

Unit 10: Niue: Peniamina and Christianity

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Facts

Capital	Alofi
Highest point	Mutalau village (68m)
Language	Niuean, English
Population	1, 398 inhabitants (July 2009 estimate)
Independence	10 October, 1974

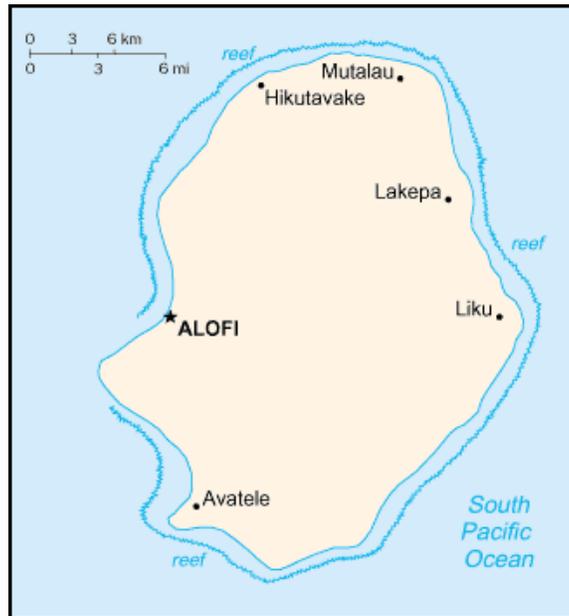


Figure 10.1. Map of Niue

Glossary

<i>Mutalau</i>	name of village that first accepted Christianity. Old name was Uluauta Matahefona.
<i>nafa</i>	wooden gong
<i>taulatua</i>	witchdoctor, fortune teller, sorcerer
<i>toa</i>	warrior
<i>Uluvehi</i>	name of the Gospel landing site in Mutalau, now used as the Fisherman's Canoe Landing.

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Write a brief history of the coming of Christianity to Niue
- Understand the significance the site at ***Mutalau***
- Understand how place, people and events are interrelated
- Appreciate the role of missionaries and pastors in our recent history

Timeline: A Brief History of Christianity in Niue

Niue is a single small but high island. It has a rocky, cliff coast and no natural harbours. Its nearest neighbours are 400 or more kilometres away. This timeline tells of the arrival of Christianity to Niue, the "Rock of Polynesia".

Date	Event
1830	John Williams, from the London Missionary Society (LMS), landed on Tuapa. He brought some Aitutaki teachers with him. Helagi, a Chief from Tuapa obtained some earrings from Williams. Tulitoa, a Chief from Makefu, saw Helagi's earrings and also wanted

some. Tulitoa and his men went to John Williams' ship to obtain earrings, resulting in the kidnap of Uea and Niumaga by John Williams. The two men were taken away from Niue to be taught about the Gospel.

- 1831 Uea and Niumaga returned but also brought the measles. Many Niueans died of the disease and Uea was killed by a **Toa** from Alofi. They had not been able to preach the Gospel. Because of the measles it was decided that Niueans returning home would not be able to land.
- 1838 A whaling ship sailed past Makefu and Nukai (Peniamina) swam out to it and was taken to Apia. He met Reverend Mills, who taught him about the Gospel.
- 1840 A Christian team from Samoa arrived but could not land. However, Toimata Fafaitifenua went away on this ship to Samoa and met up with Peniamina.
- 1842 Reverend Buscott came with Peniamina to Niue. As they were met with hostility, they did not land and returned to Samoa.
- 1846 Peniamina and Toimata came to Niue and landed at **Uluvehi** in **Mutalau**. The Gospel or the Good News was finally accepted for the first time at **Mutalau**.
- 1849 Paulo, a Samoan Missionary came to continue the works of Peniamina, by spreading the Good News. Four Samoan teachers were also sent to Niue to help Paulo.
- 1852-1884 The Good News spreads to other districts:
- 1852 Alofi
- 1854 Avatele
- 1854 Hakupu

1857	Tuapa
1863	Liku
1865	Lakepa
1876	Hikutavake
1877	Makefu
1883	Tamakautoga
1884	Vaiea
1858	Niue comes under the control of the London Missionary Society.
1861	William George Lawes becomes the first European Resident Missionary on Niue. He commenced the first mission village schools and translated the Bible into Niuean.
1872	W.G. Lawes left Niue and was replaced by his brother.
1909	The Seventh Day Adventist Church was established by Malama Head.
1952	The Mormon Church (LDS) was established.
1955	The Catholic Church was established.

Today, Niue, with a population of under 2000 people, has many religions from the traditional LMS to more charismatic churches like the Christian Fellowship and the Christian Church on the Rock (see *Figures 10.2 and 10.3*). The LMS has become the *Ekalesia Niue* and is still the dominant church in Niue.

Questions and Activities

1. Trace the map of Niue and on it:
 - (a) Locate and name the villages and write the year Christianity was accepted by each
 - (b) Circle the village where Christianity was first accepted
2. How many years did it take for the Good News to spread to all districts?
3. How many years was it after the Good News arrived, before a European Missionary arrived?
4. What is the LMS now called in Niue?

The witchdoctor's prediction about Christianity

The **Taulatua** were a strong force in Niue. People believed and worshipped their every word. When Uea and Niumaga were taken away, Kilipalua, a Taulatua from **Mutalau**, told their families that the two men were still alive and would return with lots of earrings. They did return with earrings, but the parents had already promised to sell the earrings to others in the village.

Kilipalua also predicted the return of Peniamina with a little black Book and said that he was going to say that there was but one God in the sky. The chiefs had heard about the God in the sky through the Taulatua so they readily accepted the Good News when the first messengers landed in 1846.

Nukai Peniamina

Nukai was a young man from Makefu. He had heard about the White Man and the many nice things on their boats. One day in 1838 he was at the seaside when he saw a ship quite close to the shore. He jumped into the sea and swam towards the ship.

The boat was a whaling ship belonging to Captain Simpson. It took Nukai to Apia where he was influenced by Reverend Mills and Reverend Turner. He was taught to read and write and he learnt about the gospel. While in Samoa he was called Peniamina.

He made his first return to Niue with Reverend Buscott in 1842 but could not land as they were met with hostility. They returned to Samoa.

Toimata Fakafitifenua

Toimata was a handsome young man from **Mutalau**. He was unpopular with men as he often had affairs with their wives. He also stole from the bush gardens just to be cheeky. No man was strong enough to challenge Toimata. So the men planned to gang up and beat Toimata to death.

His parents heard of the plot and planned to send their son away. The family got a three-man canoe and took Toimata to Vaitafe. Two relatives sat with Toimata to keep an eye out for any passing ship. After many days, they saw a ship and they put the canoe into the sea and paddled quickly towards it. When they reached the ship, they made signs showing Toimata wanted to go away with them. The ship went to Apia and Toimata was taken to meet Peniamina.

Peniamina was glad to meet Toimata and questioned him about Niue. He learnt that tribal warfare was rife in Niue. Toimata told Peniamina that the centre of the warfare was now in **Mutalau**.

Peniamina told Toimata about his plans to take Good News to Niue and Toimata was very keen to help. Peniamina thought, "Here is a man who comes from **Mutalau** where the strength of warfare lies. No other **Toa** would kill us there".

But first, Toimata would have to go to his village alone to seek acceptance from the chiefs. Toimata would be the key to success in **Mutalau**. All plans were ready so Peniamina and Toimata returned to Niue.

Questions and Activities

5. Match the person with the correct statement from the right column:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| (a) Kilipalau | 1. First <i>palagi</i> missionary to land in Niue |
| (b) John Williams | 2. First European Resident missionary |
| (c) Helagi | 3. Taulatua |
| (d) Tulitoa | 4. Kidnapped by Williams |
| (e) Uea | 5. Samoan missionary |
| (f) Peniamina | 6. Chief of Tuapa |
| (g) Rev W. G. Lawes | 7. Chief of Makefu |
| (h) Paulo | 8. The Niuean who brought Christianity |

Landing at Uluvehi, Mutalau, October 1846

Uluvehi has a cave opening on to a rocky ledge (*See Figure 10.5*). It was commonly used by Blackbirders as a landing place to kidnap Niuean men for the slave trade. Usually this area is well known for rough seas. It hardly ever has fine or calm waters. But on this day the area was nice and calm and the ship anchored close to shore. A rowboat was used to carry Peniamina to the landing.

There were men on the shore when the ship anchored. One man ran to the village to announce the arrival of the ship. The **Toas** of the village all came down to **Uluvehi** armed with clubs and spears.

Toimata called out to the **Toas**, asking if he could come ashore. The village **Toas** were surprised that it was a Niuean calling. Toimata then jumped into the sea and swam ashore. On landing he said "I am Toimata, one of your own village members".

The **Toas** of the village punched him, as this was customary for locals who returned from overseas. This is called *Tau Mautau*. Toimata bled and was hurt. Then they hugged and kissed and took him to the village. Toimata, being a **Toa** of great strength himself, only thought of bringing the message he was sent to give. He pleaded with the village chiefs to allow Peniamina to land so he could bring the Good News about God in the sky.

The Chiefs thought hard. They knew that if other villages knew about **Mutalau** accepting a returning person, they might come to kill him. Most of the chiefs agreed to listen to the Good News so Peniamina was allowed to come ashore (*see Figure 10.6.*, showing the memorial stone commemorating this event). Toimata returned to Apia on the ship.

When Peniamina came to the village, the people were afraid of touching his wooden chest. They believed that it contained the dreaded disease that had killed the people of Alofi. Peniamina assured them that the wood used in making the chest was from a tree that is the same that grows in Niue. Then he opened it and showed that it only contained clothes.

Questions and Activities

6. A class activity showing how the LMS and the Niueans had difficulty understanding each other on their first meeting:

One student brings a closed box into the class. The student cannot speak the same language as the class, nor can the box be opened.

(a) How can the student let the class know there is nothing dangerous in the box?

(b) How can the class find out what is in the box without touching it, opening it or talking in the same language as the student?

(c) Finally, let the student tell the class what is in the box .

(d) Discuss as a class the problems in communication between the LMS and the Niueans.



Fig 10.2. Centenary Church



Fig 10.3. Gospel Ceremony celebrating 150 years of the Good News



Fig 10.4.. Uluvehi Landing



Fig 10.8. Memorial Stones that Peniamina and Paulo built

Peniamina resides at the Taue Fupiu

The Chiefs, **Toas** and the village folk gathered to decide where Peniamina was to stay. No one was keen to put him up for fear of attack from other villages and the dreaded disease.

The decision was made to take Peniamina to the Taue Fupiu, a nearby natural coral pinnacle fortress. As this was a fortress, the **toas** from other districts would not be able to attack Peniamina. A *fale* was built and a total of 61 warriors volunteered to guard Peniamina and the Good News.

The Taue Fupiu

The *Taue* is a natural fortress of limestone rock pinnacles. Traditionally it was used by the *toas* from *Mutalau* as a place to assemble before and after tribal warfare. Other activities by *toas* at the *Taue* included training and discussion of war tactics. As the central place for meeting the *Taue Fupiu* gave the *toas* of *Mutalau* a pride in being the strongest tribe in Niue.

Ownership of the land could be traced to a common ancestor called Vihekula and today the Tagaiki family are the Titleholders. Some family members believe that the *Taue* was hardly ever used. It was merely some family land which their ancestor Vihekula gave Peniamina to reside in. Different people hold different views. After all, oral history always has different versions.

Questions and Activities

7. Choose one of the following activities to complete.

- (a) You are the chief of the village of **Mutalau** in 1846, when Peniamina landed in your village, claiming to bring the 'Good News' to the people – Write approximately 50 words explaining why you would accept him.
- (b) You are Peniamina. You have just returned to Niue after being away for 3 years in Samoa. You are returning to Niue to spread the word of God - Write approximately 50 words explaining how it feels to be back home. What are you going to tell these people about why you have returned?
- (c) You are Toimata. You have just returned to Niue after running away to save your life a few years ago – Write approximately 50 words explaining to your village why they should allow Peniamina to return and live in the village of **Mutalau**.

NOTE: You can present your written work by reading aloud to the class.

The fall from grace

A woman from **Mutalau** Village called Luta was assigned to do domestic duties for Peniamina. Luta was single and beautiful.

One Sunday when the **nafa** rang for service Peniamina was not round. The village people were very worried so a **toa** volunteered to go to the *Taue Fupiu* and find out why Peniamina was late. He found Peniamina and Luta in bed.

The village was shocked and Peniamina was judged to be very guilty. Peniamina decided to leave the *taue* and live with Luta as his wife. They had two daughters.

The Sunday services continued but Peniamina felt that he had sinned. Later, he returned to Samoa and the LMS Mission Headquarters. Luta married another man and when Peniamina retired in his old age he moved back to his own village where he died (*see Figure 10.7*).

Questions and Activities

8. Imagine you are Luta.

In a 50-word paragraph defend yourself against the accusation that you are the cause of Peniamina's fall from grace.

Uluvehi and Fupiu today

Peniamina Day is still celebrated in Niue. It is the day when all Christians remember the day Christianity was accepted in Niue. Niue celebrated 150 years of Christianity on Peniamina Day in October 1995. Since the celebrations, the landowners have allowed the **Mutalau** Village Council to look after the landing site at **Uluvehi** (See Figure 10.8) and the limestone *Taue Fupiu*.

Today **Uluvehi** and the *Taue Fupiu* are a village attraction, well kept and preserved as a reminder that this is where Toimata bravely risked his life to open the hearts of the **Mutalau** people to accept the Good News. The *Taue Fupiu* is also remembered as the fortress which was guarded for Peniamina and the Good News. The **Mutalau** people are proud of these cultural sites as evidence of the Gospel Light shining first on **Mutalau** before the spreading to the other villages of Niue (see Figures 10.2 and 10.3).

Questions and Activities

1. Today the Niueans celebrate Peniamina Day. To you think Toimata should have been included in this holiday? Argue for his inclusion, or why not?
2. In a paragraph argue for or against including Toimata in Peniamina Day.

References

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