

# Survival At Sea On Bible Psalm

by *Batiri Batua*

Nan Tetuni Bina, the lost fisherman of Makin Island in Kiribati, survived at sea on the psalm from the Bible he knew by heart.

Over and over again he recited the verses of the psalm as he drifted westward for 32 days on the open ocean in his small fishing canoe:

"I lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your feet be moved, he who keeps you will not slumber.

"Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade on your right. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil, he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore."

Whenever the despair of depression began to take hold of him he would speak these words of the 121st psalm—sometimes in broad daylight, sometimes in the dark of a moonless night.

At 42 and the father of six children, he had much for which to survive. But at the same time he says that he did not have any paralyzing fear of dying whether by shark attack, drowning or exposure.

He says that he operated on his deep faith in Jesus Christ. "I leave everything to him. He is my savior at times like this and I never stop praying for his mercy."

■ **Psalm:** In addition to the recitation of the psalm and prayers, he sang hymns that he had memorized from the standard hymn books.

Bina's opinion is that the Lord definitely heard and answered him. He says that he never failed to receive his next supply of daily bread.

The fish were responsive to his trawling line. And when he was getting weaker and weaker, a small turtle would swim around the canoe that Bina could easily pull aboard by hand. Flying fish landed on the canoe.

A variety of sea birds sat on his head and on the side of the canoe. He ate all of these animals and drank their blood.

Bina said, "For the turtle, I even clean out the intestine and eat it together with the flesh. The blood, I drink it. The whole turtle last me a week.

"The flying fish provide a tasty drink when you suck the fluid of their eyes.

"And the birds, like the turtle, I drink their blood and eat the intestines with the flesh."

Bina admitted that at first this raw flesh and blood tasted peculiar. But he forced himself to eat it bite by bite and drink it sip by sip.

During the day the sun felt as if it



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Nan Tetuni Bina: Drifting for 32 days

penetrated through his flesh right into his bones. He would dive under the canoe to cool himself and to drink sea water from below. He described it as tasting better than the water on the surface. It was also much cooler. At night the diminutive Bina—five feet four inches—curled up under the canoe sail like Tom Thumb.

■ **Problem:** The big problem was the supply of fresh drinking water. He had brought none from home. And the rain fell for only a few days. What he managed to collect from the sail and the bailing cup was miniscule.

Early on the morning of the 32nd day he felt so weak that he could barely lift his hands. He thought that it would be his last day and prepared himself for the moment of death.

He spread his sail and then tied the

two ends to make a hammock to swing between the outrigger and the main body of the canoe. As he sat there looking at this makeshift hammock, he said to himself. "This is your grave Nan Tetuni.

Then he carefully slid himself into it. The sun was climbing up over the horizon. It was about 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. He was looking across the open ocean. He saw the outline of a ship. He thought he was dreaming. He did not react immediately.

■ **Attention:** But his attention kept returning to the position. He fought to sit up. His vision was blurry. But he could still make out a profile of a ship in the distance. Gathering his strength, he waved and yelled. But the ship just blew its horn and continued on its course.

He struggled to kneel in his canoe so that someone on the ship would see his profile. He shouted louder. But the sound of the waves seemed to drown his voice. Then he began to cry.

He prayed, "Please God turn the ship back for me so that I will be saved and reunited with my family. God, you are the captain of that ship so please come back and pick me up. If it is your will God, then I am dying for your mercy, Amen."

At approximately three o'clock in the afternoon, the ship turned around. But Bina had already buried himself in his hammock bear above the sea. He swung there with folded arms and closed eyes unable to speak a word.

The crew of the Japanese fishing boat, the Susies Maru No. 6, hauled him up to deck together with the canoe.

It required much cross questioning but it was finally determined that Bina had sailed from Makin and the Japanese captain received instructions to return him home. He had drifted about 400 miles. Bina's ordeal, though having a happy ending, is not an isolated incident. In 1983, a total of 20 Kiribati fisherman were lost at sea.

A few others like Bina have survived the long drifts. Some have come ashore in Indonesia, Micronesia, Nauru and the Solomons. Others have been spotted and picked up like Bina. If not as prudent as they should be, these are surely an intrepid group of seafarers putting out upon the great blue ocean in their small outrigger canoes or aluminum boats with outboard motors.