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Dear Partners in Ministry:

We have had some rather interesting experiences since last writing, ones that I consider noteworthy enough to record here and to find their way into your prayers.

It all began Sunday, October 20, with the arrival in Uria of a man named Peter, a former resident and sorcerer. Peter's sorcery had taken him away several months ago when he went to live on the land of his recently deceased mentor, Kori. Peter figured that he would gain spiritual power and influence if he lived at Kori's spirit sanctuary, a place to commune with the dead and the demonic.

Peter came into the back of the open-sided structure that we meet in for church about mid-way through the sermon, not having been seen in Uria in six months. I asked Peter and others what brought him back, but no one was willing to comment.

The answer to the riddle of Peter's presence lie in an old woman, a bird of paradise, a dead husband. The old woman of the riddle is a neighbor of ours who has been sort of a grandmother to us and kids over the years. When we returned to Uria from Abigail's birth in Australia, this woman carried Abigail the two kilometers from the highway to our house. She has had various aches and pains over the years and Angela has frequently prayed with her and given her Panadol (the Aussie equivalent of Tylenol). Recently we hadn't seen much of her, and being busy with home-school and translation, hadn't taken the time to go over and check on her. Apparently Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning, a black bird of paradise was heard crying out near her house. Within the framework of local belief, this cry is an omen of impending death.

About 7:30 Monday morning, we heard the large *garamut* drum being sounded outside, and within a few minutes we were informed that our village grandmother had just died. We were asked to go to Madang to help get supplies for the woman's funeral, which we did.

Peter had come to perform the animistic equivalent of the Catholic practice of last rites. When the bird of paradise was heard singing near the house of a very, very sick woman, he was called to prepare her for her journey into the hereafter—which apparently was complicated because of who she had been married to and because of a demon monster the locals call Kenese.

The woman's late husband reputedly had been a powerful sorcerer and leader in the male cult. Apparently he held power over a lot of people. Traditional (not those who have been freed by the Truth) Garia believe that upon death the dead are escorted to the place of the dead, but that the journey is unsafe due to a demon monster named Kenese, who lies in wait for the recently dead in order to waylay them. Traditional Garia also believe the hereafter to be temporary haunting of physical locales—maybe a couple of decades before the dead either fade away or depart for somewhere else. During this period they work hard to keep the recently dead happy.

Later that night, after we returned from Madang, the wailing started. Wailing and funeral dirges are a normal part of grieving in Garia culture, and while probably related to appeasing the dead, are not strictly demonic practices. At about midnight, another sound joined the normal wailing and funeral dirges—secret bamboo flutes (much like a pan flute). It is strictly forbidden to play these flutes in the presence of women and is solely a male cult practice. Why then, were these flutes being blown in mixed company? Why were *serious* cultural taboos being dispensed with?

This answer lies in the late husband. The men who were initiated into manhood with him (and their sons) were blowing the flutes to appease him. Perhaps they were afraid that his former comradeship with them in life had turned to

antipathy in death. If so they would feel the need to appease him so that he would not wreak total havoc among them. Perhaps the riddle is solved best by drawing a connection between this man and the monster, Kenese. Could it be that they were inviting her once powerful husband to escort her to her place of abode so that Kenese would not attack and destroy her?

In trying to unravel this mystery I learned a few other related things that have helped me to more clearly understand the Garia mind. I've often written you about the long standing presence of the church here among the Garia and the almost total lack of genuine transformation in their lives. I have often sought your prayers regarding Garia eyes being opened to the truth. There is a friend who lives close by who is very kind to us, helpful, generally affectionate toward us, yet he will have little if anything to do with the church/Christianity. A few weeks ago I learned why. Apparently, he and the "late husband" were initiated into manhood together. At some point, their clan (perhaps during a male initiation rite??) witnessed a demonic or false miracle. It must have been a real humdinger, because from that point forward, they committed themselves to the spiritual entity who performed the false miracle before their eyes. Whatever view you take on all things spiritual, I think it safe to say that, as we examine the Scriptures, we see that demons do exist and operate and that, by and large, their most useful weapon is deception—not power.

The levels of deception are so multi-layered and intricate among these people that they can and often do believe two diametrically opposed ideas—and are unable to see the conflict. For example, Hebrews 9:27 teaches us that "man is destined to die once and after that face judgment". Their elders, their pastors (!!), and their peers tell them that they must perform elaborate rituals surrounding death or they will be made sick or dead by the dead or by the demon monster Kenese. The local "pastors" see Christianity as ritual performed on Sunday to keep God happy (this is how they approach the liturgy of the Lutheran Church) and traditional practices are performed at other times: birth, death, planting of gardens, harvest, etc.

One of the most difficult parts of this job is to unravel the mystery of the Garia mind and be able to present the truth in such a way that it will penetrate the thick fog of deception that darkens so many. In many ways, the look of our ministry resembles what Jesus did. We have daily contact and influence with a handful of people. These people (the translation team along with our neighbors) have put themselves in a position to encounter the Truth on an almost *daily* basis. When Truth sets them free from the prison of deception, they will be able, in turn, to bring deliverance to others. **The translation of the New Testament is vital to making the gospel clear to the translators themselves, and, ultimately, to those who will receive the Word of Truth in the years to come.** When these folks grasp the idea that God is Lord of All, they will no longer need to submit themselves to the elaborate rituals and fear that now rule their lives. When God rules their hearts, they will be able to live—and die—well. I've really been trying to impress upon them a phrase we've been working with lately: *Xoiteu waiwai xokupa sapi purina*, i.e., 'all things (people, nature, animals) exist under (in submission to) God's power.' It's the descriptive phrase we are using where you would find "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven" in English.

A few days after the funeral, we made another (this one planned) trip to Madang in order to buy supplies both for ourselves and for an upcoming translation workshop, and to take care of office business. As we were leaving the house, I (Todd) had an altercation with the family cat. I was scratched and bitten and the cat lost about 8 of its 9 lives (so I guess we were about even!). It was thundering and raining when we got into the truck (not a good thing considering our roads). We got half a kilometer from our house only to be stopped by a five- or six-hundred pound boulder lying in the middle of the road. Kisama and I got out into the rain and mud and tried to move it, then Angela joined us, and then one of her friends, Korenime. We moved it a bit. Kisama shimmied up a tree and cut some branches off from which we made levers. We got the boulder out of the way enough to get around it. Fortunately, that was the last of the difficulties *that day*.

We ask for your prayers, especially for **wisdom and discernment** in trying to free the minds of those in bondage to the enemy of our souls. Pray that whatever would block the Garia from seeing and receiving the truth would be **removed**. Pray that our message will be clear and that hearts would be tender. Also, continue praying for the translation team. Many are under social pressure to cease working on translation—ask God to invigorate their commitment and give them good incentive to continue, even in the face of opposition. They have shared with us that most people putting pressure on them also oppose most any volunteer community work and cannot see the value of working for something that benefits anyone except themselves. Thank you very much for your continued prayers and support, which make it possible for the truth to be proclaimed and for the Garia to have the opportunity to respond. Please thank God that church attendance has been healthy lately and that some of the younger guys are meeting for prayer regularly and are active in leading in worship services.

Serving You for Jesus' Sake,

Todd, Angela, Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, and Hannah Owen