

# Pana, Barnabas

## (1897–1984)

### MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

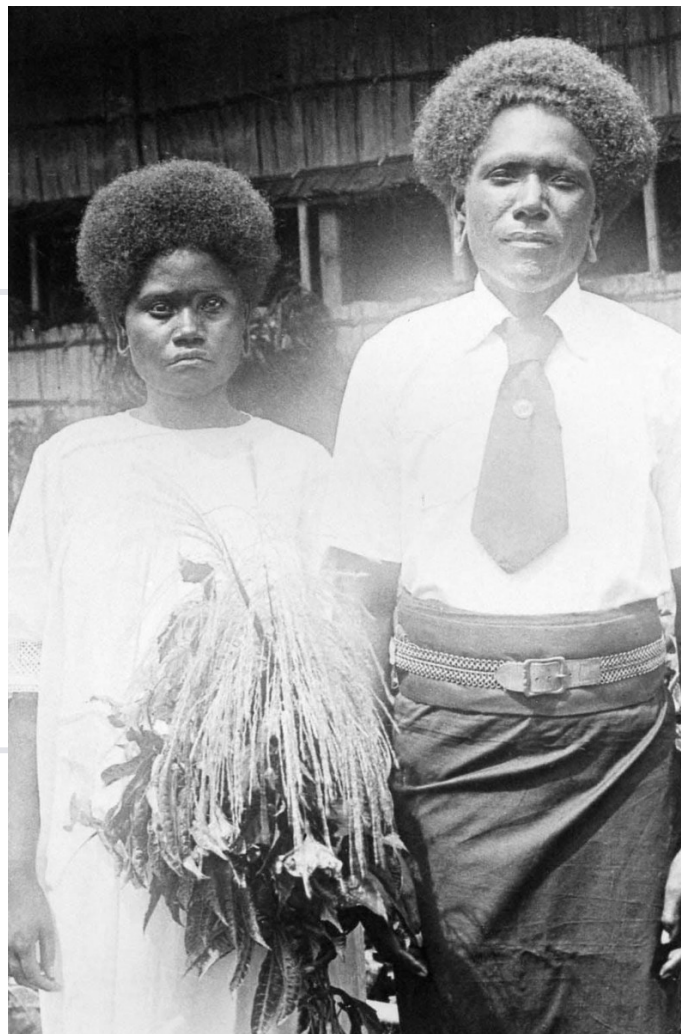
Barnabas Pana was one of the first ordained Solomon Islanders, and he worked over 40 years as a missionary among his people and was integral to the translation of the Marovo Bible.

## Introduction to Adventism

Soon after Griffiths Jones established the first Seventh-day Adventist outpost at Viru in the Solomon Islands in 1914, he sailed south in his ketch

*Advent Herald*, searching for Chief Tetagu in the Marovo Lagoon. Tetagu had messaged Jones that he was interested in having the Seventh-day Adventist mission settle in his area. Jones first met two lads at Babata, Pana and Jugha, who told him Tetagu was gathering food supplies some distance away. Jones took the lads on board to direct him to Tetagu. This was the first contact Jones had with the Marovo people. The two lads and their peers would become the spearhead of national leadership in the Solomon Islands.<sup>1</sup>

Pana, born in 1897,<sup>2</sup> was about 18 years old when among the first students to attend an elementary school set up at Sasaghana on the shores of Marovo Lagoon. Pana was also one of a small group of boys from the school who were baptized by Jones on New Year's Day 1918.<sup>3</sup> Pana later said that while the boys were transitioning from spirit, or *ponda*, worship to Christianity, at times the ancestral spirits would violently rock their canoes and throw objects around in their hut.<sup>4</sup> Pana made a clean break from the superstitions of the past, even having his



Samadao and Barnabas Pana on their wedding day in 1922.

From Robert Dixon collection.

ear lobes removed because they had been pierced in association with spirit worship when he was younger.<sup>5</sup> He also adopted the name *Barnabas* because he wanted to emulate the biblical Barnabas.

## Mission Service

In 1919 Pana began his active service under the tutorship of Robert Tutty at Dovele on Vella Lavella Island. Tutty had the reputation of maintaining mission stations that were models of order and cleanliness. By the end of the year, some men from Rononga Island paddled their canoes to Dovele, asking for a missionary to come to Mondo on the western side of their island. Tutty agreed that Pana could return with them. It was January 1920, the start of a remarkable transformation on the island with several hundred converts constructing their own church as the focal point of their Christian village. Pana emulated Tutty, developing another model station.<sup>6</sup> During his six-year term at Mondo, Pana married a young woman named Samadao in 1922.<sup>7</sup>

In 1926 Harold Wicks, superintendent of the Solomon Islands Mission, accompanied Pana to the Australasian Union Conference Session at the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds, Sydney. Pana addressed the delegates, telling them of his conversion experience while Wicks interpreted for him. He also spoke in some of the Sydney churches.<sup>8</sup>

On his return to the Solomon Islands, Pana was appointed to minister among the growing number of stations scattered around the Marovo Lagoon, the larger ones being Telina and Batuna.<sup>9</sup> He found himself becoming more and more involved with the translation of the Sabbath School lessons from simple English into his Ulusagi language. His speech was rapid and with a slight stammer. This did not present a significant impediment to his ministry, but it is understandable that his good grasp of English was used increasingly in translation work at the Batuna Mission Press. While Pana was busy translating, Samadao taught the younger grades at the Batuna School.<sup>10</sup> Later, Pana was delighted to witness the arrival of the Marovo Bible, a major translation project interrupted by the Second World War years. The project came to fruition in the mid-1950s.<sup>11</sup>

Pana was ordained with his cousin, Kata Rangoso, at Batuna on May 19, 1935. It was a milestone, being the first ordination ceremony for Solomon Islanders. Twenty tribes gathered together for the special Sabbath service. Albert Piper, one of the officiating ministers, noted that it was 21 years to the day that Jones had opened his work in the Solomon Islands on May 19, 1914.<sup>12</sup>

During the Second World War, the expatriate missionaries were obliged to retreat to Australia. Kata Rangoso was appointed the national leader in the Solomon Islands, and Pana transferred north to Kukudu on the island of Kolombangara, from where he helped to pioneer mission work on the island of Simbo.<sup>13</sup> After the war, he remained at Kukudu headquarters, visiting the area churches as a district director and continuing with some translation work. His work on the Marovo Bible took him and three other Solomon Islanders to Australia in 1950–1951. During that time, the need arose for him to have surgery in the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital.<sup>14</sup>

Pana continued to do translation work until 1961, when he officially retired.<sup>15</sup> Failing eyesight hindered his ministry in his later years.<sup>16</sup> He passed away peacefully at Chea village on May 20, 1984.<sup>17</sup>

## Retrospect

Barnabas Pana lived according to the zeal of his biblical hero. As a pioneer missionary, district director, and translator, he gave over 40 years of full-time service. In retirement, he continued as a respected spiritual father to his people.

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