) said, "*Jisas em i man tasol, tasol anointed Spirit bilong God i yusim em long mekim wok* (Jesus is just a man, but the anointed Spirit of God used Him to do the work)."<sup>10</sup>

*f. How People are Saved (Salvation)*

Cults claim that "the person can't be put right with God and be saved by faith alone in Christ Jesus".<sup>11</sup> The person must have faith, plus do good works, like obeying the cult's teachings to be put right with God, and be saved. So the cults see salvation as an equation of F (Faith), plus GW (Good Works).

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<sup>8</sup> John E. Schwarz, *An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, Minneapolis MN: Tabgha Foundation, 1995, p. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Learning about Cults*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Aulong, interview by the author, Hambasama village, Seim, Nuku, Sandaun Province, January 14, 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?*, p. 119.

The NLBO claim that, for a person to go to heaven, the person must obey Mewala, and their pastor's teachings, and become a member of the NLBO church. Therefore, when the NLBO leaders urge their members to give money and food to Mewala, break the firewood, and bring the food to their leaders, the members would obediently do what their leaders urge them to do, because this is part of earning their salvation.

*g. The Cults Like Following Laws and Regulations*

The cults are a legalistic-type people or group. They often emphasise following laws and regulations. The followers have to obey the laws that are set by their leaders. If the followers disobey the laws of their leaders, they lose their good name and salvation, and are cast out from the group.

*h. Predictions about Future Things (Eschatology)*

The cults often make false predictions about future events of the Bible. William Miller, the founder of the Seventh-day Adventists, predicted that the second coming of the Lord Jesus would be in 1843.<sup>12</sup> The Jehovah's Witnesses also claim an invisible second coming of Christ occurred in 1914.<sup>13</sup>

The Lord Jesus' return to earth for the second time is real. The Bible (Matt 24:36; Acts 1:9-11; John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 1:7) teaches that Jesus will return personally, physically, visibly, and with glory and power. However, the times and dates for His second coming are not for us to set and predict. It is something that only God alone knows (Matt 24:36). Our task is to prepare our lives and be ready for His coming.

The NLBO predict that there is no last day. Heaven is here on earth. God will only do away all the corruption of this world, and make it become heaven, and we will continue to live on this earth. Since the marks of the NLBO are very much akin to many Christian cults (like Jehovah's

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<sup>12</sup> Williams, *Learning About Cults*, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Witnesses, Mormons, etc.), the NLBO movement comes under the heading of a pseudo-Christian cult.<sup>14</sup>

## **II. FOCUSING ON THE *NIU LAIP BILONG OLGETA* (NLBO) MOVEMENT**

The name *Niu Laip Bilong Olgeta* (NLBO) simply means “New Life for All”. Mewala and his leaders named their new religious movement “New Life for All” because, when they were with the South Sea Evangelical church (SSEC), they didn’t find a new transformed life spiritually. Now, however, they claim they have a transformed spiritual life, and are walking in the new way of the Spirit.

### **A. History of the NLBO Movement**

#### **1. *The Place of Origin***

The NLBO movement was started in Arkosame village in the Nuku District in Sandaun Province in 1988. Geographically, Arkosame is situated on the border of East Sepik and Sandaun Province, east of Nuku. Prior to the establishment of the NLBO, the SSEC was the dominant denomination in Arkosame. Now the entire Arkosame area has converted to the NLBO movement. Only ten percent of the SSEC congregations are left.

#### **2. *The Founders***

Both founders are called “Charles”. One is called “Charles Mewala” and the other is called “Charles Sambeli Carroll.” They are both cousins from Arkosame.

##### **a. *Charles Mewala***<sup>15</sup>

Mewala is the main, initiating, founding, father of the NLBO movement. Mewala’s date of birth and attendance at primary school is not known. In 1972-1973, Mewala attended PNG Bible church’s Bible School at Pabarabuk in the Western Highlands Province, and did his theological training, as well as grade seven and eight. In 1974, Mewala transferred to

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<sup>14</sup> Hammer, “Cults and World Religions”, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> John Afol, Sebitala village, Seim, November 25, 1998; Michael Anlong, Hambasama, Seim, January 12, 1999; John Judah, CLTC, June 26, 2000; Carol Noah, CLTC, June 16, 2000.

Aitape High School in Sandaun Province, and did his grade nine. In 1975, he completed his grade ten at Aitape High School.

Mewala was unsuccessful after the completion of his grade ten in 1975. He then returned home and attended the SSEC Bible School in Brugam and did his pastoral training. When he had completed his pastoral training, the SSEC church synods appointed him as District Church Secretary for Guanga One. Being a District Church Secretary, Mewala also taught at the SSEC local Bible School at Arkosame.

Mewala began the NLBO movement through what he thought was a direct calling from God in 1976, and through receiving divine revelation from God in 1987. In 1976, Mewala thought he heard God's voice calling him to become the leader of the New Covenant and establish seven churches. In 1987, Mewala claimed to have a revelation from God that he would become the final prophet of this present age. This caused Mewala to initiate, and start, the NLBO movement.

*b. Charles Sambeli Carroll*<sup>16</sup>

Like Mewala, nothing is known of Carroll's date of birth and attendance at primary school. Carroll attended Aitape High School in 1972, and completed his grade ten in 1975. In 1976-1977, Carroll attended Dauli Teachers' College at Tari, in Southern Highlands Province, and trained as a primary school teacher. He graduated from the College, taught for some years, and then resigned from teaching in 1986. Carroll saw some of the miracles<sup>17</sup> Mewala did, and joined Mewala in 1986.

Carroll worked with Mewala as Mewala's Associate Managing Director. Carroll was mainly involved in dealing with the social affairs of the NLBO movement. He drew up and set up the social structures and policies, constitutions, statement of faith, and financial management procedures. He received Mewala's messages, and passed them on to the leaders of the seven regional churches of the NLBO movement.

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<sup>16</sup> Interviews with John Afal, November 25, 1998, August 19, 2000; Michael Aulong, January 12, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> John Afal (November 25, 1998) didn't specify the miracles that Mewala performed.

## **B. How the NLBO Movement Started**

### **1. Pre-Stage**

Before the establishment of the NLBO movement, Mewala and Carroll were religious people in their high school days. They often gathered together in a secret place, fasted and prayed together, and talked about what they believed.

At Aitape High School, Mewala and Carroll were the leaders of the Evangelical Alliance (EA) students' fellowship group. They organised Sunday worship service for the EA students, and took part in teaching religious instruction (RI) to the students. Since Mewala and Carroll were serious about what they believed, it gives us an indication that, while they were at Aitape High School, they probably must have planned to start their new religious movement. That's why when Carroll heard about Mewala trying to start the NLBO movement, he resigned from his teaching career and joined Mewala, and established the NLBO movement.

### **2. Mewala's Divine Call and Revelation**

In 1976, Mewala received his direct divine calling from God in his garden at Fawaiyi, Arkosame.<sup>18</sup> Mewala claimed that, in the garden, he heard God's voice calling and telling him to become the leader of the New Covenant, and establish seven churches.

Mewala heard from God of this big task, and replied "Lord I am not qualified to do this task, because I've never had experience to do this work. It's good that you choose Judah, because he has done some missionary work, and has had experience." But the Lord said, "I have chosen you to

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<sup>18</sup> This was when Mewala was still with SSEC. It was the harvesting season when Mewala went to his garden at Fawaiyi, Arkosame, and harvested yams. In the garden, Mewala heard a voice calling him by his village name, "Umblara" three times. However, after the first two calls Mewala didn't reply, because he thought it could be from some of his family lines. Later, when he heard the voice the third time calling him by the same name, Mewala replied by asking, "Who are you?" The caller replied, "I am your God, Lord. I am now choosing you to become the leader of the New Covenant, and establish seven churches."

do this work.” To prove that He had called and chosen Mewala for this big task, the Lord did “many miracles”<sup>19</sup> before Mewala.

Mewala then returned home and told the SSEC missionaries (e.g., Karl Kalmbak, and Bill Kisbread) and church elders (e.g., Ruben Wakalo, David Minimbi, John Sambeli, and John Judah) that the Lord had called and chosen him to become the leader of the New Covenant, and establish seven churches. To prove that this was from God, and not from the evil spirits, the missionaries and the church elders prayed and asked God to make it clear to them.

In 1987, around 12 midnight, Mewala claimed that the Spirit of God led him to a tree. As he came closer to the *okari* tree, and stood beside it, the Lord appeared to him, and told him that he would become the last prophet for this contemporary age. After some weeks, Mewala called all the councillors from Nuku District, and all the SSEC church leaders from Guanga One District, and shared with them that God had called him, in 1976, to become the leader of the New Covenant, and establish seven churches. Now, He had revealed himself to Mewala, and told him to become the last prophet of this present age. However, whatever advice these leaders gave to Mewala is unknown.

In 1988, Mewala started the NLBO movement. But the movement wasn't named the NLBO movement. The NLBO movement was kept under the SSEC, and was part of the SSEC. Then, in 1989, Mewala and his people (SSEC congregation from Arkosame), departed from the SSEC. Mewala and his leaders named their new movement the NLBO church of PNG, and made it known to the public.

### **C. The Reason for the Establishment of the NLBO Movement**

There could be many reasons that caused such departure. However, according to my research and interviews about the NLBO movement, the following reasons<sup>20</sup> were the cause of departure.

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<sup>19</sup> John Afal, November 25, 1998. John Afal didn't clarify the kind of miracles the Lord did for Mewala.



### ***1. Termination from being part of the SSEC***

In 1989, the SSEC (South Seas Evangelical church) leaders, at their general conference meeting at Brugam, terminated Mewala and his followers (from the SSEC Arkosame and Seim areas) from being part of the traditional SSEC. When the traditional SSEC found out that Mewala and his followers practised divination, they tried to discipline, and correct them. But Mewala, and his followers, didn't want to listen to the SSEC leadership. The traditional SSEC leadership had a meeting and terminated Mewala and his followers from being part of the SSEC. When Mewala and his followers had no church to come under, they named this movement the NLBO church of PNG and left the traditional SSEC church.

### ***2. Mewala's Direct Divine Calling and Revelation***

Mewala thought he was called by God to become the leader of the New Covenant, establish seven churches, and become the final prophet of this present age. Therefore, to fulfil the task for which God had called and chosen him, Mewala established the NLBO movement.

God does indeed intervene and manifest Himself, and communicate to people, to do His work, using many different ways. These ways can be classified under two main ways: direct and indirect. The direct way is the way in which God personally revealed Himself, and had a personal contact with people and communicated with the people. Examples are Moses (Ex 3-4; 5:22-14:4, 20-22, etc.), Paul (Acts 9:5-6), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; 22:1-3, 15), and Samuel (1 Sam 3:4-21). God manifested Himself personally to them, and communicated with them, and told them what to do.

The indirect way is when God uses other sources and means, like visions, dreams, prophets, and angels, to intervene and communicate to people about Himself, and tell them to do His work. For Jacob (Gen 46:1-4), Daniel (Dan 8; 10-12:13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:11-19), Ezekiel (Ezek 3:1-14), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-33), and John (the book of Revelation), God appeared, and spoke to them through a vision. For Joseph (through an

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<sup>20</sup> Interviews with John Afal, Sebitala village, November 25, 1998; Carol Noah, Diploma 4 student, CLTC, July 7, 2000.

angel – Matt 1:20-23; 2:13), Abimelech (Gen 20:4-7), and Daniel (Dan 7), God appeared and spoke to them through dreams. For Lot (Gen 19:14-22), Peter (Acts 12:1-18), Abraham (Gen 22:11-12), Joseph (Matt 1:20-23; 2:13), and John (Rev 19:9-10; 22:6-10), the Lord revealed Himself by speaking to them through angels. In the OT prophetic books (Isaiah-Malachi), we see God telling His prophets to warn the Israelites when they turn their back on God. However, OT prophets also gave a message of blessing and hope to the Israelites if they returned to God.

Therefore, we can't negate God's way of using all sorts of interesting ways of revealing Himself, and telling people to do His work. In the areas where the gospel hasn't been preached to the people, there is a place where God can intervene through visions, dreams, direct calling, etc., and communicate to people, and use them to do His work. However, today God has revealed Himself to us through His Word the Bible (2 Tim.3:16), about His divine nature, and His work for us. Therefore, other revelation through visions, dreams, direct calling, etc., would seem little at this time.

Thus, if God really intervened, and called us to do His work through visions, dreams, direct calling, revelation, etc., we would always work to serve His church, edify His church, and to help it grow in faith and unity, and become like the Lord Jesus Himself in character (Eph. 4:12-13). Also, we wouldn't twist what the Bible teaches, and develop new doctrines that are heretical and unbiblical.

What about Mewala's claim? Were his vision, revelation, and direct calling from God true and real? The practices, doctrines, and beliefs that Mewala and his movement teach are against what the Bible teaches. This gives us evidence that Mewala just made all this up from his own imaginative thoughts and led people to heresy. Therefore, Mewala is an apostate.

What about Mewala's claim of being called by God to become the final prophet of this contemporary age? The Bible (1 Cor. 12:29; Eph 4:11) shows us that the gift of being a prophet is among many other gifts that the Holy Spirit gives according to His will (1 Cor 12:11), for the purpose of preparing God's people for the works of service (Eph 4:12), and edifying

the church, the believers, helping them grow in their faith and unity, and bearing Christ-like attitudes in their lives. Indeed, today, God has called some believers, and given the gift of prophecy, and a gift of prophetic ministry to serve Him and His church. However, since Mewala's gifts have led to new doctrines, division, and disunity, his claim of receiving God's voice to become the final prophet of this present age is not true.

The gift of prophecy, and prophetic ministry, in the NT is different from the OT. In the OT, God often used the prophets. But now (in the NT) God has spoken to us through Christ (Heb 1:1-2). Therefore, we can't doubt about what God can do today, but I, personally, believe that, since God has spoken to us through Christ, the prophecies and the prophetic ministries of today should be less.

The true prophets, called and raised up by God, don't produce and speak their own words. They produce and speak what God wants them to speak (Jer 20:9).<sup>21</sup> They only do what God wants them to do for Him, and not do their own thing. They don't contradict the Bible.

However, Mewala, like other OT false prophets, deceived people, and lead them to worship and serve false gods (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20-22; 1 Kings 18:16-46) and practise divination (Deut 18:14). He has contradicted the Bible, by saying Jesus is not God, but just a man, and has led his followers to practise divination. He has broken away from the SSEC church. Mewala's claim of having heard the voice of God, and his appointment to become the prophet, is not true. He just made all this up by himself. This also demonstrates that Mewala is a heretic, and a false prophet.

### **3. Money and Cargo Mentality**

Mewala and his followers wanted things to emerge quickly, as it did with the Yaliwan and his Peli movement.<sup>22</sup> The NLBO didn't want to waste

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<sup>21</sup> Gordon D. Fee, and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1982., pp. 152-153.

<sup>22</sup> Wendy Flannery, *Religious Movements in Melanesia Today (1)*, Point 2 (1983), p. 98. Yaliwan, and his Peli movement, and the NLBO movement said, "*Ol i laik samting i mas kamap nau tasol* (they want things to emerge immediately)." During the night naked young men and women of the Peli movement would search for the dead in the memorial

time. They wanted to receive money and cargo from their dead ancestors quickly.

The NLBO thought white-skin missionaries had come, and blinded their eyes, stealing the money and cargo their ancestors and dead relatives had left for them. Therefore, the NLBO (particularly Mewala and his followers from Arkosame) argued with the Liebenzell missionaries (Bill Giesbrecht and Karl Kalmbach), who, at that time, lived and worked with the SSEC church in Arkosame. Then Mewala led the deviation and established the NLBO movement.

Because of their money and cargo mentality, the NLBO keep a spare room in their house. They decorate the room with the flowers, and put a plate or an empty tin in it. Between 2 am and 4 am, they go into their prayer room and pray and ask their ancestors to give them money and cargo. (Interview with Jul and Yimorika, June 6, 1998).

#### **D. Social Structure**

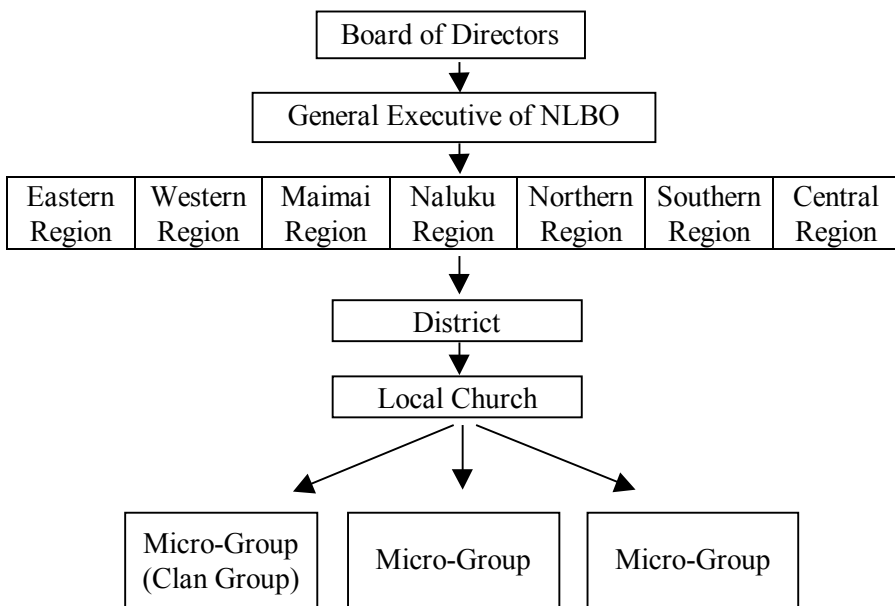
The NLBO's headquarters are in Arkosame. That's where the whole administration of NLBO's spiritual and social affairs are proposed, and carried out. The NLBO also have seven regional centres that function on behalf of the headquarters. The main role of these seven regional centres is to look after district and micro-group (clan group) churches that come under each of these seven regional centres. These regional centres are: Eastern region, Western region, Maimai region, Naluku region, Northern region, Southern region, and Central region. Each of these seven regional centres are responsible to tell all the district and micro-group churches that come under their leadership to carry out the religious activities that the headquarters in Arkosame want.

The NLBO's leadership is structured in a hierarchical system. The head of its leadership is a board of directors. The board of directors comprises the spiritual director (Mewala), managing director (Caroll), and the secretary,

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gardens in order to seize them and make money fall from their pockets (page 96 of same book). Likewise, when the NLBO started, the NLBO would go to the cemetery, and pray to their dead relatives, and ask them for money and cargo.

and treasurer. Under the Board of Directors is the general executive of the NLBO movement. The general executive is made up of the leaders, who represent each of the seven regional churches or centres. Under the general executive, are seven regional churches. Then, under the district church, are micro-group churches. This is the set up of the NLBO church leadership structure:



## E. Worship

In this section on worship, we will mainly be looking at two things. First, the object of the NLBO worship, and secondly, how the NLBO practise its religious worship and activities.

### 1. *The Object of Worship*

The NLBO claim they worship God, and that they have God as the centre of their worship and religion. However, if the NLBO's claim is true, that they do worship God, and have God as the centre of their worship and

religion, why do they deny one branch of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ as not God but just a man?<sup>23</sup>

God is one God (Deut 6:4) and a unified being. He revealed Himself in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are one Godhead, and are equal in their divine nature and power. They cleave together as one, and depend on each other in their task. They also support each other in their Godhead role. Therefore, the religion that claims to worship God, and serve God, must not degrade and deny the deity of one branch of Godhead, and recognise only two persons of the Godhead. Therefore, since the NLBO deny and degrade the deity of the Lord Jesus, the NLBO don't know God (John 7:28; 8:19), don't have God, and don't worship God.

Jesus came from heaven, and He is God Himself (John 1:1b; 1 Tim 1:17). He has all the divine nature of God in full (Phil 2:6; Heb 1:3). But He became man to reveal God to us clearly (John 1:1-3; 7:28; 8:19; 17:5-8; Phil 2:6-7; Heb 1:3). Therefore, when we believe in Jesus as God, and worship Him, we truly know God (John 14:7, 9) and worship God. Jesus is the gateway to God (John 14:6). To enter into God's presence, and worship God, we must come to Jesus first. He is the only means through whom we can come to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

The NLBO call upon the name of God in their worship. However, in reality, they just cover up with the name of God in their worship, and they actually claim Mewala as their new Jesus Christ, and worship him.<sup>24</sup> They have Mewala as the centre, and the focus, of their worship and religion.

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<sup>23</sup> Hendrick Tambala is one of the NLBO leaders; he said (January 16, 2000), "The man, Jesus, the Spirit of God came upon Him and used Him to do the work of God." Also see Francis Aulong's comments in footnote 10.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Michael Kaiyambor, Sebitala village, Seim, Nuku, December 20, 1998. Michael Kaiyambor is a former member of the NLBO movement. Having an interview with Michael about the object of NLBO's worship, he said, "*Ol NLBO i no save lotu long Krai Jisas. Tasol, ol i save lotu long Charles Mewala*" (The NLBO worship Charles Mewala and not the Lord Jesus Christ). One of the songs the NLBO composed about Mewala reads: *Jisas i kamap pinis long NLBO sios*. Literally, it means Mewala is the new Jesus of the NLBO movement.

What does the Bible say about the object of worship? Before we elaborate more on the object of worship, let's briefly define what worship is. Worship is our total being, responding to our eternal creator God. How? By bowing and kneeling down before Him, and giving Him our total adoration, and the appreciation, praise, honour, love, and thanksgiving that is due to His greatness, holiness, mercy, and love upon us, because He saves us from our sins through the work of Christ Jesus (Ps 96:6-7; John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:21).<sup>25</sup> As Robert G. Rayburn writes, "For worship is man's means of ascribing to God that adoration, reverence, praise, love, and obedience, of which he sincerely believes God to be worthy."<sup>26</sup> Also, worship is being in the presence of God, singing, and acknowledging His greatness (Is 6:3; Rev 4:8-11, 5:9-13).

The above definition reveals that God alone matters in all levels of our worship, and is the priority, and the centre, of our worship. This tells us that God alone should be the only object that matters, and that He becomes the priority in our worship and religion. In fact, the Bible<sup>27</sup> clearly tells us that God wants us to worship and serve Him alone, and have Him alone at the centre of our worship, and worship no other false gods, idols, or man (like Mewala).

The chief purpose of God creating us in His own image (Gen 1:26), and bringing us to live in this world, is to give honour and glory to Him, fellowship with Him, and worship Him alone. As Robert G. Rayburn said, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever. . . . Man was created for the purpose of bringing glory to his eternal Creator God."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> D. A. Carson, *Worship, Adoration and Action*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book house, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1980, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> There are many passages that reveal that God alone should be the only object of our worship and religion, and no other false gods, like an image of a person, or animal, spirits, or person like Mewala. See Gen 24:26; 1 Kings 18:21; 1 Chr 16:10, 29; Ps 81:9; 95:6-7; 132:7; Ex 20:5; Is 42:8; 45:20; Matt 2:4; 4:10; 28:9; Luke 2:37; 24:52; John 4:24; Acts 16:14; Rom 1:23-25; Col 2:18; Rev 5:14; 13:4; 14:7; 19:10.

<sup>28</sup> Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, p. 16; also, A. W. Tozer said, "The reason God made man in His image was that he (man) might appreciate and admire and worship

The NLBO may claim that their worship is Christian worship, however, the NLBO worship is not Christian worship. Christian worship is worship, where total adoration is given to the eternal God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)<sup>29</sup> and focuses on Christ Jesus, the founder of Christian faith (Heb 12:2) and religion. Worship is founded upon the person and work of Christ. Christian worship should have Christ as the centre of worship and religion.

However, since the NLBO have Mewala as the central object of their worship and religion, and deny Jesus as God, their worship is not Christian worship, and their NLBO movement is not a Christian church. NLBO is a Christian cult.

## **2. *The Practice of Worship***

How does the NLBO movement practise its religious worship and activities? The following points will show us how the NLBO practise its religious worship and activities.

### *a. Decoration and Dance*

The NLBO decorate themselves with white flowers and white feathers, and sing and dance in their worship. The reason for decorating with white flowers and white feathers is to show that their spiritual lives are changed, and they now have newness of life in the Spirit.

However, what does the Bible say about the true mark of a Christian, or a spiritual person, who has newness of life in the Spirit and in Christ? Paul, in Gal 5:22-23, clearly spells out the marks of a true Spirit-filled person or Christian. These marks are: "Peace, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Paul, in 2 Cor 5:17, reveals that those who believe in the Lord Jesus and are in union with Him (Christ Jesus), are new spiritual people in Christ, and have found new life in Christ.

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God." See: A. W. Tozer, *The Missing Jewel in Evangelical Church*, Harrisburg PA: Christian Publications, 1961, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Worship*, London UK: Collins, 1936, p. 70; also see Colin Buchanan, *Lambeth and Liturgy 1998*, Bramcote UK: Grove Books, 1989, p. 8.



Therefore, we can prove to the NLBO that they have false doctrine and practices. True spiritual people are those who show the fruit of the Spirit in their daily lives. We can decorate the outside of our skin with white flowers and feathers and yet become corrupt in our inner being with evil things.

*b. Sign of Respect*

As a sign of respecting their leaders, the NLBO decorate their leaders with flowers, carry them, and sing and dance before them. For example, when the NLBO group from Masanja, Sebitala village in Seim, appointed Fabian Ambassi (30/12/1997) as their district pastor, they put flowers on him, sat him on a chair and they carried him and sang and danced.

There is a place where we should respect our church leaders. However, what the NLBO did is beyond respect. It is like seeing and treating their leaders as their little gods, and giving them more honour, respect, and praise than God. In fact, carrying the leaders, and singing and dancing before them, show us clearly that they are worshipping the leaders and not God.

The NLBO say they do not worship their leaders. However, the NLBO carry their leaders, sing, and dance before them. Carrying people on a bed, singing, and dancing are a worldly way of respect, and not a Christian way of respect. In a Christian circle, we can put flowers on our leaders' heads to show them that we respect them. However, we should not carry them, sing, and dance before them. If we carry them, and sing and dance, then we are worshipping our leaders. This is against what the Bible teaches about worshipping only God, and no other gods or human beings.

*c. Nicknames*

The members of the NLBO are required to give the nicknames of dead relatives or ancestors to leaders. The leaders take those nicknames down to Charles Mewala at Arkosame. Mewala uses the nicknames, and gives each member the telephone number<sup>30</sup> to phone their dead relatives and ancestors,

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Domanic Sembeyai Wangunu, Sebitala village, Seim, September 1, 1998. Domanic is a former member of the NLBO. But he has left the NLBO, and now is

to ask them for money and cargo (e.g., rice, tinned fish). A critique of this will be made next.

*d. Prayer Room*

Every NLBO member has spare rooms for prayer. Both the husband and wife have their own prayer room. In their prayer room, they put an empty tin or plate, and decorate it with flowers. Around 2 am to 4 am, they leave their bed and go into their prayer room and pray and ask their dead relatives and ancestors to give them money and cargo. This is akin to Yaliwan's Peli movement (see footnote 22).

Praying and communicating to the spirits of the ancestors or dead relatives (and asking them for money and cargo) is a form of divination and cult practice. Divination practice is a satanic activity, and God is against any form of divination practice (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:9-12; Acts 16; Gal 19-20). Since the NLBO pray and ask their ancestors and dead relatives to give them money and cargo, the NLBO movement is a cult movement similar to Yaliwan's MT Rurun or Peli cargo movement (see footnote 22).

## **F. Doctrine and Beliefs**

We have pointed out some of the NLBO doctrines and beliefs in part one. However, these doctrines and beliefs are core to NLBO faith and teaching. Therefore, as we interact with the Bible and discuss them, we shall highlight the issues.

### **1. The Bible**

The NLBO believe that the Bible comes directly from white men, and does not come from God. They believe that the Bible is not God's word, and it does not originate from God. It comes from white men, and it is their word.

In response, the Bible is God's manual that contains everything that God wants to tell us about His divine nature, His work in creation (Gen 1-2),

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fellowshipping with Sebitala Christian Brethren church (CBC). Domanic didn't clarify what kind of phone numbers Mewala gave his followers.

and His divine plan for mankind's salvation (Gen 3:15). Though men originally wrote the Bible in ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), these men were inspired by God to write.<sup>31</sup> The Bible tells us God inspired the words, even though men wrote them.<sup>32</sup> A translation, closer to the original language of Greek, is "All scripture is God-breathed." That means the words that are in the scriptures come from the mouth of God, and God spoke those words. This tells us that the scriptures are of divine (God) origin, are a divine product,<sup>33</sup> and not from white men.

The words that are in the Bible are from God. But the writers didn't repeat God word-for-word, and write them down exactly. The writers received God's message or word, used their own imagination, expressed, and wrote them in their own words, in the context of their hearers' life situations. However, the Holy Spirit guided the words the writers wrote.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the words that the writers expressed, and wrote, in the Bible are authentic and authoritative.

Furthermore, in the gospels, Jesus often quoted OT scriptures authoritatively, and referred to them as God's Word.<sup>35</sup> In ancient times, God chose certain men<sup>36</sup> to receive His words, and they spoke and wrote

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<sup>31</sup> Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*, Wheaton IL: Living Books, 1991, p. 4; also see J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and Christian Foundations* 6, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965, p. 43; Merrill C. Tenney, *The Bible: the Living Word of Revelation*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1968, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> See 2 Tim 3:16, GNB translation.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1982, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> The apostle Peter affirmed that the Bible is God's word, and originated from God, when he said, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For no prophecy ever had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:20-21). The phrase "men spoke from God" seems to be a very short phrase. However, it is the key phrase to understand the origin of the Bible – it comes from God, and not from white men. In fact, the writers were not white-coloured men. They were dark skinned.

<sup>35</sup> John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*, London UK: Tyndale Press, 1972, p. 37. Jesus quoted OT scriptures authoritatively, and referred to them as "the word of God" (Matt 19:4f; Mark 7:11-13; John 10:34f). He also believed the OT to be revelation from God, given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36), and believed them to be authoritative (Luke 24:25-27, 44).

<sup>36</sup> Refer to OT prophets in the OT times. For further details see footnote 37.

them. That's why, in the OT, you often see the phrase "The Lord Almighty says", or "The Lord says" (e.g., Jer 5:14; 6:21-23; 7:3). This reveals that the words the prophets received and spoke were not their own words, but they were God's word. God used them as His instrument, or mouthpiece, to communicate His word. In the same way, in the NT, God used some men<sup>37</sup> to communicate, and write the message of salvation that Christ brought to us.

Since the Bible itself, and the Lord Jesus Himself, prove to us that the Bible is God's revealed word, we can prove to the NLBO that they have twisted what God's word teaches. The Bible (Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22: 18, 19) clearly tells us that those who add to or subtract from God's word are under God's curse.

## **2. *The Lord Jesus***

The NLBO believe and teach that Jesus is not God. He was just a man that the Holy Spirit came upon and used to do the work of God.<sup>38</sup>

In response, we can't deny Jesus' humanity. He was truly a man, who possessed human characteristics.<sup>39</sup> However, despite emptying His divine nature (Phil 2:6-7) and becoming a human being and having human features, He never sinned (Heb 4:15), and had no sin in His entire life. The Bible (Ps 7:11; Deut 32:4; Is 5:16; 6:3; 1 Thess 4:7; 1 Pet 1:15-16) reveals that God alone is holy, perfect, and righteous. However, Heb 4:15; 7:28

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<sup>37</sup> In ancient times, God chose certain men, like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc., to receive His words, and they spoke and wrote them in their own context and life situation that they went through. The words they spoke and wrote became books or sections of the OT. In the same way as the OT, for the NT, God used men like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, and Peter to receive His Word and communicate to their hearers, in their setting and context, and wrote them down. The words they expressed and wrote became books of the NT. The NT books are God's inspired books, because the NT writers were not "taught by human wisdom" but with "words taught by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 2:10-13). The Spirit of God guided and taught the NT writers what to say and write.

<sup>38</sup> Milne, *Know the Truth*, pp. 142-144. Milne points out heresies like Ebionism, Docetism, Gnosticism, Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism. They are like the NLBO, in that they deny the Lord Jesus as God, and say He is just a man.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus, as a human, possessed human characteristics: He felt thirsty, tired, and hungry.

reveals that Jesus was a sinless, perfect, and righteous person, like God. Therefore this reveals that Jesus is not just a man. He is God Himself (1 Tim 1:17). As H. E. W. Turner said, “the incarnated Lord (Jesus) was both ‘true God’ and ‘true man’ ”.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus became man to reveal God to us clearly (Heb 1:1-2). He is like a window that opens, and reveals to us clearly all the personality and divine nature of God that was hidden and wasn't previously clearly revealed to us. In fact, the Bible (John 14:9; cf. 17:4, 6, 8) reveals that, if we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father (God). So Jesus is the window, and the human face, of God, so that we can see and know God.<sup>41</sup>

Also if Jesus had not become a man, how would He know our struggles in life, and help us? Jesus became man, and went through all the struggles and temptations that mankind faces (but He did not sin), so that He is able to help us overcome them (1 Cor 10: 13).

To prove to the NLBO that Jesus is God, let us go further, and spell out some of the features that God alone has, which are also in Jesus.

*a. The Lord Jesus in Eternity Past*

God alone lived and existed in the eternity past, before the existence of the world. What about the Lord Jesus? In Micah 5:2, Micah prophesied about the ruler who would come to rule over Israel, whose origins are from old or ancient times (eternity). This prophecy has been perfectly fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 2:4-6). Jesus was the ruler who lived in ancient times about whom Micah prophesied. Indeed, He lived before the OT period started.

John (John 1:1-3) also reveals that Jesus was the Word that existed in eternity past, before the world was made. He was with God, and had a relationship with God the Father, in eternity past. Jesus Himself also reveals that He was there before Abraham was born (John 8:58). This reveals that Jesus is God, who already existed and lived previously in heaven, and shared with God His eternal glory before the world was made

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<sup>40</sup> H. E. W. Turner, *Jesus the Christ*, London UK: Mowbrays, 1976, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

(John 17:5). The author of Hebrews reveals that Jesus Christ continues the same. He has lived in the past, is living in the present, and will continue to live in the future. This tells us that Jesus is an immutable (unchangeable) God, who always continues to live.<sup>42</sup>

The passages that we have looked at tell us that Jesus is God (John 1:1) and that he lived in eternity past. Therefore, this proves that the NLBO's claim about Jesus being just a man is not true.

*b. Jesus Possesses the Personal Name of God*

"I AM" who "I AM" is the personal and sacred name of God. The word "I AM" in Hebrew means "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." In Greek, "Yahweh" or "Jehovah", is translated as "Kyrios", meaning "Lord".<sup>43</sup> The name "I AM" was used by God to identify Himself with Moses (Ex 3:14). Jesus, in John 8:58, used the same name, "I AM", when He had a dialogue with the Jews: "Before Abraham was born, 'I AM'."

When Jesus called Himself "I AM", He was revealing to the Jews that He was Yahweh, or Jehovah, or the Lord God, who had existed in eternity past, before Abraham was born. But, before Jesus claimed Himself as Lord or Yahweh, the angels of the Lord had called Jesus "Christ Jesus the 'Lord'", when He was born as a baby in Bethlehem: "This very day in David's town your Saviour was born Christ Jesus the 'Lord'" (Luke 2:11). This tells us that Christ Jesus the Saviour is Yahweh, or Jehovah, or the Lord God.

*c. Jesus Saves*

God alone is Saviour, and He can save people from sin (Is 45:21-22; Tit 3:5). However, the NT leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is God the Saviour (Luke 2:11) who came to save us from sin (Matt 1:21). In fact, Jesus, in

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<sup>42</sup> Immutability is an attribute of God alone. However, Heb 13:8 show us that Jesus Christ also had that divine attribute in Him. If Jesus was just a man, the author of the Hebrews wouldn't have described Him as an immutable, or unchangeable, person. However, Jesus is God Himself. The writer of Hebrews introduces Him as an immutable person, who lives forever.

<sup>43</sup> Milne, *Know the Truth*, p. 129; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: an Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994, pp. 544-545.

His death and resurrection, proved He has truly saved us from sin (1 Cor 15:17). Jesus saves people from sin. He is seen as the author of salvation (Heb 2:10). In fact, Acts 4:12 tells us that salvation can be found alone in Jesus name. This tells us that Jesus, who defeated Satan and sin, and saved us from sin, is the only person who can save us from sin now, tomorrow, and in the future.<sup>44</sup> He is the only person, to whom we can come by faith to receive God's salvation. If Jesus does the work (salvation) that God alone can do, this proves that Jesus is not just a man, but He is God the Saviour.

*d. Jesus Forgives Sin*

God alone can forgive sin (Ex 34:6-9; Ps 103:3; 130:4; Is 43:25; 44:22; 48:11; Dan 9:9), and no person can forgive sin, because every person is a sinner (Rom 3:23). However, in Mark 2:7-10, we see where Jesus healed and forgave a paralytic man's sin. Particularly in v. 10, Jesus reveals that He had the power and authority to forgive sin.

If Jesus had the power to forgive sin, as God, this proves that Jesus was God. In fact, the Bible (1 Cor 15:17; Eph 1:7; 1 John 1:7, 9; 2:12; Rev 1:5) tells us that Jesus' death and resurrection really proves that He has forgiven our sins, and His blood alone is the basis for the forgiveness of our sin (Eph 1:7).

*e. Jesus is Worshipped*

The Bible (Gen 24:26; Ex 20:3; 1 Kings 18:21; Ps 22:27; 95:6-7; 132:7; 81:9; Rom 1: 23-25) tells us that we are to worship God alone, and no other person or gods. However, in the NT, we see Jesus is worshipped. For example, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, wise men from the East brought gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh), gave the gifts to Jesus, and worshipped Him (Matt 2:9-12). In Rev 4:6-11; 5:6-14, we see angels bowing before the Lamb (Jesus), and worshipping Him night and day. If Jesus were just a man, the wise men and the angels would not have worshipped Him. However, they knew that Jesus was God, so they worshipped Him.

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<sup>44</sup> Alister McGrath, *Jesus: Who He is and Why He Matters*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1994, pp. 134-135.

*f. Jesus Created Everything in the World*

God alone is the creator of all things (Gen 1:27; Ps 148:5; Ecc 12:1; Amos 4:13; 1 Cor 8:6). He created everything that exists in both the physical and the spiritual realm. However, in Gen 1:26, these two words “US” and “OUR” tell us that the creation of the entire universe was done by the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, Jesus created mankind in God’s image. The NT (John 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2b; Rev 4:11) reveals that Jesus created everything that existed in the world. This tells us that Jesus is God Himself.

*g. Conclusion*

We have seen that Jesus lives forever; that He possesses the personal name of God; that He saves and forgives people from their sin; that He was involved in creating the world; and that He is God Himself, and not just a man. Therefore, we can prove to the NLBO that their view of Jesus as being just a man, and not God, is not true.

**3. *Salvation***

The NLBO believe and teach that Jesus died, and saved, only the white skins from their sin. He didn’t die for the people of PNG, and the South Pacific, to save them from their sin. Therefore, the NLBO claim that Mewala is their new Jesus Christ, who will die and save the people of PNG, and the South Pacific from their sin.<sup>45</sup>

Did Jesus die for the entire human race, or for white skins only? Can any sinful man save others from their sin? The Bible (John 3:16) tells us, “God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son (Jesus) so that those who believe in Him will not be lost or die, but have eternal life.” The phrase “God loved the world” is not referring to one particular coloured-skin people, like the white skins. God loved the whole human race (white, black, yellow, brown, and red skins). Therefore, the special gift (Jesus) that

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<sup>45</sup> Herman Wambor (CBC church pastor, Sebitala), in an interview with Jonah Ukalama (October 3, 1998), a member of NLBO movement, reported this information to me.



God gave is for every sinner. As Edwin Blum says, “God’s love is not limited to a few, or one group of people, but His gift is for the whole.”<sup>46</sup>

In John 12:32, Jesus Himself reveals that, after His death on the cross, He would defeat Satan’s power, and draw all people (all the human race) to Himself, and bring them into the kingdom of God. This shows that Jesus came to save all of us from our sin, and He has done that (He offers salvation from sin to every person in this world).

Can any sinful man save others from their sin? The Bible (Rom 3:23) tells us that all mankind have sinned, and are sinners. Therefore, no man is perfect to save others from their sin. Only a holy God can save people from their sin (Is 45:21-22). Thus, salvation is the work of God only (Is 12:2; 45:21-22; Jer 17:14; Ps 34:6) and not the work of any sinful men, like Mewala and us.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is a sinless person (Heb 4:15; 5:9; 7:28), and the Saviour God (Luke 2:11; Matt 1:21) that God the Father sent to save us from our sin. Thus, Jesus, in His death and resurrection, proves that He has forgiven our sin (1 Cor 15:17).

In Acts 4:12, we see that Jesus’ name alone is the only name that can save us from sin. In fact, Heb 5:9 tells us clearly that Jesus alone is the source of eternal salvation for those who obey Him. That means that salvation belongs to Christ alone, and we can only be saved through faith in Him (Rom 10:9-10; John 3:35-36; 5:24).

The book of Hebrews tells us that no person from PNG and the South Pacific, like Mewala, would come later to offer another sacrifice, with his flesh and blood, to God to save the people of PNG and the South Pacific from their sin. The Lord Jesus has offered an eternal sacrifice with His own flesh and blood to God, once and for all (Heb 9:24-26; 10:10-12) to

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<sup>46</sup> Edwin A. Blum, *John*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament, Walvoord, J. F., and Zuck, R. B., eds, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1983. In addition, R. C. H. Lenski said, “God loved the world, the world of men – all men, not one excepted.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St John’s Gospel*, Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1961.

save the people of PNG, the South Pacific, and rest of the human race, from their sin. Therefore, Christ was the perfect and final sacrifice (Heb 7:28). No more repetition of sacrifices for sin atonement will be made, now or later, by Mewala or others.

#### **4. *The New Covenant***

The NLBO believe that the new covenant that the Lord Jesus made with His flesh and blood (Matt 26:26-28; Luke 22:14-20; Heb 8:10-13; 12:24), has been corrupted by the white skins, and it has become evil, and it ended in 2000. Therefore, the NLBO claim that, in this new era (from 2001 and onward), they will make their own new covenant, through Mewala.

In response, the book of Hebrews (Heb 7:15-10:18) gives us a vivid picture of the two covenants (Old and New). In the old covenant (OT), the priests continually offered sacrifices for sin atonement every day (Heb 7:27). Also the OT covenant was not perfect and real (Heb 10:1). It was just a copy, or shadow, of the real and the perfect covenant that would come later (Heb 10:1).

The real and the perfect covenant that God had in mind to establish later had been fulfilled in the person and work of Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus came and established the real, perfect, permanent, and new covenant with His own flesh and blood (Matt 26:26-28; Heb 9:12, 26). The new covenant that Jesus made to forgive, and save us from, our sin is an eternal and final covenant (Heb 9:26; 10:10). This phrase “once and forever” (Heb 26-28; 10:10) reveals that the new covenant made by the Lord Jesus is sufficient, final, and it will last forever. God is not going to ask anybody (like Mewala) to offer another sacrifice for sin atonement, and establish another new covenant. This shows that the new covenant that Christ made didn’t end in 2000. It is still continuing, and will continue forever. This proves that the NLBO claim of Christ’s new covenant ending in 2000 is a heresy.

Mewala and his followers deny the new covenant the Lord Jesus made, and claim to have made their own new covenant. The NLBO thought the white skins corrupted, and made the new covenant become evil, so that a new covenant had to be made. This is unbiblical, and a heresy. The covenant

that God has made through Christ is perfect (Heb 10:1), eternal (Heb 9:24-26), and final. Both white skins and black skins may continue to sin, but their sinful behaviour will not destroy, and corrupt, the new covenant that Christ made to forgive their sin. Their evil deeds will affect their own personal lives, and God will, one day, punish them for not responding to the gospel of the new covenant that the Lord Jesus made (John 3:35-36; 5:24; Heb 9:27; Rev 21:11-15). However, those who believe in Christ Jesus, and the new covenant that He made, will be saved from God's wrath, and find eternal life (John 3:36a; 5:24a; 14:1-3; Rev 21:1-5).

### **5. *Spiritual Independence***

The NLBO believe that the independence Papua New Guinea received from Australia on September 16, 1975, was not spiritual independence. Therefore, the NLBO claim that Germany will give them spiritual independence.<sup>47</sup>

In response, it is true that the independence that Papua New Guinea received from Australia on September 16, 1975, was political independence, and not spiritual independence. In political independence, another country can give independence to another country. Australia gave independence to Papua New Guinea, free from Australia's governing. Papua New Guinea could stand on its own, and rule over its country. But, in the spiritual realm, it is totally different. No country (like Germany), or person (like the Pope, or Prime Minister), can give spiritual independence and freedom. Only the eternal God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) can free us from the power of sin and Satan, and give us freedom in our spiritual lives. The Lord Jesus is our spiritual liberator,<sup>48</sup> and He alone can liberate us from the law of sin (Rom 8:1), and set us free from our sin (Gal 5:1; Eph 1:7; 1 John 1:7, 9), and not Germany. This proves that the idea that the NLBO said about Germany giving spiritual independence and freedom to PNG is unbiblical, and not true.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Francis Aulong, Hambasama, January 14, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> Don Fleming, *Bridge Bible Dictionary: an "A" to "Z" of Bible Information*, Brisbane Qld: Bridgeway Publications, 1990, p. 142.

Thus, in our spiritual lives, we can't depend on our own selves. We need the power of God, to sustain and help us each day to live a life that is worthy and pleasing to God. Without God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), we can do nothing (Phil 4:13). Our spiritual growth depends on being in union with God. If we are alienated from the Triune God, and depend on our little strength, Satan can easily knock us off.

So, in spiritual independence, there is no such thing as self-dependency. It is a way of depending on Christ, and permitting the Holy Spirit to take total control in our lives (Eph 5:18), using us for God's work, and God's glory.

#### **6. *White Skins (White People)***

The NLBO believe that the white skins are not human beings. They are spirit beings.

In response, not even a single portion of the scriptures reveal that the white skins are spirit beings, and black skins are human beings. The Bible teaches that God created all human beings (e.g., black, white, brown) in His own likeness (Gen 1:26). In fact, the spirit beings don't have physical bodies, don't appear in the physical world, don't work in farms and offices, don't have sexual organs, and sexual desires, and get married, and produce children. They do not live in buildings, don't feel hungry and eat, and don't die. But the white skins are real human beings in every way.

1. They have physical bodies like us.
2. They work in farms, and in the offices, to earn their living.
3. They live and sleep in houses (buildings).
4. They have sexual organs, and get married, and produce children.
5. They feel tired, hungry, and eat.
6. They are physically present, and dwell in this world.

Therefore, since the above six points show us that the white skins are real human beings like us, with features of human beings, they are not spirit beings. They are real human beings like us: brown, black, and red skins.

So we can say that the idea that the NLBO have about the white skins is unbiblical and a heresy.

### **7. *The Last Day***

The NLBO believe that there is no last day.<sup>49</sup> God will only destroy sinful people, and destroy all the wickedness on this world, and make this earth become heaven for us, in which to live.

In response, the disciples knew that there would be a last day, and that Jesus would come a second time. That's why they asked Jesus about the time of His second advent, and the last day: "And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matt 24:3). Peter (2 Pet 3:10-11) also tells us that there is a last day. Peter uses the phrase "The day of the Lord" (2 Pet 3:10) to describe the end-times, or the last day. This proves that the NLBO claim of no last day is unbiblical and not true.

Peter (2 Pet 3:7-12) comments that, in the last day, God will judge the wicked people, and throw them into hell (v. 7; cf. Rev 20:11-15; 21:8; 22:15). He will destroy the whole universe (earth and everything) by fire, and nothing will remain (v. 12), except for His people (believers in Christ). Christ will save His people, and they will live with Him forever in Heaven (Rev 21:2-4; 22:14; John 3:36a; 5:24; Rom 8:18).

God will not make this earth become heaven, as the NLBO think. He will completely destroy it with fire (2 Pet 3:10-12), and make a new earth and new heaven for His dwelling (Rev 21:1-4). This proves that the NLBO's claim of God making this present earth become Heaven for us to live in is not true.

### **8. *Why the NLBO is a Christian Cult Movement***

The NLBO are a friendly and hospitable people. They obey, and submit to the authority of the community, and obey the laws of the country (PNG). Their giving to support their church leaders and church work is excellent. In contrast, most of the evangelical churches fail to give their money, and other possessions, to support the work of God in the church. However,

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with John Afal, Sebitala village, November 25, 1998.

since the NLBO practise divination, follow practices of a cult movement,<sup>50</sup> and teach twisted and false doctrines that are unbiblical,<sup>51</sup> their movement is a Christian cult.

### **G. How to Approach the NLBO with the Gospel of Christ Jesus**

There are many ways we can approach the NLBO, and share with them about Christ Jesus. However, according to the research, interviews, observations, and my personal interaction with them, I suggest two main ways of reaching them with the gospel. These two ways are:

#### **1. Friendship**

The NLBO are friendly, respectable, kindly, and open people. Therefore, in order to share the message of salvation with them, we must first of all build a good friendship with them. Through this, we can build an understanding of them. By listening to them, they will be willing to listen to you.

Friendship is the method that I often use to share with them about Christ. I don't argue with them about their heresies. I make friends with them, and, occasionally, they invite me to share with them in their worship time. In 1998 and 1999, they invited me to share with them about God and culture in their church meetings. So, friendship is important in sharing about Christ Jesus with the NLBO.

#### **2. Help Them When They are in Need**

The second, most important way to reach the NLBO with the gospel is by meeting their needs, and helping them when they are in need. For example, if one of their family members pass away, then cook some food, and go and help them, and give it to those other relatives who attend the funeral. Also, if some of them don't have money and good clothes, then share with them, if you have enough money or clothes. In this way, you can win their hearts, and when you share the gospel of Christ Jesus with them, they will hear, and make their own final decision.

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<sup>50</sup> See Part Two: A.5 "History", and B. "Worship", for detailed information.

<sup>51</sup> See Part One: B.2 "The marks of false cults and the NLBO movement", and Part Two: "Doctrines and Beliefs", for detailed information.

## **CONCLUSION**

The NLBO movement is not a Christian church. It is a Christian cult movement. When we discussed the marks of false cults, and the NLBO movement, the NLBO's marks are akin to the Christian cults' (e.g., Mormons and Jehovah's Witness). Also, when we looked at the NLBO's worship practices and doctrines, we saw clearly that the NLBO movement was a Christian cult.

The establishment of the NLBO movement shouldn't surprise us, because it fulfils what the Bible teaches about the coming of false Christs, false prophets, and false teachers in the last days (Matt 24:3-5, 11, 24; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). The NLBO movement is a heresy movement in Nuku District that has led many people away from the truth.

Those of you who have been led away from the truth by the NLBO movement, come out and serve the true God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) before the hour comes for you to stand before God's judgment and go to hell. If you don't want to respond to Christ, you will receive your just reward (see Heb 9:27; Rev 20:11-15; 21:8; 22:15, 19).

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# **A BIBLICAL EVALUATION OF PRAYER IN BAEGU TRADITION**

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[The spelling of the surname of this article's author was incorrect in the original printed edition. Also, it seems that the second half of the bibliography was missing from the original text, because authors' names are cited in the text, but there are no corresponding details in the bibliography. For information of readers, as many authors' names, with references that could be reliably determined, are now shown in the bibliography. However, despite a thorough search, the details for the remaining seven authors, to which citations refer, could not be determined. Furthermore, a number of the page numbers shown against author citations in the text are incorrect. Unfortunately, the correct page numbers could not be determined. –Revising ed.]

## **Introduction**

In the year 1970, a great revival swept across Solomon Islands. One birthplace of the revival was a small village called Kofiloko, a village that is located on the harbour of Lau Lagoon, and serves as a gateway to the Baegu region.

The outcomes of the revival were Christians having prayer meetings lasting the entire night, having weekends of praying and fasting, and establishing prayer mountains. This led people to adopt the traditional concept and approaches of prayer.

Over the years, many Christians were not in favour of this new experience, so they resolved to be neutral in their prayer commitments. This led to division within the churches. Instead of being mature in their Christian spiritual lives, the church members became more legalistic in their prayer commitments.

The purpose of this paper is to present clear teaching from the scriptures that, if appropriated into the Baegu setting, will guide the Baegu Christians in their prayer lives. This paper may serve as a resource for the Baegu people, and even to others who desire to venture deeply into the ministry of prayer.

## **1. The Object of Baegu Traditional Prayer**

### ***The Mythical Supreme Father***

In Baegu theology, there was a supreme being, who was addressed sometimes as *ma* (father), not just in the sense of biological heredity, but simply based on the concept of his moral attributes: his *liosaua* (love), his *kwaiofea* (grace), and *kwaitatakomia* (mercy). The supreme father was believed, by the Baegu, to exist, and be enthroned, in the *fanoi langi* (the heavenly place).

I like the definition, made by Joshua Daimoi, about the mythical supreme father: “The mythical supreme father is probably the creator god or hero for some Melanesians, or divine ruler for others.” (Daimoi, class notes)

Baegu culture firmly believes what other people groups in the world believe, that there is a supreme being beyond their habitation. What is true about the Baegu people is that, though their rituals in worship were directed to their immediate ancestral fathers (*beu akalo*), the allegiance went beyond the capacity of the ancestral fathers to the supreme being, who was higher in status.

Mbiti, in his classical book about prayers of South African religions, states a prayer which shed light on what is also true about the Baegu concept of traditional prayer communications: “Bilikonda [God], who art in the bush, Creator Akongo [God]; Akongo of the ancestors, Akongo of the fathers, our Akongo” (Mbiti, p. 143). *Bilikonda* was the supreme being in the

African context, and the Africans highly honoured *Bilikonda*. They prayed to *Bilikonda*, and they highly enthroned *Bilikonda* as the supreme being, when they paid allegiance, through their ancestral fathers.

The Baegu people have different titles for the supreme being. It is very important to know that the different names the Baegu people attribute to their supreme father do not mean that they were polytheistic worshippers. Indeed, the Baegu people were monotheistic worshippers. They believed in one supreme being, who is *sufa* (omnipresent), *gwaufutana* (the creator), *bubufera gwau* (omnipotent), and *salokwalia* (omniscient).

I will now deal specifically with the meaning of the attributes of the Baegu supreme being. The first attribute is *sufa*. This word is a combination of two words: *su* (cover) and *fa* or *fafia* (to spread). So *sufa* means, “the spreading of the covering”. This attribute indicates that the presence of the *sufa* covers the whole universe. In the biblical concept, this is like the omnipresence of God.

Another attribute of the Baegu supreme being is *bubufera gwau*. This word is a combination of three words: *bubu* (to look), *fera* (city or nation), and *gwo'u* (empty). This means that the *bubufera gwau* needs only to look at a city, or a nation, with its inhabitants, and his look could totally destroy them. This speaks of powerful judgment, which carries the biblical concept of the omnipotence of God.

The term *gwaufutana* is the combination of two words: *gwau* (head), and *futana* (power). It indicates that *gwaufutana* is the head of everything, the creator. He has the power and authority over his creation. He is full of knowledge, like our biblical concept of God's omniscience.

The last attribute is *salokwalia*. This is also from two different words: *salo* (sky or space), and *kwalia* (the breaking forth of light at the dawn). This speaks of the splendour and the majesty of the *salokwalia*. This also expresses that the *salokwalia* was a glorious being.

The above terminology is significant for Baegu traditional worship. It creates total confidence in the one they worship. They are not approaching

a man of their sort, but the one who is incomparable (even to their ancestral fathers). Ofasia reported a word of amazement uttered by his grandmother, Borubae, while watching the lightning and thunder across the skies. “There must be a great man, who was the author and activator of all that is happening in the heavens.”<sup>1</sup> Lastly, the terminology used to describe the supreme being in Baegu culture is not the terminology used in daily language. The terms used are sacred words that are used only during prayer rituals, and only by the pagan priest.

### ***The Ancestral Fathers***

According to Baegu culture, the tribe or family includes both the living, and the dead ancestral spirits. This is similar to what Burnett said about African beliefs: “Just because the person has moved from the world of fleshly order and existence, this does not mean that they have ceased to exist, as part of the tribe” (Burnett, p. 60).

The above quote expresses the fact that all tribal groups under the sun have the same beliefs about their ancestral fathers. The Baegu people were not an exception. A myth tells of how the Baeguan people came, and placed high value on the existence of their ancestral fathers.

When *gwaufutana* (creator) finished creating the island of Malaita, the culture heroes came to build their houses and gardens on the hills of North Malaita. The founding ancestor of the Baegu was one of a pair of twins hatched from a primordial eagle’s nest. From one egg hatched the Baegu ancestor, and from another egg hatched the Kwaio people group (located on the southern side of the island). Because the originality of the Baegu people goes back to the eagle’s nest, the Baegu people believe that the eagle is the bodily representation of their dead ancestors, who still exist, and live among them. Therefore, the eagle still is a sacred bird to the Baegu people today. (Ross, p. 160)

The Baegu people believe strongly that *gwaufutana* was the one who gave the land to their ancestors. So they see their ancestors, not as the creators,

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<sup>1</sup> The expression of amazement uttered by Borubae Andiata, the grandmother of Ofasia, over a powerful manifestation of God’s nature in the skies. She ascribed that to an unknown supreme being.

but only as mediators. Therefore, the prayers of the Baegu people were presented to the *gwaufutana*, via the ancestral fathers.

The priest represents the people, and offers their prayers to the supreme being, via ancestral fathers. The ancestral fathers lay their petitions before the supreme being, and the supreme being responds directly to the people, by granting the people whatever the request may be.

Smith, in his book, stated something similar to that of the Baegu traditional power communication. “The Tongan do not normally address petitions to *leza* (the supreme being). The priest, on behalf of the people, directs their petitions to *mizimu* (the ancestral spirit), and *mizimu* would lay their petitions before *leza*” (Smith, p. 68).

To be more practical, in the context of traditional power communication, a prayer from the Baegu pagan priest of Faeno tribe included, “*O ma Rifaitalo, amasia ma oe sa Bubuferagwau, uri ramoa nau ku musia luana lalmoa sa Gorikwae.*”<sup>2</sup> Iro, the priest, prayed to Rifaitalo, who was his forefather, that Rifaitalo would cry before *bubuferagwau* (the supreme being) to grant to him the power, that Iro would “eat the head”<sup>3</sup> of his enemy, Gorikwae.

The ancestral fathers are mediators between the Baegu people and the supreme being. The Baegu people still keep the ancestral shrines, and offer sacrifices to the ancestral fathers on the sacred groves like *beu ambu* (holy mountain) today.

## **2. Ancestral Names are the Medium of Baegu Traditional Prayer**

### ***Names Reflect Power***

When the Baegu people worship their forefathers, they usually call out their names. “In many ancient, as well as contemporary, cultures, the name of a person represents an individual’s character, family history, and cultural status” (Webster, p. 65).

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<sup>2</sup> A warfare prayer orally passed down to me by my auntie, Tasimaoma, of Faeno tribe. Iro the pagan priest was her father.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase “to eat the head of the enemy” is a Baegu term for expressing the utter destruction of the enemy.

The Baegu people traditionally believed those who were heroes, who stood out with extraordinary capabilities when they were alive, retained the power in death that belonged to them when they were alive.

Practical examples of the characters of Baegu heroes, when they were alive, and believed to be retained after death, includes: “valour in war battle (aggressive temperament and military skills), ability to accumulate wealth by hard work, skilful in trading and investment, and being an eloquent speaker” (Ross, p. 191).

Traditionally, the Baegu method of the “calling”<sup>4</sup> of names of the ancestral fathers for blessings or curses could be done through two distinctive forms: through ritual observations, and through direct calling on ancestral names.

The first method of calling on the ancestral names is through ritual observations. The ritual activity must go together with the worship of the people of Baegu, and the ritual activities are conceptualised as a form of prayer. “Magic as knowledge is in three parts: the correct words of the formula, the correct observation of taboos, and the correct use of the name of the ancestor by the practitioners.”<sup>5</sup>

The method of ritual observation actually demonstrates the concept that, regardless of what the circumstances were, the rules and regulations prescribed for the rituals must be carried out, without fail. Failure to observe the rules and regulations would mean death to the covenant community, or the individual practitioner. In this case, the ancestral names that should have been the channel of goodwill for the people now pronounce the death penalty on the people.

According to Baegu beliefs, there are venues that are still regarded as *abu* (holy), in which they believed that the ancestral spirits have their abode.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ai* (calling) is also used for the word “prayer” in English. *Arangai Akalo* or *angitaiakalo* are the two words that express the cry of intimacy with deep anguish that requires immediate attention from the ancestral spirits.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Daimoi, “Melanesian Theology Course Notes”, Banz PNG: CLTC, 1999, chapter 3.

Whenever a need is identified, they would go to any of these venues, and pray to the ancestral spirits, through ritual observations.

These are the *abu* (holy) sites of the Baegu:

- Sacred shrine (*beu abu*);
- Sacred caves (*falume*);
- Sacred stone (*fau abu*);
- Sacred pool (*matakwa abu or kafo abu*).

Within Melanesian societies, the venues for carrying out rituals may be similar, but some may be different. For contrast purposes, the rituals of the Ngaing of the Rai coast of Southern Madang District took place at the war god sanctuary, where the ancestors “lived either in their war gods’ sanctuaries, or with the guardian deities of their sacred pools, [where] the bones of the dead were deposited” (Lawrence, p. 17).

*Abu* and *sua* are the terms in Baegu and Toabaita that portray the same concept of holiness and defilement in relation to God and the tabernacle complex in the Bible.

In our Christian concepts today, those places, such as quiet-time sites, prayer hills, holy sites, etc., may not necessarily be called sacred shrines, but we may regard these venues, which we use, to meet with God, as holy places. It may be a small hut, made specifically for quiet-time and prayer, a selected site in the bush, or a church building.

The second method is to call the names of the ancestral fathers in times of emergencies. This expresses the heart-cry call to the ancestral spirits, a typical cry that demands an immediate response from the ancestors (*angitaiakalo*).

I will use a case study here to illustrate the point stated above. In 1976, about 30 men surrounded a man from Baegu during a long night of drinking at the Honiara hotel. The 30 men actually planned to kill the Baegu man. The Baegu man had no means of hope. At this point of time,



the Baegu man called upon the name of his forefather “Rifaitalo”.<sup>6</sup> It was noted that, by calling the name, the man regained his strength, courage, and confidence. At that moment, that Baegu man just felt like a superman. He then retaliated, took revenge, and the outcome was five of the opponents had broken bones, and the rest shared major injuries, which caused all of them to flee for their lives from the hotel.

The calling of ancestral names, through ritual observation, and the calling of ancestral fathers, in times of emergencies, are the traditional avenues the Baegu people used in calling upon their ancestral spirits. It is vital to note that names, to the Baegu, are not mere labels. People, who give ancestral names to their children, believe that names characterise ancestral identities. The identities of the ancestors are manifested at the time the practitioners called upon the particular name for help. The calling out of ancestral names means inviting oneself to be possessed by the ancestors’ power. The caller is also challenging the ancestors to open the floodgates of the supernatural realm, for the caller’s personal business.

### ***Names Reflect a Covenant Bond***

The Baegu people are under obligation to their ancestral fathers, because they are special people, a possession of the ancestral fathers. The ancestral fathers, too, have a strong obligation to members of the Baegu people. The ancestral spirits are accountable to the members of the tribe for their well-being. “The unity of a group reached out, back in time, to include the ancestors. In burial, for example, the dead were gathered to their people, united with their kindred” (Martens, p. 72).

It is understandable that, in order for the relationship between the Baegu and their dead ancestors to remain intact, “the living Baegu must keep, and faithfully maintain, the mutual cooperation, through rituals, daily prayers, and offering of sacrifices” (Ross, p. 141).

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<sup>6</sup> *Rifaitalo*: A war hero in the Faeno tribe of Baegu. The name means *ri* (shout), *fai* (with), and *talo* (club). So *rifaitalo* means “shout with a club”. The incident referred to was witnessed by Billy Dauuma, of Waleano, who was accompanying the main character. This incident was common knowledge throughout my community, after it had taken place.

To call out the names of ancestors actually signifies the keeping of the covenant bond, with great honour and respect. When the names of the ancestors were being called in times of sacrifices, or during emergency situations, the ancestral spirits immediately responded with great obligation, because the ancestors knew that they were highly respected by their tribe, or a member of their tribe. “The ghosts were usually resident in the region of the dead, a specific locality, but were available for assisting human beings when suitable prayers and sacrifices were offered to them” (Tippett, p. 6).

A case study of a people group in Malaita, Solomon Islands, actually illustrates the above point. A Langalanga man, under the coverage of the sacrifices offered by his priest, was rescued by the *baekwa asi*<sup>7</sup> while hopelessly drifting in the ocean. The man was safe, because the name of his ancestor was called in this emergency situation (Cooper, p. 119).

Maintenance of the covenant affected was done through keeping of the sacred relics. The Baegu term for “sacred relics” is *matale*.<sup>8</sup> Hogbin reported that “*matale* to the Toabaita people was a bundle of hair taken from the deceased, while placed on the already-dug grave” (Hogbin, p. 104) “To the Kwaio people of Malaita, a *matale* is a skull of their dead” (Keesing, p. 116). And to the “Nyakyusa of South Africa (for contrast purposes) the dead relics may be a lump of hair, or finger nail, of the dead person” (Willson, p. 22), while to the Baegu people the relics maybe a “walking stick or a lock of hair” (Ross, p. 211).

To the Baegu, the keeping of relics of the dead are the mark of the living covenant with dead ancestral spirits, and, also, the preservation of the dead relics are the way of accommodating the presence of the ancestral spirits with men. The assistance needed could be provided, at the disposal of the person, who called on the name, or the one who preserved the dead relics, anywhere, and at anytime.

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<sup>7</sup> *Baekwasi* is the red shark, worshipped by the Langalanga people of Malaita, Solomon Islands. They believed that the red shark was their ancestor. The red shark could be mouth-fed at the shrine by the priest.

<sup>8</sup> *Matale* is a part of a dead man or article that was kept by the deceased while he/she was alive.

We conclude by saying that ancestral names, to the Baegu people, are believed to be their medium of prayers. To the Baegu, calling of the ancestral names is the sign of assurance that power is always available, to be used in the best interest of the living relatives, and also the calling of the ancestral names signifies that the covenant bond was still intact.

Finally, the whole concept of ancestral names, as the medium of prayer, is the total explanation of their faith in calling upon the names of ancestors. It sums up their faith that, what they called for, was sure to be granted, without being in doubt, or being faithless (*fitala*).

### ***The Shrine Complex: the Essence of Baegu Traditional Prayers***

#### *The Sacred Shrine (beuabu)*

The Baegu people prayed to their ancestral fathers in the sacred groves. The sacred groves consisted of virgin hardwood, rising out of the green blanket of secondary forest. To the Baegu, the sacred groves were both temples and cemeteries. This is where the ancestral heroes were buried, and it was where all the greatest religious ceremonies took place.

In Baegu, the groves are termed as *beuabu* (holy house), from *beu* (house), and *abu* (holy). There are different concepts related to the word *beu* (house). In Baegu, the general meaning for the word *beu* is a “dwelling”. *Beu*, in this context, is a masculine noun, and is a dwelling for men only. The dwelling place for the whole household, and particularly for females, is a feminine noun.

The concept I will focus on is *beuabu*, “the dwelling place is sacred or holy”. As the ancestral spirits are most sacred, their abode must be treated with great honour and respect. The *beuabu* to the Baegu is not a building, but the whole shrine complex. It includes the natural grove, and all the activities that take place in the sacred grove.

The Baegu people believed that the community was made up of both the living and the “living dead” (Mbiti, quoted by Adeyemo, p. 132). The groves, where the ancestral heroes are buried, are called *beu* (house). Because the *beu* was the abode of the ancestral spirits, the *beu* became holy (*abu*). The *beuabu* (holy house) was traditionally restricted from common

life activities. This concept of *beuabu* will be discussed in detail under the biblical concept of tabernacle.

### *The Baegu Shrine Complex (beuabu)*

The graves of the ancestors were located in the *ra'ai* (holy of holies). This was surrounded by a rectangular wall of stone (*lasi*). Outside the *lasi* was the main place of fire for sacrifices. This was the *laloabu* (holy place). The *laloabu* was surrounded by another rectangular wall of stone (*sulofou*) that served as the enclosure that marked the boundary between the holy place (*laloabu*) and the common court (*fuliau*). This boundary was called the *fara boboe*. Outside the *laloabu* was the *fuliau* (common court), which was used as a celebration ground for public worship. The rectangular enclosures restricted different groups to different places, according to prescribed law, passed down by the founding ancestors.

### *Fuliau (Common Court)*

This is literally the venue for music. The typical music, in traditional Baegu, was called *agae* (orchestra). This was for a selected group of people, playing traditional panpipe instruments, accompanied by a well-arranged, and organised, band of males.

The section was described as “common court”, because it was a neutral ground that was located under the *laloabu* (holy place). The concept behind the celebration that took place in the common court was “celebrating the victory”. After all the sacrifices and prayers were offered by the priest, on behalf of the community, the whole community then flooded into the *fuliau* for the joyful celebration. The community burst out with thanksgiving to their ancestral fathers for all the blessings imparted to them.

Hogbin notes a bystander’s comment about the outcome of the Toabaitan *aga'a* (celebration): “Our bellies are full, our bodies are light, and we only think of laughter. Long standing disputes are forgotten, because we are not angry when we dance. Music and dancing throw anger out. We see a kinsman, against whom we have a grievance, but we think only that he is a kinsman, not of the grievance, and we dance together” (Hogbin, p. 70).

It was understandable that only the priest could enter the shrine complex, together with a few other ritually-*abu* (holy) people. The *fuliau* is the only court that is accessible for the whole community to enter and celebrate the victories of their ancestral spirits.

In the *fuliau* (celebration court), visitors from other tribes or clans could enter and participate together in the celebration with the hosting tribe. The commemoration feast that was enjoyed after the *agae* is called *maoma*<sup>9</sup> (Ross, p. 236).

### *The Laloabu (the Holy Place)*

According to Baegu traditional religion, entering the *laloabu* required certain conditions. The *laloabu* actually was not a venue for mere entertainment, such as the *fuliau*. These are some of the conditions prescribed for entering the *laloabu*:

- The men had to remain in the *beuwane*<sup>10</sup> for a prescribed period before the sacrifice took place.
- The laws and regulation required by the community's behavioural pattern must be strictly observed, without failure.<sup>11</sup>
- A man had to avoid entering the *bisi* (menstruation hut), the *bisi ni lafi* (childbirth hut), and the boundary of *kabara* or *tala keni* (latrine).<sup>12</sup>

The people entering the *laloabu* must be strictly from the same tribe of the ancestral shrine.

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<sup>9</sup> *Maoma* is the traditional feast, commemorating the ancestral heroes who died and are still active in the affairs of the living community.

<sup>10</sup> *Beuwane* comes from two words: *beu* (house) and *wane* (house man).

<sup>11</sup> The community's behavioural laws and regulations included most of the Ten Commandments. See Ex 20:12-17.

<sup>12</sup> The blood from menstruation and childbirth, and the female latrine, were powerful enough to defile and destroy the *beubu*.

The whole idea, developed in this section, is that the worship and the prayers, offered in the shrine, were based on agreement in the community. Those who are guided by the law and regulations instituted by the community, and the god, in whom they believe and worship.

### *The Ra'ai (the Holy of Holies)*

This is the most sacred of all the courts in the Baegu shrine complex. Even the priest could not enter the *ra'ai* of his free will. The priest, and those who are ceremonially *abu*, entered the *ra'ai* only at the burial of the existing priest, or burial of a man of heroic character.

The various duties normally carried out by the priest in the *ra'ai* were:

- Preparing the oven for the sacrifice (*koboso*);
- Digging the new grave for the burial of the dead priest, etc.;
- Carrying of the corpse into the *ra'ai* to be buried;
- The priest's aid (*falesusua*),<sup>13</sup> who helps the priest recite the names of all the living members of the tribe during the sacrifices.

The duties carried out in the *ra'ai* were too demanding for the priest to be able to do by himself. There were other people, who were able to enter the *ra'ai*, together with the priest, for the sole purpose of assisting the priest. The priest has to offer special prayers before and after the job has been completed, to appease the anger of the ancestors against those who helped the priest (*famola*).

Finally, although there were certain boundaries that were structured in the Baegu shrine complex, the worshippers actually, subconsciously and consciously, knew their boundaries. The restriction of certain groups to certain courts in the shrine is, actually, not in the sense of "being forced not

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<sup>13</sup> *Falesusua* is the term for the priest's aid. The priest held a string of beads (*ae galu*) as a rosary, and the priest's aid would recite all living members of the tribe so that no one would be left out of the blessings.

to enter”, but is based on respect and honour towards the ancestral spirits, who were the source of the individual and community well-being.

These are boundaries for certain groups of people:

- The female members, the ceremonially-defiled people, and visitors from other tribes, could only enter the *fuliau*, and not go beyond the *faraboboe*.
- The ordinary *abu* (holy) people could enter the *laloabu* (holy place), but not the *ra'ai*.
- The priest could enter the *ra'ai*, only when an existing priest, or a person of heroic character, died, and was buried.
- The *falesusua* (priest's aid), and those who were sanctified to assist the priest with duties in the *ra'ai*, could enter the *ra'ai*, when the priest offered special prayers and sacrifices for them.

The different groups enjoyed their boundary limits, because they had a sense of respect and honour. Their submission, in being confined to given boundaries, was, to them, an act of worship.

The whole traditional worship of the Baegu people, and their approach in the shrine is related to the concept of holiness. Without holiness, worship would be in vain. Likewise, the whole essence of Christian worship is holiness. The scriptures state “But, just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do . . . for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:15-16). The concept of holiness, as a mark of godly worship, will be discussed in detail later.

### **3. The Object of Christian Prayer**

#### ***The God of the Ancestors***

The word “transcendence” describes the traditional Baegu beliefs about the *gwaufutona*<sup>14</sup> (God). Baegu traditional beliefs about the supreme being

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<sup>14</sup> *Gwaufutona* is the term, in Baegu, for “head”, but it was seen in the context of a creator. In relation to Baegu traditional religion, the creator is the supreme being.

can be summed up, as Erickson shares in his book: “God is other than the world, and other than humans. . . . God was thought of as being very high above the earth, and off in some far-distant place” (Erickson, p. 268).

The Baegu people subconsciously knew that there was someone far greater than their ancestral fathers, who existed, and were enthroned in the *fanoilangi*.<sup>15</sup> It is very difficult for the Baegu people to describe the supreme being. The way the Baegu people described the supreme being is similar to what Webster says about some so-called world religious views about God. “In the highest forms of Buddhist, Hindu, and the Taoist thought, God is imagined to be a nameless and indifferenced spiritual reality beyond personality. The conception of God in Islam is impersonal and deterministic. His name is associated with power and transcendence” (Webster, p. 72).

When we contrast the Baegu, and the views about God of the above world religions, with Christianity, we find out that they are different. Christian belief about God is that God is the God of relationship, the God who reveals Himself throughout history, through specific acts, propositional teaching, and personal communion.

While the Baegu’s supreme being is transcendent, without personally revealing himself to men, the God of the Christian is transcendent, but also reveals Himself to men: “God permeates the world in sustaining, creative power, shaping and steering it, in a way that keeps it on its planned course” (Packer, p. 277).

Christians are worshipping and offering prayers and petitions to God, who is not an impersonal being, unlike the Baegu’s religious views about God. The God of the Christians is the God who relates personally to His covenant people, rather than being a nameless impersonal force. He is the God of creation, who chooses to be known through His covenant relationship with specific individuals, who walk before Him, and obey Him. It is very important to know that Baegu people believed that the supreme

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<sup>15</sup> *Fanoilangi* is the term, in Baegu, for “Heaven”, an abode beyond the human world.



being is enthroned in *fanoilangi* (heaven). He is superior over their ancestral fathers, because he was also their god.

The first time God revealed Himself to Moses, He said, “I am the God of your Fathers, the God of Abram, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6). The scriptures also confirm that, during the Lord’s earthly ministry, He emphatically said to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees “I tell you the truth . . . before Abraham was born I am” (John 8:58). God revealed His identity to Moses at Horeb by saying that He was the God of his ancestral fathers. In doing this, He was actually affirming to Moses that He was the God, who spoke to his forefathers, and He was the God, whom his forefathers worshipped, and He existed before his forefathers came into being.

It is interesting to know that the concept of a supreme being is found in the traditional beliefs of the Baegu. The problem lies with the fact that the Baegu people have no personal relationship with the supreme being. They worship the supreme being via their ancestral spirits.<sup>16</sup> The problem is that they have no covenant relationship with him, and no knowledge of him. The Baegu’s traditional perception about the supreme being was similar to the beliefs of the Athenians at the time of apostle Paul.

Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagas and said: “Men of Athens! I observed that you are very religious in all aspects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription: ‘To an unknown God’. What, therefore, you worship in ignorance this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world, and all things in it, since He is the Lord of the heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:22-25).

The above scripture reveals the heart of the Baegu traditional religion. The fact is that, because they have no personal knowledge of the supreme being,

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<sup>16</sup> The Baegu believe that the family includes both the living and the spirits of the dead. The ancestral spirits have great power, and can influence the lives of their earthly descendants, because the supreme being is transcendent and unknown, so they worship and offer prayers to their ancestral fathers, who are immanent beings.

they have tended to worship their ancestral spirits, and accommodate them, because ancestral fathers were, to the Baegu people, the immanent beings.

***Baegu and Christian Worldview of Supreme Being***

“The great French agnostic Voltaire said, ‘God created man in His own image, and man returned the favour.’ God created man, and we have reduced our unique God to just a superman. But He remains totally, utterly, absolutely transcendent” (Evans, p. 39). It is a pity, but Voltaire’s statement reflects the beliefs of traditional Baegu worshippers.

BELIEFS	BAEGU WORLDVIEW	CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW
Supreme being	<i>Gwaufotona</i> (Creator)	Yahweh (God)
Transcendence	Lofty	Lofty
Immanence	Replaced with ancestral spirit	Covenant
Revelation	Manipulation via ancestral fathers, communicating through rituals	Personal revelation through specific acts, propositional teachings, through incarnation, sacraments
Personal knowledge	No personal knowledge	Personal knowledge

In order to understand the God, to whom all Christians offer their prayers and petitions, we must look into the scriptures and find out what God Himself has said about His being. The scriptures explain that He is both transcendent and immanent.

- The Transcendent God – “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:8-9).
- The Immanent God – “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin” (Ex 34:6-7).

The two scripture passages above actually express that God is in no way to be compared to human beings. And, because God cannot be compared to humans, He is not subject to the limitations that men possibly make. Human beings cannot possibly help themselves, because of their limitations. Only God, the God of all impossibilities, can help human beings in their limitations.

Finally, it is a pity to see traditional Baegu worshippers serve their ancestral spirits under obligations. In order to obtain and maintain their well-being, they have to manipulate the ancestral spirits, by observing the rituals of keeping sacred relics.

The Christian God is an all-sufficient God. He has made Jesus to be “far above all rule, and authority, power, and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. And God has placed all things at His feet” (Ephesians 1:21-22). This scripture shows that God is the God of the ancestral fathers. We see, in this text, that God has placed all things under Jesus’ feet. This indicates that even the ancestral spirits, whom the Baegu people have held in high esteem, were ultimately under the total authority of God. Therefore, all worship and prayer should be directed to God alone.

### ***The I Am Who I Am***

Whenever the Baegu people worship, or call on the names of their forefathers, during the offering of sacrifices, or during emergency situations, their forefathers are usually available at personal or community disposal. The Baegu people believe that power was channelled through the names they called upon: “the names denote the essence of a thing . . . the name was related to the nature of the character of the person” (Smith, p. 116).

In Baegu terminology, *rifaitalo* means “shout with a war club”, and *ramo* means “warrior”. Whenever there was a war confrontation, calling upon these names meant definite victory, because *rifaitalo* and *ramo*<sup>17</sup> are two

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<sup>17</sup> *Rifaitalo* is the name of a war hero in my Faeno tribe. *Ramo* is a popular name in the Baegu and Taobata cultures. The names reflect the war heroes who bore those names.

names that signify being powerful. It is interesting to observe the way in which the God of the Christians first revealed Himself to mankind, because God revealed Himself to man by using the concept of His name.

In order for us to know how God introduced Himself to man, we must go back to the root of the culture of the people to whom He revealed Himself. “The general term ‘El’ and ‘Elohim’ may possibly be connected with the idea of ‘strength’, the epithets, ‘Shaddai’ and ‘Elyon’, the former is cognate with an Accadian word *shadu*, “mountains”, and later means ‘lofty’ ” (Robinson, p.52).

It is interesting that, although God revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He never revealed His name. God spoke His proper name for the first time to Moses in the Sinai wilderness (Peel, 88). “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent you’ ” (Exodus 3:14).

This indicates that, at the right time, the eternal supreme being, who is the author of the whole universe, revealed Himself to the nation of Israel. “The English translation actually used the term ‘LORD’ to represent God’s Hebrew name YHWH. Because the Israelites never read or spoke the name Yahweh, they substituted the word ‘Adonai’, meaning ‘LORD’. The Hebrew word Yahweh simply means ‘I AM’ ” (Peel, p. 88).

The ancestral names of Baegu are frequently used during sacrifices, and emergency calls, as a form of manipulating ancestral fathers for immediate attention. Whereas the name Yahweh not only denotes greatness and power, it is too sacred to mention. He is not to be manipulated or abused.

The personal name of God, “Yahweh” is expanded by Martens: “I will be who I will be. . . . I will be for you the kind of God you have need of” (Martens, p. 22). Yahweh represents the God who identifies Himself with His covenant people: the unchangeable God, the God who always is true to His promises.

When God revealed His name to Moses as Yahweh, He was assuring Moses that He was reliable, because of His nature. The Israelites, who

were the covenant nation, needed to wholly trust in Him for their salvation, because He used His own name as an oath, a guarantee of the covenant. “I am God, there is no other. I am God, and there is no one like me. . . . My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure” (Is 46:9-10).

We have already seen that the Baegu people believed that a higher being was beyond their ancestral fathers. The problem is that the Baegu people did not know how this supreme being could be known, in their own context. Due to this difficulty in understanding the supreme being, they turned their worship and prayers to their forefathers.

Finally, the God, whom Christians worship, and to whom they offer prayers, is the God who revealed Himself to human beings, and entered into a covenant relationship with them. The God who made promises with His people is reliable in fulfilling what He has promised. He does not tolerate manipulation, like the Baegu traditional worship does with their ancestral fathers.

The right approach that God requires from Christians during worship and prayers is not to be based on the concept of manipulation. It should be seen as an act of relationship, knowing that, through honour and submission in faith, God will fulfil His promise in granting Christians their needs and desires.

### ***The Abba Father***

According to Baegu terminology, the word *ma* is a widely-used term, which refers to “Father”. When the term is used, it could either be an address, within a household, to the father, or it may be an address, alluding to an elderly person, or a man of social status, by someone of low status.

The word *mama’a* also denotes “Father,” but in a different way. Little children, when addressing their fathers, may only use *mama’a*. It is an embarrassment for an adult person to use the term *mama’a* when addressing his or her father, or a man of social status.

When little children use the term *mama'a* in addressing their fathers, this signifies intimacy; it also shows an action of dependency on the part of the little children towards their fathers. It carries the concept of faith. The use of the term *mama'a* by little children, when they address their father, implies trust in their father for the provision of necessities.

It is interesting to see the Aramaic word *Abba* explained in the context of the Jewish culture. “To the Jew, ‘Abba’ is a very familiar form of address. *Abba* and *Imma* were the first words a child learnt to say, and even though, by the time of Jesus, the use was no longer restricted simply to very young children, yet it was a very personal and familiar term, by which no one had ever before dared to address God” (Magdalen, p. 60).

The word *Abba* is actually used as a personal name of God in the New Testament. It is an Aramaic word, which is translated as “Father”. The word expresses a very intimate and inseparable relationship between Christ and the Father, and between the believers (children) and God (Father) (Groningen, p. 887).

To address God as *Abba* was very unusual in Judaism, since *Abba* is the language of family intimacy. The Lord Jesus also taught His disciples to address God as *Abba*. The title, which He introduced, is used frequently in His prayers. It is very interesting that, whenever Jesus spoke about God as the Father, in relation to Himself and his disciples, He used *Abba* distinctively “I have not returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).

Tenney attempted to explain why the distinction was made, “The reason the distinction in His words to Mary was not, of course, that there were two gods but rather that her relationship with God was different from His. He is the eternal Son of the Father, she, as well as the disciples, had become a member of God’s family by receiving Him” (Tenney, p. 191).

It was encouraging that the title *Abba* was also recognised in the epistles to be used for the relationship of the believers to God. “The Spirit who cries

‘Abba’ makes the believer not just a son . . . but a *fellow-heir with Christ*’<sup>18</sup> (Dunn, p. 25).

We have learned that the Lord taught his disciples to address God the *Abba* (Father), when they offered their prayers “Our Father”.<sup>19</sup> When believers address God as “Our Father”, this signifies that all believers belong to a large family, and they are uniting with others in prayers to one God, who is the intimate Father.

The Baegu people address their ancestral father as *maka’ a’*. This is a title used by the priest when offering prayers to the ancestral fathers while in the sacred shrine. This title is totally different from *ma* or *mama’ a*, which is the title used to describe the relationship of a child to his father, or between an adult, and an elderly man, or a person of status. When the priest calls out the name of the ancestral father, by addressing him as *maka*,<sup>20</sup> this carries a concept of *Abba*, in the sense that those whom the priest were representing were from the ancestral blood genealogy. They are those who were born into the tribe, or clan, that the ancestors belonged to.

To make the above point clear, I’ll mention the major tribes of the Baegu “the Waloiano, Waloilangi, Oisamaku, Auangisia, Agia, and the Masu” (Ross, 103). The idea is that no one, including the priest of Waloiano, could enter the sacred shrine *beu abu* of the Oisamaku tribe and offer a sacrifice to the ancestors of Oisamaku.

The act described above was regarded as impossible. It was impossible, because the members of the Waloiano, including the priest, have not entered into a covenant relationship with the ancestors of the Oisamaku tribe. Because of this, they cannot address the ancestor fathers of the Oisamaku tribe as *maka* (or *Abba* in Aramaic). This sort of action could well lead to death, because this was seen as an act of blasphemy against the name of the ancestral fathers of the shrine.

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<sup>18</sup> Rom 8:17 and Gal 4:7.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 11:2.

<sup>20</sup> *Maka* is a term, in Baegu, for an intimate relationship. It is only applied to the living and the dead ancestral fathers, a covenant title.

Thus, the idea conveyed by the biblical *Abba*, and the Baegu *maka*, did carry similar concepts, and, I believe, the principles here could be used in furthering the prayer commitments of Baegu Christians. The title *maka* could be meaningfully used in the covenant relationship with God.

As we have seen, *Abba* could not be used outside of the covenant relationship towards God, within the category of believers. Likewise, *maka* could not be used outside the covenant relationship towards its own ancestral fathers, within the category of a respective tribe.

If we look at the above contrast with another interpretation, then we would see that there is a weakness in the Baegu covenant relationship. In relation to Christianity, all believers, regardless of tribe, race, nationality, and culture, can address God as *Abba*, while this was not the case with Baegu culture. However, the respective members of one tribe that worshipped the ancestral fathers that belong to the same tribe, and the same sacred shrine (*akalomae*), could only use the Baegu *maka*.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4. Christ Contextualised into Baegu *Foa'a* (Prayer)**

##### ***Christ the Perfect Beuabu***

The Baegu people worship their ancestral father (*beuakalo*) on the mountains. The mountains were called *beuabu*, which is translated as “holy house”, or “house of prayer”, because it was where the priest presented all the community’s prayers, whether verbally, or in the form of sacrifices. To the Baegu people, the *beuabu* is the centre of all religious activities. There are significant points about *beuabu* (prayer mountains) in Baegu culture.

The *beuaba*, and its elevation, signify the moral attributes of the ancestral spirits. They are *abu* (holy), and *sukwai* (powerful). The mountains, and its elevation, signify the status of the ancestral fathers who were buried on the mountains, they were heroes of the tribe, to whom the shrine belonged. The *beuabu*, and its elevation, is believed to be closer to *fanailangi* (heaven), the abode of the *gwaufutona* (supreme being), and this would be

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<sup>21</sup> *Akalomae* is a term used for the house or abode of the ancestral spirit.



an advantage for the worshippers to be closer to the god, whom they worshipped.

The *beuabu*, to the Baegu worshippers, is a suitable venue for worship, because it is quiet and free from common life activities. It is a place suitable for private meditations.

If we look closely at the discourse between the Lord Jesus and the Samaritan woman, recorded in John 4:21-24, we see that the main theological issue that was in focus was the issue of traditional shrine worship. Historically, the Samaritan community put a lot of emphasis on Mt Gerizim,<sup>22</sup> as the centre of religious activities, “while the Jewish community put high value on the Jerusalem temple, as the centre of their religious activities” (Tenney, p. 55).

To say that “the time is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on Mt Gerizim nor in Jerusalem” was a shocking statement to the Samaritan woman. This statement, made by the Lord Jesus, actually put more questions into the mind of the Samaritan woman regarding her traditional religion.

We will look closely at the earthly life of the Lord Jesus. We will see that He respected the synagogue, because this was the venue, which He normally attended, to listen to the scriptures, and to preach from the scriptures. He also went to respective venues, where he could pray with his Father without any disturbances. These are some biblical examples:

- It was the Lord’s custom to attend synagogues on Sabbath days.<sup>23</sup>
- The Lord went to the mountainside to pray.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Samaritans founded their claims on the historical fact that, when Moses instructed the people concerning the entrance into the Promised Land, he commanded that they set up an altar on Mt Ebal, and the tribes should be divided: half on Mt Ebal and half on Mt Gerizim. The Jews held that, since Solomon had been commissioned to build the temple in Jerusalem, the centre of worship should be located there.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 4:16.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 6:12; Matt 14:23.

- The Lord went up to the mountain with three of his disciples to pray.<sup>25</sup>
- The Lord went to a solitary place to pray.<sup>26</sup>

The Lord found His daily strength and wisdom from His Father by listening to the scriptures read in the synagogue or temple, and by spending time alone with His Father in a solitary place. If that is the case with the Lord, then what can we say about His words to the Samaritan woman, regarding replacing Gerizim and the temple worship? Was the Lord contradicting Himself?

All four gospels record the incident about the cleansing of the Jerusalem temple.<sup>27</sup> According to the gospel of Mark, the Lord was quoting the words of Isaiah, “for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Is 56:7b). It was very interesting to see that, when the Lord was being questioned about His authority over chasing the money-changers, the Lord seems to change His style of language, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:15).

The concept of raising the destroyed temple after three days actually found its fulfilment in the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup> This proves that the new temple, which was raised after three days, as a replacement to the Jerusalem temple, is the Lord Jesus. Therefore, the Lord is the new House of Prayer for all nations.

The significant thing about the temple, and the religious mountains, is that they draw worshippers to themselves. The Lord Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). This indicates that the glorified Lord, now seen, has taken over the role of the temple in Jerusalem, the mountain of Gerizim, and the mountains of the Beuabu people, which used to be the means of attraction to multitudes of worshippers.

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<sup>25</sup> Luke 9:28.

<sup>26</sup> Mark 1:35.

<sup>27</sup> Mark 11:15-19; Matt 21:12-17; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 2:31-33; Matt 27:63-64; Luke 24:6, 21.

The Lord said to the Samaritan woman, “The time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks” (John 4:23). It looks as though the Lord Jesus is saying to the Samaritan woman, the hour is on its way, and, in fact, it is standing in front of you. I am the one, and I am going to inaugurate a new basis for worship. It has nothing to do with Mt Gerizim, or the Jerusalem temple, and, if you like, the prayer mountains of the Baegu.

The new principle of worshipping the Father is now based on, not where you worship, but whom you worship, for the Lord says, “for where two or three come together in My name, there I am with them”.<sup>29</sup> This implies that the new venues for worship are wherever the Lord’s name is present.<sup>30</sup>

The scriptures also state that we Christians are like living stones that make up the spiritual building.<sup>31</sup> Now, the localised manifestation of God’s presence on earth is replaced by His indwelling of all believers. “Thus, the thought is that, when anyone comes to Christ, a new stone is added to the ‘spiritual’ house” (Blum, p. 229). All Christians accommodate the temple of God, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). It is important to know that, both individual Christians and the community of all believers are the temple of God, and it is the Holy Spirit of God that universalised the presence of the Lord Jesus, in whatever venue, or avenue, they might use in worshipping the Lord.

The implication here for Baegu Christians is that the *beuabu* (prayer mountain), and the church building that was built with bush materials, are not the temple of God. The Baegu people, those who are worshipping the Lord on the prayer mountains, and in the church buildings, are the temple of God. Therefore, with no restrictions, no programme, the temple is open 24 hours a day. The task of the believer is to worship God, and offer

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<sup>29</sup> Matt 18:20.

<sup>30</sup> Wherever the Lord’s name is present, it indicates the covenant relationship between the worshippers and God. True worship is the worship that derives from the heart of man.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Peter 2:5.

prayers, whether he is on the mountain, in the garden, driving a car, or sitting on the toilet.

Finally, an encouragement to the Baegu people is that they should continue to go to the prayer mountains (*beuabu*), because they are part of the traditional heritage. But, remember, that *beuabu* is not really what the Lord is seeking. The Father is seeking individuals. Tony Evans says:

[I]f you go to the church thinking you are now going to *the* place of worship, you've missed the message. If you limit worship to where you are, the minute you leave that place of worship, you will leave your *attitude* of worship. . . . That's why we have a group of people, who can worship on Sunday, and then do their thing Monday, and the rest of the week (Evans, p. 343).

Let all Baegu Christians be encouraged by the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25 NIV). So, let us remain in the perfect *beuabu*, and offer our daily prayer to God our Father. It is through our meeting together that Jesus, as the temple, will be manifested in the midst of this corrupted world.

### ***Christ the Perfect Arai Foa (High Priest)***

I'll begin this section by quoting the words of Ross,<sup>32</sup> in regard to the nature, and responsibility, of the Baegu priest.

The Baegu priest is very much a priest, and not a shaman, or prophet. The priest is the representative of the community, for dealing in the supernatural. Only the priest can offer sacrifices to the ancestral spirits, and only the priest can, through prayer, ask them to grant "blessings"<sup>33</sup> to his descendants. His office is socially created and validated. He is selected on the basis of his temperament, and mastery of specific ritual knowledge. He must

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<sup>32</sup> M. Harold Ross, *Baegu: Social and Ecological Organisation in Malaita, Solomon Islands*, Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973.

<sup>33</sup> The word "blessing", in Baegu, is *maman'aa*.

know detailed genealogies, the exact wording of all the relevant prayers, and the details of sacrificial and ritual procedure (Ross, p. 189).

The words of Ross indicate that the priestly office within the Baegu culture is a significant position in traditional religion. In order to obtain a perfect and harmonious relationship with the community, and the ancestral spirits, the elected priest must be a person with moral qualities. One moral quality that governs the whole Baegu traditional worship is holiness.<sup>34</sup> In order to obtain holiness, required as the basis for the covenant relationship, it is vital three elements be adhered to:

- The priest, as the mediator, must be conscious of his daily life involvements.
- The pigs that are reared for the sacrifices must be ceremonially clean from physical contamination.<sup>35</sup>
- The priest must master the rituals, because rituals are the only saved language that should be used in communication with the ancestral spirits.

Though the standard required by the ancestral spirits is holiness, the community always found themselves with a problem. This was because the priest, himself, was imperfect, and the sacrifices were imperfect. Traditional Baegu religion was not based on relationship, but obligation. They had to feed many pigs, in order to feed the ancestral spirits. Many sacrifices were necessary for the spirits to be appeased.

The apostle John presented Christ for the first time, by using the title “the Lamb of God”,<sup>36</sup> not as a priest, but, literally, a lamb. It looks as though

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<sup>34</sup> “Holiness”, in Baegu term is *abu*, not in the sense of restriction, but respect and reverence.

<sup>35</sup> The pigs must be fed with the food from the sacred garden. Those who are scheduled for feeding the pigs must be also free from physical contamination (avoid contact with females, especially blood).

<sup>36</sup> In the Old Testament context, lamb is not an abstract idea. Lamb is actually the victim for sacrifice, which was the only remedy for covering up the sins of the people.

the apostle is saying, “Here comes the Lamb that the whole world is waiting for.” It was a joyful moment, a time of celebration.

According to Baegu culture, viewing the sacred animal (which was to be the victim for sacrifice) by common people is a dreadful moment, because that would mean death<sup>37</sup> to the whole community.

The scriptures say, “Be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy.”<sup>38</sup> It is very difficult for mere man to be holy. The scriptures also confirm that “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have, together, become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Romans 3:10-12).

It is pity to see the Baegu people obligated to their ancestral spirits, by offering countless pigs to appease the ancestral spirits, to avert the impending judgment that would fall on them. The Baegu people are glad, because they now have Jesus Christ as the perfect priest, who is the perfect sacrifice that replaced the Baegu imperfect priest and sacrificial systems.

It is important that the Lord Jesus becomes the perfect priest for the Baegu community, by means of His incarnation process. Christ entered into relationship with the Baegu people by being qualified to be their *araifoa*,<sup>39</sup> and becoming the *boso*,<sup>40</sup> and, being a priest, offering Himself on the altar (*fuliere*), for the sins of the whole world.

To be human is the common essence of man, and Baegu people are not exempted from it. To say that Jesus is fully man implies that He is not only a Jew, but he is also a Baeguan man. Therefore, the Baegu people are not ashamed to call Jesus their brother, because it is what the scriptures

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<sup>37</sup> The pig is sacred (*abu*) and the common people are defiled (*sua*). For a defiled object to come into contact with the sacred object (*abu*) means the sacred object will become defiled (*sua*), and that is violating the sacredness of the ancestral father. Therefore, the community deserves severe punishment.

<sup>38</sup> Lev 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15.

<sup>39</sup> *Araifoa* is the Baegu term for “high priest”.

<sup>40</sup> *Boso* is “pig” in Baegu language, whereas, for the Jew, the lamb is the victim for the sacrifice.

say, “Both the one who makes man holy, and those who are made holy, are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”<sup>41</sup>

What a great privilege for the Baegu people to have Jesus as their first-born brother to be the high priest. This means that all Baegu Christians are priests, because they are born into God’s family, and they share with Christ as priests. This confirms the scripture, which says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness, and into His light.”<sup>42</sup>

The implication for the Baegu people is: let them bring their prayers and petitions to Christ, who is the High Priest, the one within their own family, who is perfect enough to intercede on their behalf, and the one who is a perfect victim of their sacrifice. Because He is the perfect Lamb (*boso*), and the one who is a perfect *beuabu*, they can offer all their daily lives as a sweet sacrifice to the Lord, as long as they live.

## **5. Recommendation**

### ***Cultural Extremity***

It is logical to say that the practices found in the cult worship of the Baegu have common roots in the principles provided in the scriptures. The ritual teaches the Baegu people about prayer and faith. The relics teach the Baegu people about God’s presence. The whole shrine complex teaches the Baegu people about holiness, and God’s grace.

The people should value the traditional aspect of worship, as the vehicle they use to worship the true God. The scriptures must always be placed above culture, because, if that is lacking, then the churches of Baegu will end up with problems.

### ***The Object of Worship***

The enthusiasm in developing ancestral worship in this paper does not guarantee that I, in any way, believe my Baegu ancestors truly existed.

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<sup>41</sup> Heb 2:11.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.

After all, the scriptures testify that the devil is a great liar, a deceiver, and an angel of light (Matt 8:4, 2 Thess 2:9-10, John 8:44).

The ancestors were the founders of the Baegu people, and, historically, the Baegu people should appreciate their ancestors. But it does not mean that the Baegu people should worship their ancestors. The ancestors have gone to where they belong. It was the devil that did all the manifestations, claiming to be the spirit of the ancestors. Therefore, all prayers should be attributed to God alone.

### ***The Scope of Baegu Traditional Covenant***

According to Baegu traditional worship, a member of one tribe was not allowed to offer prayers in the shrine complex that belonged to another tribe. This act was regarded as a violation of the names of the ancestors of the shrine. Death would result from this action. To avoid this, the Baegu people normally established their own mountain shrines in their respective localities. Prior to the 1980s, the people lived in a Christian community (lived as a body of believers, regardless of which tribe they belonged to). However, by the 1980s, people went back to living in their own tribal settings. While this is good, especially for the maintenance of their cultural identity, the danger is that Baegu Christians will revolve around their own cultural boundaries. They will not perceive the mandate of the gospel, which is meant to be the gospel of every tribe and nation in the world.

The practice of living in tribal communities, and erecting small mountain shrines, actually got its roots from Baegu traditional worship. This practice allows Christians to interpret biblical principles of worship in their cultural context of worship. It is encouraging to see the Baegu people use the cultural elements of prayer as a vehicle to worship the true God, while their focus should not be confined to their own tribal boundaries, but to the rest of the world, as the potential universal family of God.

## **6. Conclusion**

The churches of Baegu should reconsider their theological stand in their prayer commitments. It is also important that the churches look at the positive side of culture; after all it is God who gave them the culture. It is



a mistake to regard culture as evil, and so totally ignore it. It is understandable that, due to the fall, culture was spoilt.

The advice is that the Baegu churches should value their culture, adopting their traditional concepts and approaches in prayer, but should measure their culture against the scriptures. By using the biblical principles as a means of guidance, the cultural concept and approaches will be beneficial to Baegu Christians, in their prayer commitments.

Finally, all the cultural elements of worship, confirmed in this paper, have been pointing to Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that the material presented in this paper will bring blessings to the church of the Baegu as a whole.

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# THE REIGN OF CHRIST: AN EXEGESIS OF ISAIAH 2:1-4

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## **Introduction**

Encouragement – we all need it. We need to be encouraged in our Christian walk, and in our Christian witness. The prophet Isaiah gave some encouraging words to the nation of Israel in Is 2:1-4. God was punishing Israel for their disobedience, but, in the midst of this punishment, Isaiah spoke words of encouragement to Israel. Isaiah prophesied of a time of great blessing for Israel and the world. A close look at this prophecy will encourage us all. May this study be a challenge to walk in the light of the Lord (Is 2:5b).

## **Text of Isaiah 2:1-4**

We begin our study by providing a translation of the passage directly from the original Hebrew text. Most of the passage is written as poetry, and this is reflected in the appearance of the translation.

## ***Translation of Isaiah 2:1-4***

<sup>[1]</sup>The word that Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>[2]</sup>And it will happen in the last days,  
the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established  
higher than the mountains,  
and it will be lifted up above the hills,  
and all nations will flow to it, <sup>[3]</sup>and many peoples will come.

And they will say,

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us His ways  
that we may walk in His paths.”  
Because from Zion instruction will go forth,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
[4] And He will judge between the nations,  
and He will decide for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning knives.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,  
and they will no longer learn war.

### **Relation to Micah 4:1-3**

Except for minor differences, Is 2:2-4 is identical to Mic 4:1-3.<sup>1</sup> Since Isaiah and Micah ministered together from approximately 750 BC to 680 BC in Jerusalem and Judah, the question of original authorship arises.<sup>2</sup> Did Isaiah quote Micah?

There is evidence that Micah was the original author. First, Micah’s use of “strong” and “afar off” (Mic 4:3) do not seem like additions, but, rather, omissions by Isaiah.<sup>3</sup> Second, Mic 4:1-3 fits well with 3:9-12, while Is 2:1-4 does not flow well from its preceding context.<sup>4</sup> Third, Micah’s text is regarded as superior, based on the scope of the few textual differences in both passages.<sup>5</sup>

There is equal evidence that Isaiah was the original author. First, the phrase “for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” is found only in the book of

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<sup>1</sup> The main differences in are in their use of the words “nations” (גוֹיִם) and “peoples” (עַמִּים), and Micah’s addition of the words “strong” (עָזָז), and “afar off” (רָחוֹק) in 4:3.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah’s ministry can be dated from Is 1:1. Micah’s ministry can be dated from Mic 1:1.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Lange, *Isaiah: Commentary of the Holy Scriptures*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1877, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> B. K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Tyndale OT Commentary, D. J. Wiseman, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1988, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Isaiah (1:20; 40:5; 58:14) except for its use in Mic 4:4.<sup>6</sup> Second, Micah may have amplified Isaiah's original text by adding v. 4.<sup>7</sup> Third, Moyter argues Micah's opening is ordinary, when compared to Isaiah's typically stylish opening.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, Micah's variations suggest that he freely quoted Isaiah. For example, Micah adds "and" (ו) before the phrase "to the house of the God of Jacob" in 4:2.<sup>9</sup>

Since the evidence shows either prophet could have been the original author, Feinberg aptly concludes, "it is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which insures us that we have the mind of God in both cases".<sup>10</sup>

### **Context of Isaiah 2:1-4**

To understand the passages, it is necessary to understand the context of it. This includes the context within the book of Isaiah, the immediate context, and the historical context.

#### ***Context within the Book of Isaiah***

The theme of Isaiah is salvation.<sup>11</sup> Even Isaiah's name, a compound word meaning "Yaweh's salvation", suggests this theme.<sup>12</sup> Isaiah can be divided into two halves: chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66. The first half of the book focuses on God's retribution of Judah, while the second half displays God's restoration of Judah.<sup>13</sup> Chapter 1 serves as an overview of the book of Isaiah. It begins with the condemnation of Judah (vv. 1-23) and ends

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<sup>6</sup> G. W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary F. Gaebelein, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978, vol 6, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1971, vol 1, p. 75.

<sup>8</sup> J. Alec Moyter, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Analysed Bible, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1993, p. 53. Moyter proposes that *בֵּית־יְהוָה נְכוֹן* is less stylish than the typically Isaianic *יְהוָה נְכוֹן בֵּית־הָרַב*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> C. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1990, pp. 167-168.

<sup>11</sup> G. L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1994, p. 363.

<sup>12</sup> F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah: Commentary on the Old Testament*, C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, eds, reprint edn, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Martin, *Isaiah*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament, J. F. Walvoord, and R. B. Zuck, eds, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1994, p. 1032.

with the promise of restoration for Judah (vv. 24-31). The structure of chapter 1 shows the themes of the two halves of the book.

### ***Immediate Context***

Following the first chapter's overview of the book, Is 2:1-4 and 4:1-6 serve as bookends for the first section of chapters 1-39. Both refer to the glorious future of Jerusalem while bracketing a warning of judgment.<sup>14</sup> In chapter 2, after prophesying of Jerusalem's glorious future in vv. 1-4, Isaiah challenges Israel to obey God in v. 5. Then, in the remainder of chapter 2, and through chapter 3, Isaiah prophesies of judgment. Thus, in the first few chapters of Isaiah, the contrasting pictures of punishment for sin, and promised restoration, are interwoven.

### ***Historical Context***

Assyria's invasion of Judah in 701 BC may be the historical event leading up to Isaiah's writing. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was moving towards Jerusalem, when the Angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13-19:35). Sennacherib then departed and returned to Ninevah (2 Kings 19:36). Isaiah refers to this invasion of Judah, and God's protection of Jerusalem, in 1:8-9. If Isaiah wrote 2:1-4 during this time, his prophecy of Jerusalem's glorious future would have painted a picture of contrast and hope to the Jerusalem of his day.

### **Exegesis of Isaiah 2:1-4**

Is 2:1-4 paints a picture of the glorious future of Jerusalem, during Christ's millennial reign, in three broad strokes. One stroke sketches the time of His future reign (vv. 1-2a). A second stroke draws the location (vv. 2b-3a). The third stroke colours the picture with the benefits of His reign (vv. 3b-4).

### ***The Time of Christ's Reign (2:1-2a)***

Is 2:1 serves as an introductory header to the rest of the passage.<sup>15</sup> In this verse, Isaiah supernaturally "saw" (הִתְהַוָּה) the "word" (דְבַר). It was a

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<sup>14</sup> Leupold, *Isaiah*, vol 1, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Verse 1 is written in prose, while vv. 2-4 are written as a poetic structure.

prophetic word “concerning Judah and Jerusalem”. Isaiah begins v. 2 abruptly with the word **וְהָיָה** (“and it will happen”). This abruptness gives the word a future force.<sup>16</sup> Also, the relationship of the word with v. 1 causes it to signify a future time.<sup>17</sup>

The prophetic events that Isaiah saw will happen “in the last days” (**בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים**). This phrase occurs 16 times in the OT. These occurrences can be divided into two groups. The first group focuses on a future time of peace and prosperity.<sup>18</sup> Is 2:2 and Mic 4:1 fall into this category. The second group focuses on a future time of judgment and war.<sup>19</sup> In the LXX, the phrase “in the last days” is translated as **ἐν ταῖς ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις**. The Greek phrase **ἐσχαταὶς ἡμέραις** (“last days”) occurs three times in the NT (Acts 2:17, 2 Tim 3:1, and Jas 5:3).

Acts 2:17 speaks of the pouring out of God’s Spirit in blessing in a future time. Therefore, the “last days” was prophesied in the OT, and is future still in the NT. The phrase points to the future, but is not definitive enough to place it in a specific time. Other prophetic scripture, such as Revelation, is needed to better understand how the “last days” fits chronologically into the end times.

Rev 20:1-6 gives the time frame of Christ’s future reign in the millennium, a time of peace and prosperity. The millennium follows the tribulation (Rev 6-19), and precedes the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21-22). Many passages in Isaiah, including 2:1-4, fill in the details of the millennial kingdom (9:6-7, 11:1-10, 40:1-11, 61:4-11, 62:1-12, 65:17-25). Thus, the phrase “in the last days,” in the context of Is 2:1-4, refers to the time of Christ’s future millennial reign.

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<sup>16</sup> E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996, vol 1, p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> B. K. Waltke, and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990, p. 539. Waltke classifies all of verse 1 as a temporal adverbial construction. When this construction is followed by a **וְהָיָה** it signifies a future time.

<sup>18</sup> Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Ezek 38:8; and Hos 3:5.

<sup>19</sup> Deut 4:30; 31:29; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 8:19; and 10:14.

### ***The Location of Christ's Reign (2:2b-3a)***

In the last days “the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established” (v. 2b). The phrase “will be established” (יְהִי־נִכּוֹן) prophesies of a specific event that will happen in the future. Young argues that it should not be translated as a future passive. His purpose is to show that it is an event already in progress at the time (e.g., the church). His argument is syntactical, and rests on using יְהִי־יָ ( “will be”) with the passive participle נִכּוֹן (“established”).<sup>20</sup> But Sailhamer, arguing against Young, shows the use of “will be established” in 1 Chr 17:14 has to mean a future event, and, therefore, should be interpreted the same in Is 2:2.<sup>21</sup>

The specific action is the establishment of “the mountain of the house of the Lord.” The term בַּיַּת־יְהוָה (“house of the Lord”) occurs 175 times in scripture and refers to the tabernacle or temple of God in virtually every use. Thus, Isaiah has in mind a literal temple. Ezek 40-43 describes the millennial temple. Ezek 43:12 specifically describes its location as on top of a mountain. Also, Is 2:3 refers to many people saying “let us go up”.

Many people will specifically go up “to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob” (v. 3). Since the prophecy relates to Jerusalem, Isaiah is prophesying the temple will be built in Jerusalem, on top of a mountain.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the prominence of the temple mount in Jerusalem is a theme that runs throughout the book of Isaiah.<sup>23</sup> The temple mountain will be “higher than the mountains” (בְּרֵאשׁ הַהָרִים). Translators have

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<sup>20</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, vol 1, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> J. H. Sailhamer, “Evidence from Isaiah 2”, in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, D. K. Campbell, and J. L. Townsend, eds, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1992, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> In BHS (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 2nd edn, Karl Elliger, and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds, Stuttgart Ger: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), the Masoretes noted that the phrase אֶל־הַר (“the mountain”) occurs 16 times in the OT. In 15 of the uses it refers to Mount Carmel. It is significant that Mount Carmel is an actual mountain. Thus, because the same phrase is used here in Isaiah, it may offer evidence that a real mountain is in view. BHS, p. 677.

<sup>23</sup> Martin, “Isaiah”, p. 1036. See Is 11:9; 25:6-7; 27:13; 30:29; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20.



interpreted the word **כְּרֹאשׁ** in this verse in at least two ways: “chief” and “on top,” with each translation offering a different emphasis.<sup>24</sup> Also, Martin believes that “mountains” (**הַהָרִים**) could represent “kingdoms”, since it is used that way in Dan 2:35.<sup>25</sup> The context largely determines how the two words should be translated. Sailhamer correctly argues that Isaiah’s use of the Niphal form of the word **נִכּוֹן** (“will be established”) shows the new creation of mountains. He supports this by showing that it is used throughout the Psalms and wisdom literature, especially in contexts dealing with creation themes.<sup>26</sup> The word **נִשָּׂא** (“will be lifted up”) is used elsewhere in Isaiah (2:14, 30:25, 57:7) to describe high mountains and hills. The word **הַגְּבָעוֹת** (“hills”) is often used in parallel structure as a synonym for “mountains” in Hebrew poetry.<sup>27</sup> In the parallel structure in Is 2:2b, there is a correlation between “higher” and “lifted up”, and “mountains” and “hills”:

“the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established  
*higher* than the *mountains* and it will be *lifted up* above the *hills*”

The phrase “and it will be lifted above the hills” is a poetic restatement of “higher than the mountains”. The word “hills” (**הַגְּבָעוֹת**) is never used in Isaiah to represent “kingdoms”.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the phrase “the mountain of the house of the Lord” refers to the temple mountain. The word “mountains” (**הַהָרִים**) should be translated consistently throughout the passage as a literal mountain (whether singular or plural). Based on this

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<sup>24</sup> NIV and NASB use “chief”, which emphasises the importance of the mountain. KJV and NKJV use “on top”, which emphasises the height of the mountain.

<sup>25</sup> Martin, “Isaiah”, p. 1037.

<sup>26</sup> Sailhamer, “Evidence from Isaiah 2”, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> BDB (F. Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Lafayette LA: Associated Publishers & Authors, 1981), p. 149. Examples include Is 2:14, 30:17, 30:25, 31:4, 40:4, 40:12, 41:15, 42:15, 54:10, 55:12, and 65:7.

<sup>28</sup> The word “hill” is used 14 times in Isaiah, and in each use an elevated geography is meant. In fact, Is 31:4 seems to refer to the temple mountain as a “hill”.

evidence, the best translation and interpretation for the phrase is a literal “higher than the mountains”.<sup>29</sup>

Not only will the mountain be the highest; it will also be the focal point of mankind. The phrase “and all the nations will flow to it” provides vivid imagery of its importance. In contrast to physical waters flowing from Jerusalem (Zech 14:8) all nations will flow to Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup> It is significant that Isaiah uses the phrase “all nations” because it emphasises that both Jews and Gentiles will come to Jerusalem. Jews, as one of the world’s nations, will occupy the land promised to them in the Palestinian Covenant (Deut 30:1-10, Num 34:1-12). Gentiles will occupy the remainder of the world’s nations.

Girdlestone suggests that “nations” specifically refer to Gentiles, while “peoples” refers to Jews.<sup>31</sup> But the phrase “and all nations will flow to it” is in a poetical, parallel structure to the phrase “and many people will come”.<sup>32</sup> There is a correlation between “nations” and “peoples”, and another correlation between “flow” and “come”.<sup>33</sup>

and all *nations* will *flow* to it,  
and many *peoples* will *come*.

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<sup>29</sup> Other scriptures show that the temple mount will be higher physically than all other mountains on earth. The last-bowl judgment during the tribulation will flatten the geography of the earth (Rev 16:20). When Christ returns, Jerusalem will rise (Zec 14:10).

<sup>30</sup> Sailhamer, “Evidence from Isaiah 2”, p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> R. B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1956, p. 256.

<sup>32</sup> The word וַאֲמַרְו stands out in this structure. In BDB, it is actually at the end of the line, but it is not included in the parallelism of the line here. Therefore, it may be used simply to usher the reader on. The line does have continuity, though, because the tense of each of the three verbs is waw consecutive perfect: וַיִּנְהַרְו and וַיִּהְיוּ כּוֹ and וַאֲמַרְו.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah uses the word עַמִּים “peoples” (15 times) and גּוֹיִם “nations” (18 times), in a variety of ways. For example, עַמִּים refers to “you from far countries” (8:9), while גּוֹיִם refers to the “whole earth” (14:26). Thus, the context of Isa 2:1-4 should be a determining factor in the interpretation of each word.

In this parallel structure, “nations” and “peoples” are considered synonyms.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Mic 4:1b-2a interchanges the words.

And *peoples* will flow to it,  
and many *nations* will come.

This shows that the words have equivalent meanings.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the world’s population will come to Jerusalem.

### ***The Benefits of Christ’s Reign (2:3b-4)***

As the nations stream towards Jerusalem, they will encourage one another to go to the temple by saying:

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us His ways  
that we may walk in His paths.<sup>36</sup>

The Hebrew construction of the phrase “Come, let us go up” (לָכוּ וְנַעֲלֶה) expresses purpose.<sup>37</sup> The nations have a purpose for going to Jerusalem; they want to learn from Christ Himself. But they won’t simply learn and forget. The syntactical relationship between יְרַנֵּנוּ (“He will teach us”) and וְנִלְכֶּה (“that we may walk”) is one of result.<sup>38</sup> What they learn will result in action.

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<sup>34</sup> R. Chisholm Jr, *From Exegesis to Exposition*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1998, p. 142. Chisholm calls this reiterative poetic parallelism; the second line simply reiterates the first, using synonymous terms.

<sup>35</sup> BDB, p. 156. BDB states that לָכוּ is sometimes parallel with נַעֲלֶה, and gives the example of Is 2:2, 4 when compared with Mic 4:1,3.

<sup>36</sup> BHS has an athnak under בְּאַרְחֵי יְהוָה (“in his paths”). This suggests the peoples’ statement is finished. BHS, p. 678.

<sup>37</sup> J. Gibson, *Davidson’s Introductory Hebrew Grammar and Syntax*, Edinburgh UK: T. & T. Clark, 1994, p. 106. The imperative לָכוּ, plus the cohortative וְנַעֲלֶה (with simple waw) expresses purpose.

<sup>38</sup> Chisholm, *Exegesis*, p. 110. The jussive יְרַנֵּנוּ, plus the cohortative וְנִלְכֶּה indicates result.

The teaching will bear results, because it is from Christ Himself. The preposition כִּי (“because”) relates the teaching to its source.<sup>39</sup> It also introduces a chiasm (A, A’, B’, B structure) that characterises the source.

A Because from Zion  
A’ instruction will go forth,  
B’ and the word of the Lord  
B from Jerusalem

This chiasitic structure equates “Zion” with “Jerusalem”, and emphasises it as the location of the teaching. The chiasm also equates “instruction” and the “word of the Lord”, and emphasises it as the source of the teaching.<sup>40</sup> What will this “instruction” contain? Isaiah’s use of the word (תּוֹרָה) in Is 51:4 relates it to justice.<sup>41</sup> This same relationship is found here in 2:3-4. Verse 4 begins with the verb וְיִשְׁפֹּט (“and He will judge”). The grammatical structure of this word shows that “He will judge” is an example of the type of “instruction” given.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the instruction is judicial in nature.

Isaiah elaborates on the recipients of Christ’s judicial instruction through a parallelism. The phrase “He will judge” equates with “He will decide”, while the phrase “nations” equates with “peoples”.

*And He will judge between the nations,  
and He will decide for many peoples.*

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 116. Causal clauses express a cause or reason for the main action or state. כִּי or one of the other causal prepositions typically introduces them.

<sup>40</sup> BDB, p. 436. “Instruction” was chosen as the translation for תּוֹרָה, because BDB categorises the use of it here under the title “instruction in the Messianic age”.

<sup>41</sup> Is 51:4 “Listen to Me, My people; and give ear to Me, O My nation: For law (תּוֹרָה) will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples” (NKJV).

<sup>42</sup> Chisholm, *Exegesis*, p. 131. The word וְיִשְׁפֹּט is a Qal waw consecutive perfect. This stem and tense sometimes introduces a statement that gives a specific instance, or example, to demonstrate the truth of the preceding, general statement.

Thus, Isaiah is taking advantage of Hebrew poetry structure to emphasise the judicial role that Christ will play.<sup>43</sup> He will judge the world from His throne in the temple (Ezek 43:1-12). Christ will judge the sinful behaviour of man. Only believers will enter the millennium (Matt 25:31-46, Ezek 20:33-38) but they will have children born into sin (Zech 14:16-19).<sup>44</sup> Sinful natures result in sinful action. Sinful actions need judging.

The result of Christ's judgment will be peace throughout the world. Isaiah uses two sets of parallel structures to describe the worldwide peace. In the first parallel structure, the word וְכִתְּתוּ ("they will beat") describes the parallel phrases: "their swords into ploughshares" and "their spears into pruning knives".

*They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning knives.*

In the second parallel structure לֹא ("not/no") describes "lift up sword against nation" and "longer learn war". In the Hebrew, לֹא ("not/no") is the first word of each phrase, and, therefore, more clearly shows the parallel structure.

לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי-לְגוֹי חֶרֶב  
וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה  
Nation will *not* lift up sword against nation,  
and they will *no* longer learn war.

Isaiah shows that the ramifications of such activities will be enormous. Since war instruments will be made into farming items, no war instruments will exist. Since nations will no longer attack their neighbours, the art and study of war will be removed entirely. Delitzsch sums it up well by stating:

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<sup>43</sup> See the discussion earlier in the paper showing "peoples" and "nations" as synonyms in the context of this passage.

<sup>44</sup> J. F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1959, p. 302.

“There is a peace, not an armed peace, but a full, true God-given and blessed peace.”<sup>45</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Isaiah’s words should greatly encourage us. Isaiah prophesied of a time of great blessing for Jews and Gentiles alike. He prophesied of a time when Christ will rule and teach from Jerusalem. It will be a time of peace, such as the world has never known. Such a glorious future should be an encouragement to walk in the light of the Lord today!

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<sup>45</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, p. 76.

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