

# God's Power is Demonstrated Among the Chambri Tribe of Papua New Guinea

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"I know enough about Satan to realize that he will have all his weapons ready for determined opposition. He would be a missionary simpleton who expected plain sailing in any work of God."

James O. Fraser (1886-1938)

Pioneer Missionary to China

A pack of enraged villagers charged us. I yelled for our team to run and then turned back to face the attacking mob. One of the tribesmen, hearing my voice, whirled around and sprinted towards me with a machete in his hand. His eyes were red and glazed as he swung the machete at me in a demonic frenzy. He screamed, "You have destroyed the ritual of our ancestors!" And twice he swung the machete over my head as I ducked and back-pedaled out of the way.

Preaching Christ among tribal peoples in the grip of a satanic choke-hold is like stirring up hornets with a stick. Revelation 12 reminds us that the devil is "filled with fury because he knows that his time is short." This is why world missions and spiritual warfare are inseparable. If you stir up the hornets, be ready for some action!

Situated near the Sepik River in the sweltering swamps of Papua New Guinea, the Chambri Tribe suffers under the strict tyranny of territorial and ancestral spirits. However, centuries of demonic domination over the Chambri is now being demolished by the intercessory prayers of God's people. These impassioned intercessions have dragged the entire tribe to the very brink of spiritual breakthrough. A dramatic shift in the spiritual climate of Chambri has recently occurred that is entirely unexplainable, except for prayer and the power of God.

Ever since our work commenced among the Chambri Tribe in 1989 we've been asking the Lord to do something that would visibly demonstrate his superiority over the multitude of spirits that Chambri villagers fear and worship. Being a power-oriented society, it is important that they be fully convinced of God's sovereignty over evil spirits. And finally, in the summer of 1995, the Lord did it!

Thirty minutes after Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) dropped us off on the grass airstrip at Chambri Island, a woman died. Antonio was a young Chambri woman in her

late 20's who had suffered from cancer. When she died, she was one of only six believers in the entire tribe of 1,700 people.

The Chambri, like most tribals, do not believe in natural death, particularly when it involves a young person. The belief is that someone must have caused the premature death through witchcraft or sorcery.

Over hundreds of years, Chambri tribesmen have devised a ritual to help them discern the identity of the person or clan responsible. Then the death can be avenged and the spirits satisfied.

The ritual is called wokim mambu, which means the "shaking of the bamboo." Initiated men call upon evil spirits to come possess them and to empower a bamboo pole which will point out the guilty person. In Chambri, evil spirits influence the bamboo in much the same way as they do an ouija board.

Chambri men boasted to me for six years about how easy it is to conjure up the spirits. It is so simple, they say, that "even our children can do it." And this is true. Tribal children grow up learning how to manipulate the spirits through a variety of sacrifices and rituals. And most New Guineans will tell you that they have seen the spirits. No doubt, they have intimate dealings with demonic spirits on a regular basis.

Antonio died on a Saturday morning, was buried that afternoon, and the Chambri were ready to call up her spirit that same evening. As the sun was setting, more than 200 people gathered in an open area between several huts. Two young men stood to begin the solemn séance. One man held a five-foot long bamboo pole while the other tapped on it rhythmically with a human bone. He chanted softly at first and invited the spirit of Antonio to come take control of the bamboo. And then his chants became louder and more aggressive.

I inched over next to the bamboo, angry that they were attempting to conjure up the spirit of Antonio. With loud shouts I announced that "Antonio was a follower of Jesus; she is in heaven with God right now; and her spirit will not appear tonight!"

Probably ten minutes of intense spiritual warfare ensued. The Chambri sorcerers were begging with the spirits and I was raising my voice asking the Lord to restrain the spirits and to show Himself to be more powerful than the ancestral spirits. In the name of the Lord Jesus I rebuked the men and forbade the spirits to show up or to have any influence over the bamboo. Finally, one of the men threw the bamboo down in disgust, saying, "The spirits won't come tonight."

I yelled out loudly, "That's right! Our great God is more powerful than the spirits! He has proven his superiority by disarming your spirits and forbidding them to move the bamboo!"

Suddenly, confusion erupted as people were running around and screaming and throwing coconuts at us. And I thought the people were chasing after us, so I yelled to our team to "Run!" and they took off sprinting down the grass airstrip.

As part of my team hustled back to the campsite, I continued to shout out the truth of God's power and authority over their spirits. The villagers were furious and screaming insults and threats against us while I persisted loudly about the supremacy of God over evil spirits.

Suddenly, a woman appeared out of the shadows over to my left. Those of my team that were still with me - We physically felt a surge of evil power sweep over us. Obviously, this was a much more potent sorceress. She waved her hands over her head and began to sway and dance and chant and plead with the spirits. Though she was more than twenty yards away from the bamboo, all of her attention was directed towards it. She was attempting to levitate the bamboo by the power of the spirits.

Once again, there was a time of intense spiritual battle as she pleaded with the spirits to reveal themselves. And I continued to pray loudly for the power and presence of the Lord to rebuke her and to dis-empower the spirits who would seek to take authority over the bamboo.

Then the Lord prompted me to issue this challenge:  
I yelled out the name of the sorceress,

**"Rosa! Bring out your most powerful sorcerer. If he can persuade the spirits to shake the bamboo, we will follow and worship your spirits. But if he can't do it, you need to repent and worship and follow our God!"**

Rosa became all the more loud and radical, twisting and gyrating her body in a frantic attempt to summon the spirits, but the bamboo lay lifeless on the ground.

Finally, with cursing, she gave up and retreated into the night. One of the young men grabbed the bamboo and angrily shoved it up through the open doorway of a hut.

I quickly bellowed out my challenge once more for them to bring out their most powerful sorcerer. But they refused to even try. But now, several villagers, in their anger charged after us. And I shouted again for my team to run for safety.

This is when the machete-wielding tribesman chased me down. He took three quick steps forward and raised the bush knife over me. I wheeled around to avoid being hit on the head, fully expecting to be slashed in the back. I flinched, but nothing happened. When I peeked around, I saw that one of the unsaved Chambri men had jumped in between me and the swinging machete! He saved my life - Not because he was a believer in Christ, he wasn't. He did it because three times he saw the demonstration of our God's authority and power over their spirits. And he was afraid of what our God would do to them if I was killed.

To my amazement, forty Chambri villagers encircled me and quietly escorted me safely back to camp. My strength left me and I fell to the ground weeping. I wept because of my great love for the Chambri; I wept because of the incredible adrenaline rush of almost having my head chopped off; and I wept because of the realization that God had just used us in an awesome display of his power, openly rebuking the spirits that have ruled over Chambri for thousands of years. All of that emotion exploded out of me as I lay face-down in the wet grass sobbing for a long time.

The machete man came to visit me the next day. He brought a gift of two beetle nuts and apologized, saying, "I don't know what came over me last night, but I almost killed you!" I replied, "I know what came over you. You are a servant of evil spirits. But three times last night our God showed himself to be more powerful than your spirits. You need to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus." This man's name is Bob. I now jokingly referred to him as **Machete Bob** and he has become my best friend among the Chambri. Although he did not commit his life to Christ, he did follow us around every day, helping us in everything we did. In the years following, he insisted that I use his canoe and boat motor whenever I went visited the surrounding tribes. Bob is now my constant companion and guide on these gospel excursions.

**Praise Report:** I received word in 2002 that Bob and his wife had become believers in Christ and are now part of the Chambri fellowship.

The spiritual conflict with the sorceress was a significant turning point. Dozens of Chambri villagers began visiting us, whereas before we only had a sprinkling of interested visitors. They had seen in a visible way the power and supremacy of God over the evil spirits that dominate them. This demonstration of God's power is giving them the courage to listen to the gospel message and seriously consider who Jesus Christ really is.

The Prophet Isaiah foresaw a momentous day in which the shroud of spiritual darkness overhanging the nations would be destroyed and replaced with God's salvation (Isaiah

25:7-9). We are seeing the fulfillment of this as the Lord steadily dismantles the devil's stronghold over the Chambri tribe.

The battle lines are now decisively drawn in our struggle for Chambri souls. Gospel seed has been steadily sown and watered since 1989. By God's grace, I believe the time is near when I will be able to report an even greater in-gathering of souls; and the church will be even more gloriously established in the Chambri swamps of Papua New Guinea.