

# ***The Lion Reigns***

*By*

*“UmFundi”*

*Roland Pletts*

**Miracles and Murders –  
An account of mission work in Africa.**

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***“Stop weeping, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome”. Rev 5:5***



***The Lord will overcome all evil and Reign in Peace and Justice.***

*This book is dedicated to our special friends martyred for Christ; the Elim Missionaries, Hazel and the Community of Reconciliation and numerous others who were persecuted and killed and to all the brave, faithful believers who continue to stand for Christ.*

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# *In the Jungle*

## *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*

### *Foreword*

*Born of British parents in what is now called Zimbabwe I was active in mission work in Central Africa for nearly four decades. I grew up during a period of rapid and violent change as African Nationalism confronted British colonialism. The country suffered during a Liberation War which left people scarred physically and psychologically. Horrendous incidents occurred in the war that caused tens of thousands of casualties. During this time I witnessed a spiritual awakening as people turned to the Lord and found faith in these testing circumstances. I was privileged to belong to a vibrant, Spirit filled Christian team of dedicated men and women and helped to establish churches and also conduct outreach into*

*remote areas and communities. After Zimbabwe attained Independence in 1980 I continued to minister in Christian outreach, discipleship and social service. As the new nation struggled into democracy horrific events took place, from isolated acts of brutality to state orchestrated persecution of minority groups. During this time the army brutalised the Matabele people who suffered many casualties. Some of these atrocities are documented in the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe. The regime exercised more and more control and in the 1990s the situation degenerated into collapse of the currency, law and order, education, justice, health facilities and agriculture, followed by food shortages and economic failure. Although there was freedom to worship many Christians suffered severe persecution and many other people who were not church members suffered grievous crimes perpetrated against them.*

*In the days of the British colonial administration of Rhodesia European missionaries played a major role in the church. After the country gained independence the leadership in the church shifted to indigenous leaders. These were difficult times fraught with problems in an era when many brave people shone brightly despite severe testing and when devout believers, African, Asian and European, were sometimes savagely killed. During these years I saw the lives of people wonderfully changed for the better despite great tragedy. This is an account of miracles and murders, of divine intervention and faithful sacrifice, and of supernatural comfort.*

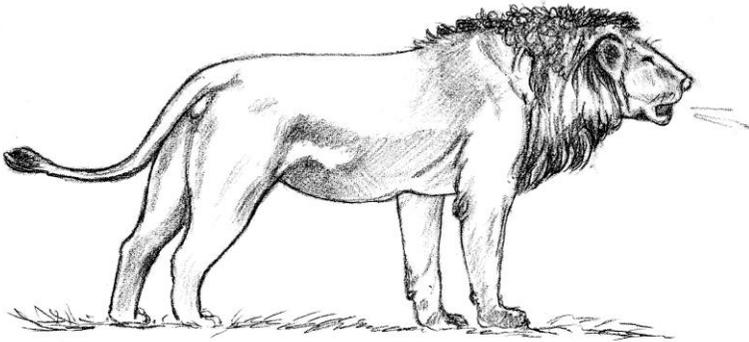
*UmFundi was the name given me by local people and means "teacher". Nothing is written here to draw attention to myself but only to give a record of how the Lord worked in the lives of men and women and in the nation. Some people in this account have been given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The wonderful, gentle people of Africa greatly blessed me with their hospitality and generosity and I will for ever be grateful. They did not deserve the harsh treatment meted out to them. May the Lord grant seasons of renewal, healing and restoration to the people of Africa.*

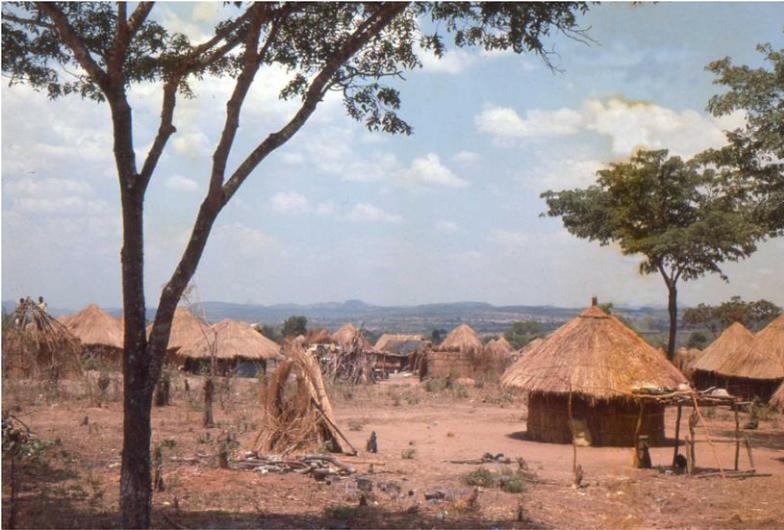
*One of my favourite songs is that lovely ballad written by a Zulu in the mid last century – “In the Jungle, the Mighty Jungle, the Lion sleeps tonight.” For me it always evokes the call of Africa.*

*The Lion is the symbol of Africa and pictures its majesty and savagery, nobleness and terror. It is also used in the Word of God to depict two opposing powers; one is the devil who goes about as a roaring lion to devour the souls of men and women and the other is the Lord of Life, Jesus the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”.*

*One depicts life the other death. This is an account of the conflict between light and darkness, the Gospel and the works of Satan.*

*"UmFundi" – Roland Pletts*





## *A Peaceful African Village*

### ***Chapter 1 - Sleeping with Lions***

The African night was dark as I lay on my camp stretcher and gazed at a sky filled with crystal stars. The great sparkling wave of the Milky Way stretched across the dark dome of sky from one horizon to the other and the mighty constellation of Orion seemed to stand guard above me.

My companions and I had made a small fire over which we grilled steaks and baked potatoes in the coals. When we finished our simple supper we had coffee and sat around the campfire talking about many things. The flames flickered with a familiar crackle as they cast dancing shadows into the bush that crowded in on us. At last, tired after a long day of travelling over rough dirt roads, we crawled into our sleeping bags. The fire had now died to a glowing bed of coals. The African night resonated with sounds of wilderness. Crickets

chirped and an owl hooted gently. In the distance a duet of lions roared in unison. Gradually they came nearer and nearer until they were just meters away. In the thick darkness we could not see them but their roaring was now so close that the air reverberated with their guttural calls as each breath came in savage rasps. None of us said a word but someone got up and threw some logs on the coals. The rest of us sank deeper into our sleeping bags but there was no where to hide from the fearful roars that seemed to shake the ground and go right through us. These were not zoo lions but wild lions, free ranging and hungry and there was no protective barrier between them and us for we were deep in the heart of the wild Zambezi Valley in northern Zimbabwe.

The words of the song came to my mind; *“In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight, near the village, the peaceful village the lion sleeps tonight.”* Another verse reads *“the lion roars tonight”*. The original words of this well-known song first came from the townships of Southern Africa and became a popular international song. It was written by a Zulu man and although it must have earned some people a great amount of money he never got a penny from it. These lions were not sleeping or tired and sleep eluded us as they continued their grating calls. The dark night seemed to amplify each mighty roar and we listened in silent awe. The roars made me recall how early Christians were thrown to lions as savage as these. Next day was to be an important day. We were to hold a baptism service for a group of new believers who lived in a village on the banks of the Zambezi. The baptism was not to be conducted in a plush, carpeted church with a safe, clean baptismal pool. It would be in a wild, crocodile infested river, one of the truly great rivers of Africa, the mighty Zambezi. And the baptism would be full immersion for nothing less would satisfy these simple, raw believers in Christ.

It was along this very river that the intrepid missionary Dr. David Livingstone had trod the dusty paths of Africa a hundred years before us. His famous exploration journeys opened Africa to the gospel as well as other benefits that eventually came, like hospitals, doctors, schools, roads, development and sadly, exploitation. Livingstone

survived a lion attack. The big cat leapt upon him and buried its teeth in his shoulder. Fortunately it was shot before it killed him but his injuries left Livingstone with a stiff and weakened shoulder for the rest of his life. That, and numerous other setbacks such as debilitating bouts of malaria, attacks from Muslim slave-traders, trouble from antagonistic tribesmen and criticism from many of his own people back home, only served to strengthen his resolve – to drag Africa out of darkness into the light of a new era. He also wanted to stop the awful slave trade conducted by Muslim traders. Livingstone’s wife, Mary, died in Africa and lies buried in Malawi not too far from where we were. Livingstone himself suffered much hardship and loneliness and died on his knees in prayer after a long bout of malaria. It was his life of sacrifice which together with others like him would bring an end to slavery and open the way for missions to penetrate deep into the very heart of Africa with the life changing message of God’s love. In the missionaries’ wake, tribal conflicts ceased, farms and industry developed, and peace came. This period of stability brought unprecedented benefits to the people. It was a time during which the gospel made enormous advances in Africa notwithstanding the abuses that colonialism also brought. Yet despite these advances witchcraft and superstition were still rife. Africa was in many ways still the Dark Continent.

As I lay in my sleeping bag listening to the lions a scripture came to mind. ***“The devil as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8). I began to appreciate the scripture more than ever before. I was born in Africa and from childhood had grown up with wild animals but the close vicinity of the lions was awesome and unnerving.

At last the lions stopped roaring and silence fell across the African bush. A waning moon lit the landscape with soft light. The silence was ominous. Now we were no longer able to tell where the lions were whether close or far. We knew they were not sleeping but on the prowl. An African Nightjar sang a melodious and plaintiff call which sounded like a prayer. It is known as the litany bird for the call sounds like “Good Lord deliver us, good Lord deliver us” offered like

a prayer again and again. It is the prayer of Africa. I gazed up at the Southern Cross tilted in the southern sky and gained comfort at the symbol. It seemed as if the Lord Himself leaned down from the lofty heavens and comforted us with His Presence, deep in the wilds. Tomorrow would be an important day, a day when the light of the gospel would extend yet further across the African continent. I fell asleep to the soothing words over and over in my mind, ***“In the Jungle the Mighty Jungle the Lord reigns tonight.”***

Next day we rose with a crimson sun in the east. A chorus of doves and other birds welcomed the sunrise. Soon the heat of Africa spread over the bush and any relief the night had brought was gone as the temperature soared to a searing 38 degrees centigrade. After a brief breakfast we were again on the track that led eventually to a remote village on the banks of the Zambezi River. It was here that we would spend the next few days in fellowship with believers in a small church. My friend and companion, Morgan, as well as a couple of other workers travelled with me. Morgan was a Pastor based near Harare. We had driven through some of the wildest tracts of Africa to minister to this small group of isolated people and strengthen them in their simple faith.

A herd of graceful Impala antelope bounded across the track. Then, as we rounded a bend a massive elephant barred our way. He swung to face us in a majestic stance of defiance with gleaming ivory held high. We screeched to a dusty halt just a few meters in front of him. With a shake of his mighty head he swung away and made off in a cloud of dust with his massive ears flapping and tail held high. This was Africa, the land of my birth and the land that I loved. Her people were my people and I was honoured, like the Ethiopian Official of Acts chapter 8 to be a messenger of God’s saving grace. The very first place where the Gospel was sent, before it ever reached Antioch or Rome, was Africa. The Ethiopian took it home after his visit to Jerusalem. Now in 1992, nearly 2000 years later, we bore the same message.

As a minister I have spoken in many places to people from many

different backgrounds. In London I once spoke in a church where the members were all of African stock. At the beginning of my talk I asked a simple question.

*“All those born in Africa please raise your hands.”*

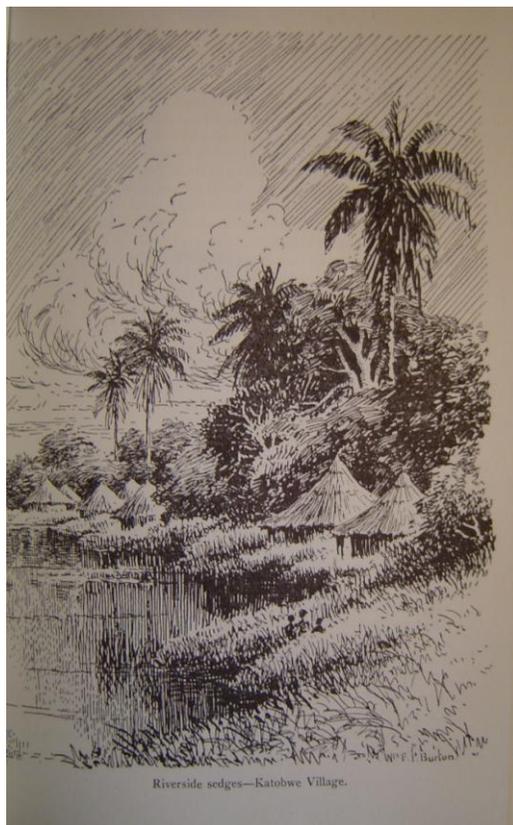
To my surprise very few did and so I triumphantly lifted mine and said, *“I was born in Africa.”* The impact of what I said was not lost on such an audience. There was a thunderous and happy response, for they considered it no mean event to have been born in the land of their roots. Their parents had left Africa long before, mine had gone there from foreign shores. Through the years many people left Britain, Europe and America to come to Africa. Many of them endured great adversity and some lost their lives. But Africa enriched them for they gained experiences such as can not be bought with money, wealth far beyond worldly riches. Many people born in Africa have been forced to leave and have lost much to that volatile continent but we can never completely lose our heritage for we are Africans not just because we are born in Africa but because Africa is born in us. We have in a way been baptised into Africa.

And many who remain are standing for truth and righteousness and the Everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Chapter 2 –*

*How it began*

*Missionaries who  
gave their all to win  
the lost.*



Riverside sedges—Katobwe Village.

Growing up in Africa I was fortunate to see the land that one now only reads about in history books, the Africa that missionaries gave their lives for in sacrificial service. Many of those early missionaries were the true heroes of Africa. They came not as masters but as servants to serve the people. Many succumbed to disease, or were killed by wild beasts or were murdered. I was privileged to have known several renowned missionaries. As a young person I sat at the feet of these legendary pioneers and listened to their accounts. They captured my imagination and inspired me to emulate their faith.

One famous missionary was William Burton who came from Preston in England. He seemed to me to be a dour man who seldom smiled for the rigors of missionary pioneering in tropical Africa had knocked all superficial jesting from him. Yet he was compassionate and gentle. He came to the Belgian Congo in about 1914 and spent his entire life

there. He was one of the first evangelical Pentecostal missionaries and he and a colleague started the Evangelical Congo Mission Churches deep in the heart of the jungle. These churches grew into a large and vibrant mission movement throughout the Katanga Province. The Congo is a vast land covered by thick forest and watered by a huge network of rivers that feed into the great Congo River. Burton told of amazing experiences with cannibals and wild animals in an era during which the Congo emerged from medieval darkness, experienced the horrors of early colonial atrocities, followed by a short lived season of comparative peace despite adversity and then plunged into anarchy and bloodshed at the time of Independence. I was spell-bound listening to his stories. The illustration is a pen and ink by Burton who was a good artist.

The Congo was infamous for its cannibals and he told an account of when he arrived at a village previously never visited. There were no roads in the jungle and the missionaries travelled on the rivers in dugout canoes. As he stepped from the canoe onto the bank a group of tribesmen surrounded him and began to gesticulate, prodding him with their spears. He could not understand their language but their intentions were plain by the way they looked at him and he knew he would soon be in the pot. His whole body began to shake and he tried to stop for he did not want them to see he was afraid. The more he tried to stop shaking the more he shook. Then he realised that he was not really afraid and it was the anointing of the Lord that shook him and boldness came upon him. Knowing that God was with him he suddenly felt compelled to speak out boldly and found himself speaking in a language he did not even know, just as the first Christians had done at Pentecost. As he confidently continued in this strange language the warriors became quiet, laid down their spears and backed away from him. He did not know what he said except that he was speaking with authority and they understood every word and whatever he said made a notable impression upon them. They did not touch him and left him in peace.

On another occasion he was given food that had been poisoned but when he ate it and did not die the people were convinced he had

supernatural powers and was invincible. The community responded to this message and slowly over the years the gospel took hold and churches grew as people turned from witchcraft to Christianity.

Burton lived most of his life in the Congo. His wife died there and he survived a life threatening disease there for he was diagnosed with cancer and given six months to live. He had x-rays to prove it and the doctors in South Africa had said there was nothing they could do for him so he simply went back to the Congo. Instead of dying he grew stronger and completely recovered. Eventually during the uprising shortly after Independence in the early 1960s he was so sick with fever that he was carried out on a stretcher. This probably saved his life for many missionaries were killed at that time and Burton would probably not have left on his own accord. When he recovered he returned and travelled throughout the whole of his extensive parish to gather the scattered people who had survived the mad horrors of the bloody war. Burton visited Rhodesia and held meetings in churches and homes. All the young people would gather around him and he would recount stories of his escapades on the mission field. We noticed that he often insisted that one chair should remain empty and when we asked him why, he said that it was reserved for the Lord. We also noticed he never ate any cake or cookies. After establishing several churches the missionaries prayed for a Congo Pentecost. They called the people together and sure enough there was a great outpouring of God's Spirit and people received the Holy Spirit speaking in new languages as on the first Day of Pentecost. For many years after Congo Independence Burton continued to labour among the African believers and went at last to be with his Lord in January 1971. He was visiting South Africa and one day as he strolled around the garden talking to the Lord in prayer his heart stopped and he collapsed on the ground and died, an old warrior for Jesus and a mighty giant for the Gospel.

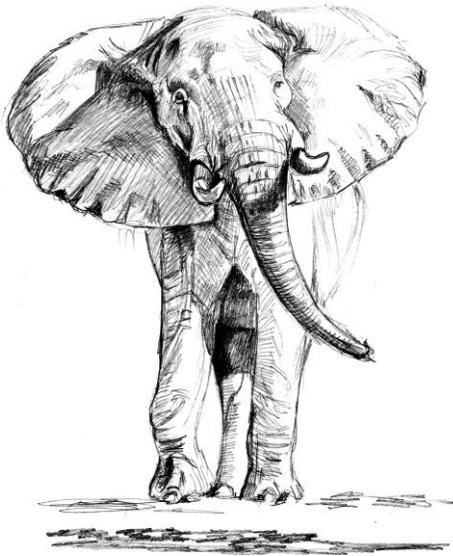
Another Congo missionary was Fred Johnston, a small man but full of gallantry and fortitude. He too was in Congo missions for most of his life and was gifted with a wonderful sense of humour and could tell many tales about the Congo. The best I heard was when he came to a

hostile village where the people reacted angrily when they saw him. One must bear in mind that in those days many of the indigenous people had never seen a white man and rumours were rife that whites were slave traders, murderers or evil spirits. Fred rode his bicycle on the narrow twisting paths through the jungle to visit remote communities. He arrived at a village where instead of getting a welcome the occupants lurched towards him with blood curling screams and an assortment of weapons. Fred jumped on his bicycle and fled down the path he had just come up, with a large contingent of angry people in close pursuit led by a large bosomed woman wielding an axe. Realising they were gaining on him he knew his only chance was to stop and confront them. He slammed on brakes and skidded to a halt, swung the bike around as a barricade, put up his hand like a policeman and with a voice of authority commanded the woman “Stop, in the name of Jesus.” She skidded to a halt and the others stumbled into her. The woman towered over Fred who stood peering up at her with his moustache quivering as her substantial bosom heaved in front of him. The two of them looked each other in the eyes, both puffing wildly. Slowly she calmed down and then turned away like a meek child. Fred concluded that it was the first time any man had ever stood up to her and she simply did not know how to react.

It was men and women like this who gave their lives for the “Dark Continent.” For example, the missionaries that established the Congo Baptist Union in the late 1800s only survived on average a few months before they succumbed to malaria and other diseases. David Livingstone and many others sacrificed their lives to bring Africa out of darkness. After years of hardship and months of fever Livingstone died with a prayer on his lips, “God Save Africa”, the cry of his heart. He had walked across the continent several times. At that time slave trading was still rampant throughout central Africa. Although western nations had already outlawed slave trade others had not. The colonial powers had committed an outrage against humanity with their inhumane slave trade. Laws passed that prohibited it were largely due to the efforts of Christians such as Wilberforce and others. In Livingstone’s time Muslims, however, still raided far and wide,

pillaging villages and killing those who resisted, leaving awful pain and suffering in their wake.

It was William Burton's life of dedicated Christian service in Africa that greatly influenced me. I had become a Christian in my late teens and joined the Assembly of God church. Burton's life-long commitment to the people of Africa deeply moved me and I decided I too should do my best to share the Gospel with the people of Africa. After this decision in my early twenties I gave myself to a time of preparation. I was young and enthusiastic. There followed several years of preparation and I then entered full time missions work at the end of 1973. It was the start of an exciting career that would span four decades, introduce me to most astounding people and lead me into many exciting places where I would witness truly amazing events.



### *Chapter 3 – Baptism with Crocodiles*



Back in the Zambezi Valley our vehicle finally bumped across the last few miles of rough bush track towards our destination. As the noonday sun of the tropical Valley scorched down on us and with a last turn in the road the broad waters of the shimmering Zambezi lay before us. On its banks grew large evergreen trees amongst which nestled a village. The huts were made of sticks and mud with thick "elephant grass" for the roofs. As we came to a halt chickens scattered with a flurry of feathers and excited children ran to us with shouts of welcome. What a welcome it was. The people of Africa are always happy to see visitors and soon a small crowd of inquisitive faces gathered around our vehicle. They all came to greet us, children and parents and even the little babies held in their mothers' arms. They clapped and sang with exuberant laughter and expressions of pleasure.

The Zambezi is one of the truly great rivers of Africa. It has its source on the same watershed that gives rise to the mighty Congo River but instead of flowing north as the Congo does it flows south across central Africa for over 3000 kilometres and is the source of life for

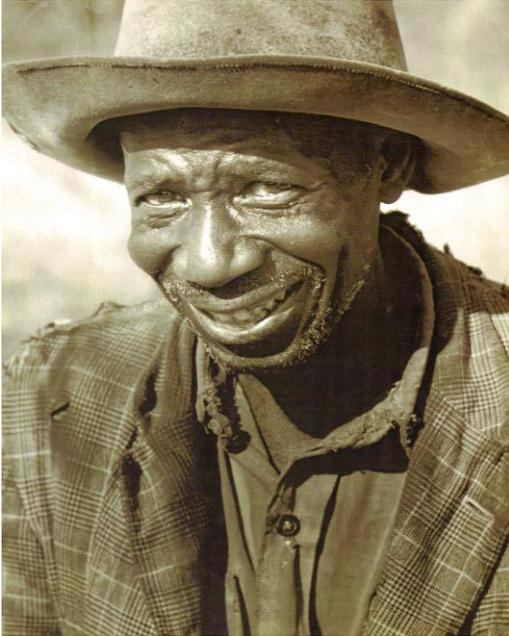
thousands of people and wild animals. It flows through Angola and Zambia, along the border of Namibia, touches Botswana, then becomes the northern border of Zimbabwe and on across Mozambique to the Indian Ocean. Rich in fish it sustains numerous villages along its banks. It also nurtures a rich diversity of animal life. Thousands of hippopotamuses and crocodiles live in its waters. It was in these waters that we were about to baptise a group of new converts. These simple believers did not have the luxury of a swimming pool or baptismal font in the vestry of a church. Their church building was a rough thatched mud hut and their baptismal was a bit like the original baptisms that John the Baptist held in the river Jordan, except for the crocodiles! I had recently heard of the dreadful snatching of a safari operator by a crocodile. He was guiding tourists on a canoeing safari and had waded in knee deep so as to secure a drifting canoe. They never found his body. Many others have perished in this wild river. These converts were familiar with the river and its dangers yet were not deterred.

A time was set for the baptism and Morgan carefully looked for lurking crocodiles as the new believers queued on the sandy bank waiting to enter the river. They were not content with a sprinkling and nothing but full immersion could satisfy their deep commitment. As the sun beat down I almost welcomed the thought of a swim in the cool Zambezi water. I was not conducting the baptism but had slipped off my shoes and joined the faithful believers in the shallows. The swift current swirled the loose river sand through my toes and the tickling sensation gave me a sense of vulnerability. A weed wrapped itself around my legs and my heart leapt. Morgan conducted each baptism, exposed to the dangers of crocodile attack. The converts waded deeper and with a prayer they were plunged beneath the water. What a sight it was to behold their declaration of faith. No one could doubt their sincerity or courage as they passed through the “waters of baptism”. These were not just any waters but the mighty waters of Africa and it seemed as if we had all been baptised into that great continent. Afterwards we gathered together on the sandy banks of the river and sang and clapped our hands in songs of praise to our Lord and Saviour. For these simple believers God was very real. Most of

them if not all had already experienced the supernatural dark powers of witchcraft. They had seen demonic manifestations, some of them had been held in the controlling power of demons. Now they were set free and rejoiced in their faith in Christ.

*Notice how deep they are in the water fully exposed to croc attack.*





## *Chapter 4*

### *The People of Africa*

In 1973 when I first started mission work, Zimbabwe was a British colony called Rhodesia. The population was comprised mainly of two kinds of people, the white settlers and the indigenous black people. There was also a small Asian community. The black people were divided into two main tribes, the Shona and the Matabele. There were other smaller tribes such as Tonga, Shangaans and Nyanja. The rural people who lived in the remoter places were mostly uneducated and unsophisticated. They were not, however, without culture and traditions, wisdom and dignity. In some ways, however, some were innocent and almost childlike. I grew up in a country where few people had secondary education and many had no primary either. Many old people could not read. They lived a simple and uncomplicated life. They were paradoxical, testing one's patience to breaking point and then suddenly coming out with a disarming smile and unexpected generosity. They were loveable and trusting, happy and hospitable, respectful and dignified.

Their value system was very different from whites. African people are more community minded in their culture. Although they had private possessions, like cattle, the elders and chiefs had a large say over the people and controlled many things. Land was communal but allocated to individuals within the community. The chief held it in

trust on behalf of the people. This bred the concept that everyone shared everything.

Generally, the local Africans were a happy, helpful and polite people. They loved to please and often spoke with this in mind saying what they thought we wanted to hear rather than what might have been factual. This was considered to be good manners. They were easy-going and laid-back, stoic in nature accepting things as they came. They were the masters of procrastination having developed it to a fine art. Maybe they had learnt this from the harshness of Africa, which is far too big to fight. The whites would rush around, shout and rave and get things done but get worn out in the process whereas Africans would plod along at their own pace and conserve their energy knowing that tomorrow would come soon enough. Their philosophy was not to worry about anything except very immediate needs. This was most frustrating for whites but whites had heart attacks whereas they did not. The African way was to let life work out at its own pace.

They were held in the grip of a religion that strengthened superstition. Whatever happened was the will of the ancestors, there was little one could do to avoid it. When adversity came they accepted it and faced great pain with bravery. They sometimes seemed devoid of sensitivity to the sufferings of others and I came to the conclusion that two things contributed towards it, the general hard conditions most of them had grown up in and the ancestral religion under which they lived, a religion that allowed no room for questioning and held them in superstition and fear. Of course many individuals showed great compassion and parents had great love for their children and they could be the most loyal and passionate of friends. They were hospitable and generous.

African myths and superstition kept them bound in fear. The Africans were very superstitious of many creatures. Owls were a cause of foreboding and if one alighted on a house or hut there would soon be a death, they said. Hyenas were the most dreaded of all creatures for “witch doctors” rode on them in the dead of night and with sinister intent as they conducted “house calls” to huts. Any sign of a hyena

was considered a terrible thing. This is understandable when one hears the hideous laughter that a gang of hyenas in a feeding frenzy can emit.

Africans gave names to their children that vividly illustrated their own disposition and philosophy to life. Babies were named according to the circumstances of their birth. Names such as Happiness, Beauty, and Precious spoke volumes. Lovemore, Honesty and Proudness reflected the pride of the parents. Other names such as Jampot, Sugar and Sweetness reflected their love of sweet things. Sometimes things went wrong and names such as Sadness and Loveless told the story. Other names were Sixpence, Shilling, Ticky, Nonsense, Dishes and Saltful. Many had Biblical names learnt from the missionaries such as Elias, Philemon and Isaac - they loved the prophets.

African people love to talk and are at their best debating some topic of importance or lack thereof. For hours at a time they would talk periodically bursting into laughter for they could find humorous anecdotes in the most common events of everyday life. When we travelled on the dusty roads they would lift their hats and wave in cheerful acknowledgement as we passed in our vehicles. The *umfaans* ran out from the huts in excitement and shouted greetings and waved to us from the roadside and we responded with smiles and waves. Africans were hospitable and if one visited their huts they would emerge with a gift, no matter how poor they were. Sometimes it was a pumpkin, or a chicken, or a tin mug of sweet milky tea. Africans worked miracles for their income was not high yet few people went without basic necessities. They kept vegetable gardens near their huts and maize fields to provide them with green mealies. They also caught flying ants and locusts and caterpillars which they ate with relish. At times the trees would be covered in these large, hairy bright yellow and orange caterpillars. To prepare them to eat, one simply held one end and squeezed, and out popped the unpalatable insides leaving the flesh to be sun-dried after the hairs had been scorched off. But it was hard life for most of them yet they made the best of things.

African people love to party and sometimes they would sing beautiful

harmony. When the African church gathered to worship it was unlike any European church. The Christians would sing and dance with great energy for many hours and services were long and filled with clapping and joyous expressions of faith. The pews would be filled with people coming and going throughout the service which could last the whole day! However, all people were not like that. Most weekends the drums would beat out the monotonous, ghoulish, monotone sounds of Africa all through Saturday night waxing and waning as beer drinking and dancing fluctuated until they were all in a drunken stupor by Sunday morning.

At funerals the people often let down their stoical masks. Non-Christians treated funerals with demonstrations of emotional grief and despair, with mourners wailing and ululating, women collapsing, and the mourning going on for days. The people certainly knew how to hold a wake. Large amounts of beer were consumed and as much meat as possible. Then all possessions left by the deceased had to be divided among relatives some claiming more than others so tension was high. The wife never got a thing. The most important thing was that the ancestors had to be placated and elaborate ceremonies were conducted and offerings made to the spirits. When people became Christians this changed and instead of all the wailing and supplication of spirits the Christians were comforted and able to break free of ancestral strongholds to conduct funerals in a way that gave glory to God with beautiful hymn singing and prayers.



*A road side vendor with his wares; skeletons and monkey icons.*

## *Chapter 5 -*

### *A Vision of War*



### *A happy trip to market*

In the 1960s during a time of preparation for church work I was active in an English speaking church in Harare (then called Salisbury) and involved in Sunday Schools, youth work and social care. In 1970 I was appointed a deacon and this gave me opportunities to lead home groups and give Bible teaching. The church was vibrant in outreach, had regular converts and the moving of the Holy Spirit in gifts of healing, prophecy and other unmistakable evidence of the Lord's power and grace. Our Prayer Meetings were well attended with a very large portion of the congregation in regular attendance. Not only were the members praying but they did so with conviction, faith and anointing. Prayer and the Gifts of the Spirit were considered normal church activity. There was a sense of holiness and expectation and of obedience and hunger to serve the Lord with sacrificial giving and bold outreach. But the church was English speaking and there were

no indigenous members, not that they were unwelcome but churches tended to be separated into White and Black congregations. This little church over a period of time sent out many young men and women into full time ministry and mission work in fulfilment of our Lord's "Great Commission" to take the good news of the Gospel into all the world.

In about 1971 while in prayer I received a sobering insight from our Lord about the future. At that time the political climate in Rhodesia was heading for conflict. During the previous decade African Nationalism had grown throughout Africa and many African nations had attained independence from European colonial powers. In Rhodesia, however, the resident white settlers were digging in their toes for they saw no future as communism swept across the continent. With the rise of the African Nationalist Movements there were riots, demonstrations and violence in the townships. In 1965 Rhodesia declared independence from Britain. Now there was a standoff between the Rhodesians, the British and the Nationalists. It seemed we were heading for disaster.

Christians were concerned about the way things were going and churches encouraged prayer for the nation. Small groups of intercessors were meeting in homes. I attended these and during a time of heart searching a deep conviction grew within me that we were heading for civil war in which thousands of people would perish. I had opportunity to share this with people. I spoke in the congregation where I was a member. What I said came as a shock at that time for fighting had not begun in Rhodesia, there had only been a few armed clashes. However, from about 1973 the country began to move into serious conflict which over the next seven years brought death to tens of thousands of combatants and civilians. The nation eventually gained Independence as Zimbabwe in 1980 but this prediction of violence in those early years was hard for many people to receive and some people said it would never happen. But, I knew that we were heading for a time of severe testing.

During those years I was active in outreach to under-privileged

children in a suburb of Salisbury called Lochinvar. This outreach was successful and bore fruit as young people came to faith in the Lord. My friend Eric, who was in charge, was a great tease especially of clergy in other denominations. He seemed to take delight in pulling their legs. One day we had a meeting with an Anglican priest to discuss mission work in the area. It was important that we should favourably impress him for we needed his co-operation for projects we planned. It was with some trepidation therefore that I greeted the priest but was relieved to note the respectful attitude my friend took right from the start. I was beginning to relax when things took an embarrassing turn. With a tone of exaggerated respect he turned to the priest and in answer to a question addressed him as "Revenue Father." I was taken aback but my friend did not even blink an eyelid and continued as if nothing was amiss and for the remaining discussion referred to him as "Revenue Father." I reprimanded him later and he grinned with a twinkle in his eye. What could I say!

In January 1974 I became a minister in the small town of Que Que (now KweKwe) - a historical town in which during the early 1900s the Globe and Phoenix mine once operated as the largest mine in the country and the richest gold mine in the world. African miners had discovered gold there many centuries before and extensively worked the surface but had no technology to penetrate further underground. The early white settlers reopened the ancient workings and the town grew around the mine. When I arrived in town the main gold was already exhausted but the extensive dumps were being reworked. We held Sunday services in the Globe and Phoenix Mine Club as huge buckets carrying tons of rock rattled above the building on overhead cables. Parties were held in the club every Saturday evening and early Sunday morning the hall needed to be cleaned. Sometimes the last reveller was leaving as I arrived. The place was a mess with broken bottles, cigarette stumps, crumpled paper napkins, shattered glasses and other rubbish lying on the floor and the overpowering smell of smoke and booze saturating every corner. Out came mops and brooms and after a vigorous hour or two of hard work it was transformed into a place of worship. Nothing could disguise the smell of booze but it was in this hall that we had some memorable

meetings. The sweet aroma of heaven seemed to descend upon us and at times we were sure we could hear the angels singing. It was as if we were seated at the gates of heaven.

Christian ministry exposed me to terrible tragedies and also great triumphs of faith. While caring for others I experienced some of life's great moments. I went to see people in their homes and also did many hospital visits. Armed "insurgents" had now infiltrated the country and attacked farms and ambushed travellers on roads. These North Korean trained fighters moved into African villages and indoctrinated the rural people. People were killed or injured and many people began to "seek the Lord". It seems that people often realise their need of God only when they face trouble. Added to this were the daily needs of people who were sick, anxious and in need. One day I was asked to visit an Indian lady who was very ill but I was not forewarned what to expect. I arrived at her home and was shown into a large, dark room and left alone. I waited for my eyes to adjust to the gloom. I became aware, slowly at first, that I was not alone for I could hear the sound of shuffling. Then I made out a stooped and withered form of an animal-like being crawling towards me across the floor. Such a picture of abject misery I had never beheld. Distorted and hardly recognisable as a person was a woman who looked as though she had emerged from a dungeon. I was overcome with horror and repulsion at her appearance for she seemed barely human and was disfigured in a grotesque and twisted shape. Consequently she never ventured out of her room but spent her days in darkness shut away by her family. I could do nothing for her except to tell her about the love of God and pray. It seemed so little.

Near Kwe Kwe was a town called Redcliff, a small thriving community around a steel works. It was a rough town with many hard drinking men and women and regular fights at the club and regular domestic violence. One day I arrived at the home of a couple whose marriage was in difficulties. How could I, a young single minister, possibly help? When I knocked at the door I heard raised voices in anger but I thought it was the radio on loud so knocked again more distinctly and persistently. Suddenly the door was flung open nearly

off its hinges to reveal a powerful man wearing boxer shorts and standing in a Karate stance. He was very angry and glaring at me he challenged me as to what I wanted. I thought “this is the day I am going to take a beating.” I composed myself and determined to bluff my way through.

“Good morning, I’ve been asked to come and see you” and I introduced myself. He did not move.

“Can I come in?” I asked.

Trembling with rage he still did not move but I think my cool manner disarmed him. Taking the initiative I stepped forward. He did not move so I inched past him into the house. His wife was just as angry as he was but was relieved to see me. I had entered a hornet’s nest. Their marriage was on the rocks. Again I took the initiative.

“Sit down” I invited them “and let’s talk” and quietly I began to tell them about the love of God and the power of forgiveness. The couple glared at each other. I continued to gently persuade them to think about the love of God. Slowly they began to melt until the man cracked, fell on his knees and sobbed his heart out. Reconciliation and forgiveness were expressed and the couple turned to the healing grace of God. Again and again I had similar adventures with the Lord always protecting me and fending off savage dogs and just as angry owners but the Lord was visiting the town and hearts melted as people heard the Gospel and gave their lives to Jesus. Never once was I bitten or hit.



*Waiting to be baptized in the mighty Zambezi.*

## *Chapter 6 –*



*The church hall we built in Kwe Kwe.*

### *A Vision in the Sky*

One dark night in 1974 I went into a field and fell on my knees in prayer. I was burdened for the nation especially after what the Lord had shown me about coming bloodshed and I knew that things were getting much worse. I made a habit of praying at night and would walk through the quiet, deserted streets of the town all the time praying. On this night I found myself in an open field near to the cemetery where many early pioneers were buried including my grandfather. The beautiful Africa night was dark and from horizon to horizon the stars were brilliantly clear. I knelt down and prayed with open eyes gazing into the heavens. I had been praying for a long while and it must have been very late when an astounding sight suddenly, unexpectedly appeared. A group of massive translucent shining orbs of light materialized and began to fly towards me. They were so large that together they looked like a formation of flying “chariots” and they lit the sky with a beautiful soft light. As they loomed above me I thought at first that a huge Jumbo jet was coming

in to land on the field in which I knelt but my mind immediately rejected that thought knowing it was totally impossible. The shining orbs were like glowing clouds and flew directly above me and were an awesome sight. They had an unearthly glory and I wondered whether this was what the shepherds of the nativity saw when angels appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. Then, as if at a signal, the shining orbs broke away at fantastic speed and headed in a northerly direction.

I was not hallucinating and was in sound mind and deeply shocked by this extraordinary sight. These huge shining orbs shone with beautiful radiance and seemed to be alive and not solid. Still on my knees my first response was to ask the Lord in prayer what I had seen. A thought was immediately impressed upon my mind as if someone was speaking directly to me from within; "I have shown you angels on a mission in this country." They were shining angelic messengers moving through the land in preparation for spiritual revival. From that night I began to search the scriptures as to what the Bible said concerning coming events on earth that would usher in the promised time of harvest. I became more and more aware that the Lord wanted the Gospel to be ministered during this coming time of suffering and upheaval in the land.

Soon after this event the nation was flung into increasing violence as the bush war suddenly began to increase. More and more battles between Rhodesian soldiers and armed nationalists occurred and more and more people were dying or being injured. Fear stalked the land and bereavement and sadness became common experiences for many. Rural Africans were caught in a vicious cycle of intimidation and brutal torture inflicted by "freedom fighters" on the one hand and government troops hunting the combatants on the other. As in all wars atrocities were committed and people suffered badly especially those Africans who did not support the Communist trained fighters. But it was during this time that the Spirit of the Lord began to move in people's hearts in significant ways.

We had a revival in the church in Que Que. It soon became known

around town that things were happening down at the Globe and Phoenix Club and all types of people began to come along. We were a lively church and many different and strange people attended. It was often difficult to keep some of the more exuberant members from expressing themselves in eccentric ways. We also had drunks come to church to “give their hearts to Jesus”, which they did in the most demonstrative manner. Often they would be back the next week to do the same again.

One day a man pitched up and began to create a nasty scene bellowing that his wife who was in the service must come home immediately and threatening to beat up any one who got in his way. He was in a drunken rage and our visiting overseer from Salisbury attempted to calm him down. John was a small man but without hesitation he faced the wrath of the drunken husband and I well remember the scene as he peered up into the face of the abusive drunk and spoke with the gentle persuasion of God’s love. The man had no defences against such sweet disposition and soon became quite meek. Que Que was a rough-and-ready mining town but there were many genuine conversions and many “rough diamonds” came to know the Lord as Saviour.

One night as the people gathered and the church was a hum with conversation before the service began a young lady with the shortest skirt imaginable and with long black hair stepped through the doors. Bearing in mind this was in the early seventies and her dress or lack there of was to most people very embarrassing. She was a striking woman and as she walked up the aisle and found a seat every eye in the church followed her. The place became very quiet. It so happened that a delegation from a very conservative church had come to spy out what was happening in our services. They sat towards the back of the hall and she sat down in front of them. One could almost hear the criticism that some people were thinking, “who does she think she is coming to church dressed like that, why doesn’t she dress properly for church?” All went well and I was into my sermon when all of a sudden she began to tremble, threw up her arms and exploded into praise, right in the middle of the message. She continued to praise in a

language unknown to any of us. Right there in the pew she had for the first time believed in Jesus as Saviour and received salvation and baptism into the Holy Spirit and she had spontaneously begun to exuberantly worship in the language of the Spirit. The eyes of the visitors popped out like stalks as their worst fears were verified - here was a public display of undisciplined, uncontrolled heresy. I stepped from the pulpit and walked down the aisle to the woman and gently spoke with her. She became quiet and filled with peace. There was no disorder just a wonderful display of how the Lord in sovereign power filled a new believer with His Holy Spirit. We had been seeking a measure of respectability and acceptance from the more conservative churches but in Africa people often tend to be free and uninhibited in their worship. The revival in the Globe and Phoenix hall went on and we were taught not to look to man for approval. The lady concerned eventually married a young man in the church and went on to become a devoted Christian. There was a move of God's Spirit and many others became committed Christians experiencing salvation and faith.

We had outreach meetings at nearby Redcliff town on Sunday evenings. It was an industrial centre and had grown up around the steel mill and furnaces at Risco foundry. The people were rough and tough. One night I drove up the hill behind Redcliff and parked to overlook the town. I liked this spot because it was quiet and I could see the twinkling lights spread out below. I used to pray up there and this night was a glorious, mild, still night like so many are in Africa. The Milky Way stretched above like a jewelled necklace. The sounds of the familiar night birds called softly. After a while in prayer suddenly a wind started down the road in a kind of muffled roar, sweeping towards me, catching the vehicle and rocking it back and forth as if by some unseen hand, it passed and I could see a dust cloud as it continued along the road that led to town. All was still again. I sat stunned. It was as if an angel had passed in the dark. The stars above were crystal clear in their profusion and the night absolutely still. A lovely church revival came to Redcliff and we saw rough, tough miners and their wives and families come to believe in Christ in meaningful ways. A new church started and people from different walks of life, from rough artisans to directors, committed their lives

to Christ. We had some great times and we saw people's lives transformed.

There was no choir or big orchestra with fancy amplification to give music. All we had were the skills of those who came. One couple was Rudy and Lena. With three girls they were a loving and devoted family. Tragedy suddenly struck and the youngest became seriously ill with meningitis and died. It was a great blow but their faith was strong and their steadfast witness touched the whole community. Rudy was our one-man band. He set up his instruments in the front of the church and played the mouth organ, strummed his guitar and at the same time beat rhythm on a couple of drums with his feet. The feat took amazing dexterity and co-ordination and he did it all without any formal training. Another musician was a man called Piet. He and his entire family regularly attended church and when he and Rudy played together the place came alive and supported by our pianist we had good "old time" worship.

Wild bees swarmed in the ceiling and established a hive. There was no way we could get safely into the roof to get them out so they buzzed around the congregation as we sang and prayed. It was a great test of faith for those people who attended. One day a man was stung on his head and then rushed to hospital because he was allergic but no harm came to him. We decided we had to do something to eliminate the bees. We managed to get a hose into the ceiling and pumped in poison which killed the bees but the result was a rotten smell that wafted through the building. Despite this our numbers continued to grow! At night we had large and sometimes fierce looking insects fly in attracted by the bright lights. Africa has an abundance of night insects from large moths and dive-bombers, a kind of huge flying ant, to large, hairy, terrifying spiders. The flying creatures whirled around and got caught in the ladies hair or down their frocks and under the collars of the men. Shrieks would regularly interrupt the sermon as women lifted their feet into the air as a large spider scurried across the floor. One needed to be quite brave to attend church and yet the people kept coming!

One Christmas a colleague in the local “ministers’ fraternal”, Pastor Gerry, planned a Christmas service at the Redcliff Mine Club. All local residents were invited to attend irrespective of their denominational affiliation. After the singing of carols Gerry planned to preach. He liked to use mimes and theatrics to illustrate his sermons so that they should not be forgotten and he hit on a great plan. Even though it was Christmas and not Easter he decided to show the gathering what a crucifixion was like. He called on John, an army officer and member of our congregation, for help. John went to the local army blood bank and got a bag of expired blood, which Gerry slipped into a rubber glove. On the stage they built a wooden cross. A large crowd of people attended the service and sang traditional carols. Then Gerry preached his Christmas sermon. At the appropriate moment in the sermon John held up the rubber glove and with a huge hammer proceeded to nail it to the beam. The intention was that the nail would pierce the glove and blood would trickle gently down. However, the bag exploded showering blood all over the stage and some on to him. Confusion reigned as people gasped in unbelief and shock while some left the hall. If Gerry had wanted to make his sermon stick in their memory this certainly did for the furore it caused did not subside for weeks and understandably so. As a local minister I dared not show my face in town. But people still kept coming!



*A small rural church at Empress Mine*

## *Chapter 7-*



*Four rural sepulchres, white washed and kept clean.*

### **Tragedy and Funerals**

As the war in Rhodesia intensified some territorial servicemen in the Army broke down under stress of battle. They behaved irrationally, drank excessively, became violent and often sank into depression. I spent more and more time counselling them. Many soldiers had done or seen things that were impossible to forget and they spoke with me about the horrors they had been involved in. What they shared gave me insight as to what was happening behind the scenes in the bush war. These men were exposed to the tensions of active service, living near the edge of death and seeing horrific deeds of war. They were not professional soldiers and not trained to cope with war. Many of them were called up for extended service leaving their jobs and families and exposed to the stress of warfare. They came back with feelings of guilt and despair.

One such soldier let off steam in Redcliff. He shut himself in an apartment on the top floor of Redcliff's one and only "skyscraper" which was about six stories high. From there he discharged rounds from his army rifle. People ducked for cover as bullets flew at random across town. Because I knew the young man I was soon called in to help, together with Eddie an ex-policeman in our congregation. We cautiously sneaked up the stairs and called to him through the door. The reaction was swift and furious and he let off more rounds and told us to "*foetsek*", which means to go away. Eddie was trained in this kind of situation and continued to speak gently and firmly through the door, urging him to calm down and to allow him in. Eventually, after a good deal of cajoling, the soldier gingerly opened the door and Eddie slipped in, whereupon it was quickly locked behind him. My heart sank as I thought, "That's the last of Eddie." For what seemed hours I sat on the steps and waited, prayed and held my breath and at last out they came, the soldier disarmed and held in the big arms of a truly great man.

I was called upon to conduct funerals, some of them the result of very tragic circumstances, servicemen killed in action and civilians caught in attacks or ambushes. One was the dreadful death of a good friend, Wendy. My wife and Wendy had gone to school together. Her husband Harry, like so many other loyal Rhodesians, had gone to fight in the bush for home and country. He was a platoon commander and on this occasion led his group of men, all African soldiers, through thick undergrowth as they cautiously followed the tracks of a band of insurgents. No one could see even ten meters ahead when suddenly 'all hell' broke out for they had walked straight into an ambush. Bullets flew in all directions as soldiers opened up behind Harry and he got hit in his leg, not by the enemy but by his own men. After the firing ended he and another casualty were taken to a small hospital for treatment. Army HQ decided to fly the wives of the two men to where they were recovering. This would have worked well if the light aircraft had not crashed. All on board were killed and it was gutted by fire. Harry lay in hospital waiting to see his wife when in walked a priest instead. Wendy was about seven months pregnant, a devout Christian. It was an unspeakable calamity.

I was asked to do the funeral. It was a difficult request but someone had to do it and it might as well be me. The church was packed. Harry arrived on crutches with his leg in plaster and hobbled up the aisle. I cannot remember what I said. I struggled through the service and hardly managed to keep my emotions controlled. After the service we went to the cemetery and laid her to rest believing she was in the presence of her Lord and Saviour. That, however, did not bring comfort to the many people who attended for it was too hard a blow. We were all hurting too much. After the prayers at the graveside the men took off their dark jackets and ties, rolled up their long white sleeves, picked up the spades and shovelled in the grave. The paid attendants, all Blacks, hung back in silent respect. I watched the grim scene and knew then that nothing was going to stop this conflict and that it would tear apart the Black and White communities. There would be many more tragedies and I was to do many more funerals including members of my own congregation as well as civilians, children and others. Later Harry took the remainder of his family and left the country and no one could blame him for doing so.

Not all funerals were so harrowing. I remember one that was quite astonishing. It was the funeral of a dear lady who I knew very well as she and her husband were the parents of my close friend Rob and his brothers and sister. They were a special family and she was a great bird lover and had especially planted trees, flowers and shrubs that would attract birds to her garden and there was birdseed and water. Birds were abundant and she loved to sit on the lawn, watch them and listen to their song

A significant number of people attended the service and the hall was full. It was a warm day and the front main door of the building was wide open. I stood behind the pulpit and started my sermon. All of a sudden a bird flew through the door, up the central aisle to alight on a lintel right above me just a few feet away. I stopped talking and looked up. It then began to sing the most beautiful song in crystal notes amplified by the church acoustics that filled the entire building. Everyone sat hushed in wonder. It finished and calmly looked around at us and then flew straight out again. We were amazed and after such

a perfect rendering I felt my words of comfort were endorsed and approved by the birds she loved so much. We had heard from one of them a most comforting message of life and joy.

Rob and his brothers conducted a great outreach work in the nation distributing hundreds of thousands of tracts and Bible courses to rural people. They went to remote areas travelling along bush paths on motorbikes, places few others went to. The people were so hungry for God and many came to faith. Sometimes I was privileged to go with them and also helped with office work.

*One of the beautiful birds of Africa.*



## *Chapter 8 – The Ways of Witchcraft*



*“Ngangas”; dressed and possessed.*

The African people suffered badly. They were caught in a civil war that ripped their society to shreds and divided families. Not only were they subjected to physical trauma but also manifestations of witchcraft occurred regularly for witchcraft was rife during the conflict and used by some elements to intimidate and control people. When this took place the results were not always easy to handle and ended in tragedy with people murdered or sometimes dying through what appeared to be supernatural powers!

Africa has long been steeped in witchcraft which has always been practised and still is. Sadly, many people were held in the grip of voodoo superstition. It is linked with ancestral religion. Ancestral veneration is the way Africans use to honour family and to strengthen community bonds but it became influenced by demonic spirits and is a means to control and manipulate people and hold them in fear and

superstition. Witchcraft still grips Africa and profoundly controls many people. Perhaps this was why Africa was called “the Dark Continent” and it is hard for an outsider to imagine just how witchcraft is rife in Africa or what devilish crimes are carried out in its name.

African ancestral religion developed from the ancient lands of Egypt and Nubia where the power of the Pharaohs was perpetuated after their death by their being elevated to the status of divinity. In this way they became “*god-kings*.” Their bodies were embalmed and placed in plush tombs together with their worldly riches and at night the spirit of the *god-king* was free to travel from the tomb through the land and visit the people thereby perpetuating the control of the deceased ruler. This in turn strengthened the hold that ancestral priests had over people for they claimed to speak for deceased rulers. This developed until eventually leaders used the concept of ancestral spirits as a way to manipulate the masses. Researchers believe that Southern Egypt, known as Nubia, was the original Biblical “Land of Ham” from where African people originally migrated into the rest of the continent. As they moved south and west they carried with them the Egyptian religion. African spirituality developed along similar lines until the elevation of ancestors was practised throughout the continent. These spirit ancestors are believed to take a continuing interest in the activities of their descendants and to punish them for breaches of conduct and to require sacrifices and rites to be made to them. Because mediums had authority to speak for the ancestors it gave them power over living people. In this way ancestor elevation became an extension of the system of political leadership and control. The chiefs recognised the authority of spirit mediums and in turn the mediums controlled the people under them. In the days of early colonialism it was the spirit mediums that often incited rebellion for they saw their old customs being eroded and their own power decreased. As Africans became converted and educated many of them turned from the ancestors. However, African mediums are still called upon in Africa to advise and empower leaders and in some countries still play an important role in politics. They are used to place curses upon people and very often demon activity takes place. The spirit

mediums become possessed and fall into trance whereupon strange voices speak through them and give instructions.

During the “Liberation War” spirit mediums influenced the people profoundly. Through spirit mediums the “liberation fighters” had control over the people. It would take a brave person to defy them and because Christians were the only people who were set free from superstition they were often singled out for severe persecution. Some “*ngangas*” were herbal healers but others practised black magic which was incorporated into ancestral religion. This system developed throughout Africa and was linked with political control. Because of thousands of years of ancestor veneration the people developed a mindset of either subservience or dictatorship. The people slipped easily into being controlled or of controlling. It is this mindset that has plagued African politics for decades and is still seen in the way that dictators have meteoric rises over whole nations. Some dictators are elevated to “hero” status. Although witchcraft was outlawed in Rhodesia we often heard of atrocities when ritual murders took place; often children, were abducted and killed for body parts used in the witch doctors’ trade. Bodies were sometimes found with hearts or other vital parts missing. Such was the power of African superstition that if a curse was placed upon an individual that person would inevitably die unless they were able to obtain the services of a stronger *nganga* who could cancel the curse. This power exerted its influence from grass roots right through to the top echelons of African society. This did not change in hundreds of years. This may sound exaggerated and some may even deny it but I have seen it to be real. However, there are now large numbers of Christians in Africa. They are the future hope.

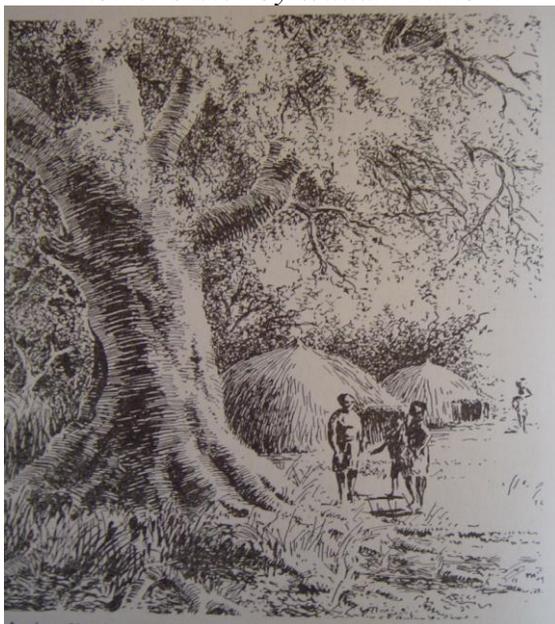
We noticed that whenever there was a turning within a community to genuine Christian standards there was always an outbreak of what appeared to be “demonic” activity to counteract it. We often saw evidence of this. Sometimes spirits attacked individuals or intruded into homes and subjected people to poltergeist activity and demonic manifestations. At times we were called to help and we prayed and led people to faith. Whenever we prayed for deliverance for people

they experienced a release but they needed to totally renounce the spirits to remain free of them. One newly converted woman saw a hunched up spirit sitting on her veranda. She sought deliverance from it and remembered some voodoo carvings she had in the house. When these were removed and burnt there were no further problems. This might sound strange to western Christians who have not been subjected to the reality of spirits. Sometimes spirits manifested in strange ways when we counselled or prayed for people. In Africa there is a lot of “demonic possession”; people spoke in strange guttural voices, others rolled about making animal sounds, went into trances, some “religious” spirits even quoted scripture and praised the Lord but it was counterfeit. Others became violent. But they all obeyed prayer in the name of our Lord Jesus. I once counselled a woman who suddenly saw a spirit standing behind me and by the look on her face it must have been real for her if not for anyone else. I was tempted to turn around but knew that would distract me and instead told the woman herself to rebuke the apparition in the name of the Lord. It disappeared immediately and she was delivered. On another occasion an invisible force gripped the throat of a woman with whom I was counselling and tried to strangle her. She was unable to breathe and her eyes bulged. She too was delivered. I have been in gatherings where people were delivered from “demons” and then received physical healing all in the same service! In fact we came to realise that whenever there was a notable move of the Holy Spirit there were invariably demonic manifestations that accompanied it. In the Gospels whenever Jesus displayed His power there was demonic resistance. One cannot have one without the other. When we prayed for people they quite often fell. Some people who fell “under the power of God” were in fact falling because they were possessed. Demons do not like to be exposed and will do anything not to be so they will often act dumb or just passive or cause the person to fall but once exposed they *must* submit to the authority of Jesus’ name. Because so many western Christians do not like anything that smacks of disorder or being out of control or anything too “supernatural” they don’t see evidence of God’s power because when God moves anything can happen. I have found that where God’s Holy Spirit is allowed to be sovereign and do *whatever* He wants to do in the way

He wants then there are revelations and powerful gifts of healing and deliverance but there is always a demonic reaction too. I think this is why there is so little evidence of God's power in the western church for people do not want anything that would unsettle them and do not "let go and let God" take over. What is required are mature leaders who are not easily unsettled or afraid of the supernatural and have spiritual authority to deal with demonic activity when it occurs and who are secure enough to allow God to be sovereign in His church.

As I say, whenever the Lord moves there will be a reaction by the forces of darkness. I ministered in a church in Pretoria, however, I felt opposition towards me from some in the congregation. Afterwards we shared fellowship over tea and a plate of food. Soon afterwards I succumbed to severe food poisoning and was desperately ill for a number of days and felt I would die but the Lord sustained me and I recovered. Whether it was deliberate or not I do not know but He is faithful.

*Another sketch by William Burton.*



## Chapter 9 -

### Preaching the Gospel



Nicholas Bhengu was called the “Black Billy Graham” of Africa and regularly came to Rhodesia from South Africa. He was a Zulu, tall and handsome, and stood as straight as an assegai. He looked like a warrior from the 19<sup>th</sup> century who had replaced his shield and spear with a suit and a Bible. He was highly respected by Blacks and Whites alike. Notable miracles occurred during his ministry and revival came in South Africa, in East London first and then elsewhere. In one of his meetings in the city of East London a well known woman who was badly crippled and could not walk and was pushed about in a wheel chair was healed in front of a large crowd. Because she was well known the miracle could not be denied. Faith grew and thousands of people became Christians. Bhengu would challenge those present to come up to the front, throw down their weapons and repent. Hundreds of criminals came to his meetings and handed in their knives, guns and weapons of all kinds. After his meetings piles of weapons were left discarded so the police had to

come and take them away. In this way the police also heard his message and became Christians. A significant Christian work called “Back to God” grew in Southern Africa.

This was during the days of the Apartheid regime and Nicholas Benghu was segregated as a Black, denied hotel accommodation and experienced humiliating discrimination yet he never used the pulpit as a political platform. Nevertheless, he was a realist. His sermons often contained poignant comments concerning the racist problem, comments that were often provocative and controversial. People accused Europeans of being insular and not taking the time to learn the culture of other races and in those days many congregations were structured along racial lines. However, a reason that hindered interracial gatherings was the simple language barrier. Many Blacks could not speak or understand English and neither could most Whites understand local African languages.

An interesting observation came forth during one of his sermons in a White congregation in Salisbury. To illustrate a point Bhengu went to some lengths to show the different characteristics of the racial groups. “You Whites” he said, “have long straight hair. We Blacks have short kinky hair. You Whites have long slender noses. We Blacks have wide flat noses. You Whites have thin lips, we Blacks have big lips.” He paused to let the contrast sink in and then said, “And that’s where the similarities end.” He knew something others did not, that the deep cultural values, misunderstanding and prejudice of many people were still a cause of great division. If a White had said that they would have been chased out as a racist but he got away with it. Benghu was a captivating speaker who held his listeners entranced for hours as he told simple, everyday stories with great depth of meaning. His command of English was superb and he could take off the superior attitude and bearing of many Whites with embarrassing realism, yet he was never offensive for he could do the same with Blacks and we all laughed at one another and were drawn closer together. The thing with his ministry was that he would not just talk but he also prayed for people to be delivered from demons and healed of illness, to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to turn from all manner of bad deeds.

Powerful things happened when he spoke.

Every year we drove to the annual church conference in Apartheid South Africa. It took us two days travel but was worth every mile. It was held in a small town called Witbank and thousands of Christians attended. In a nation torn apart with political and racial tension Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians all came together. There is always something exciting about being in a large gathering of Spirit filled believers. The singing was nothing short of magnificent with choirs of Zulus, Swazis, Xhosa, Tswana and other tribes. Few people can sing as Africans do. One cannot explain the immense emotional charge one feels as thousands of people unite in worship and the Spirit of God moves in sovereign power just as happened in the early church. The blending of massed African voices in unison, the deep bass of men, the harmonious voices of women, all in perfect harmony unaccompanied by music, is an inspiring and awesome sound.

The powerful, unmistakable Presence of the Lord was so evident in these meetings that it was truly awesome. Standing among the people one could hear the arrival of the Holy Spirit as He came in and moved right across the entire congregation, sweeping through like a mighty rushing wind. Then there would be the awesome sense of the Divine Presence hovering over the people like a cloud.

## *Chapter 10 -*

### *Easter in Africa - The Power of The Holy Spirit*



*Gathering for lunch - Goat stew.*

A large tent was pitched and several hundred hot and sweaty bodies squeezed in. This was the annual Easter convention in Zimbabwe held by churches with which I worked. People came from all around the country some of them travelling for several days to attend. Meetings in Africa can go on for hours for there is plenty of time and no one is rushing off anywhere. However, the congregations would be in a constant state of movement as people walked in and out; mothers breast-fed their babies, others went to the toilet or changed nappies while babies cried. Some people would be cooking meals in huge iron pots over large open fires with smoke billowing in clouds while women carried water in pots balanced on their heads. Chickens milled around, dogs barked and children shouted and played. It was a scene of bright, colourful, noisy, chaotic activity.

I had been asked to speak and my topic was entitled “Seeking the

Kingdom of God.” Sermons were expected to be lengthy, the longer the better for people had travelled far distances and spent hard earned money and they wanted to have their money's worth in ministry. After about two hours I concluded my teaching and sat down just before lunch was due to be served. The people were now hungry and the delicious aroma of stewed goat and *sadza* (maize meal) wafted into the large tent. The message had been challenging and I wondered what would happen. In Africa the people always come to church expectant. They don't just listen but after a Bible message the congregation respond there and then. Some repent with weeping, some pray, some seek healing, what ever is appropriate to the heart of the message. After my message there was a hush, something seldom heard in an African gathering. Then one of the leaders at the front got up from his chair, turned around and knelt down. One by one others followed and soon all the leaders were on their knees at the front. It was a hot, still day but without warning the flaps of the tent were flung up as a sudden strong surge of wind swept right into the tent and onto the people. The whole tent shook with the force and then it became absolutely still again. Then something extraordinary started to happen. The powerful spiritual Presence of the Lord became tangible in the tent and earnest prayer gripped the people. They began to pray as only Africans can. Grown men began to weep, old mothers sat on the ground and cried with tears streaming down their cheeks and young people began to shake under great conviction as their hearts were challenged. As their expectations grew the people in the gathering began to shake and fall as if under a great weight. One man standing next to me began to totter and as he fell he clutched me and pulled me down with him and we lay together in the dust of Africa overwhelmed with the power of the moment. Men and women around me began to receive infusions of great gladness, laughter and rejoicing, in uninhibited joyful abandon. Others were in earnest prayer while yet others poured out expressions of love and praise. Many experienced baptisms of the Holy Spirit in great waves. The entire gathering came under the control of the Spirit and no one was left unmoved. Attracted by the mighty commotion people walking outside on the path stopped and peered through the windows at this strange event. Children playing soccer on a nearby field gathered

around the doors to look with wide-eyed wonder at the proceedings. From my position on the floor I noticed a young man who was in great turmoil and very distraught. I got up, walked over to him and asked him what his problem was. In a terrible state he told me that his wife was seriously ill in pregnancy and he feared for her life. We got down together and prayed for her and a peace came into him and he was gloriously liberated into praise and thanksgiving. Later I heard all was well and the baby had arrived safely and the mother was well. The anointing continued for a long time and lunch was forgotten and lives were changed in personal encounters with the Lord. It was an amazing experience, as if the Lord himself had stepped inside the tent and although invisible had walked among the people, touching, healing, breaking bonds and setting people free.

It is an unforgettable experience to witness such events with the people of Africa. They are not inhibited by pride or doubt and respond unreservedly to the reality of their spiritual experience. In a gathering of women at which I spoke several mothers with babies on their backs became overwhelmed in a similar visitation. African women carry their infants on their backs wrapped in a cloth and tied at the front. In this way babies go everywhere there mothers go and partake in all that they do. It was quite comical to see these babies in wide-eyed wonder watch their mothers fall or kneel in the presence of the Lord, some shaking uncontrollably, others lying prostrate on the dusty floor. Never before in their little lives had they seen anything like this. We had to quickly remove the babies from several women who could not contain themselves and rolled on the ground as they praised the Lord or were set free from demons. Such are the joyful ways of the African people. Some people would say this was hypnotism or hype yet their lives were changed for good. Broken families came together, men learnt to be kind to their wives, heavy drinkers stopped getting drunk, mothers were taught how to care for babies and young people got direction in their lives. These people knew how much they needed God whereas in the Western nations many people don't even believe there is a God. Where is the greater darkness I ask you?

The African people are very open to reality of spirits and when set free respond to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. A friend and I went to Zambia to minister at a conference for Christian workers. Men and women came from all round the country some of them travelling long distances. One man came from the far north near the Congo border where he faithfully ministered in a small church. He had no formal education and had taught himself from books, had no stipend and no foreign support. He was a man who had suffered great hardships having known much adversity and he seldom smiled. As I got to know him he impressed me as a genuine follower of Christ. He had no wealth and no education, yet he had a deep godliness and wisdom. The more he shared the more I realised how much suffering he had endured in his life and he wept as he recounted things he had been through.

On about the third day of the meetings there was teaching on how to receive renewal from the Holy Spirit and at the end of the talk there was a wonderful move of God's Spirit. Many of those present were profoundly touched in significant ways. The Holy Spirit especially moved upon this man. He fell to the ground and lying on the baked clay floor of the thatched building he received what I can only describe as infusions of great spiritual joy. He began to laugh from deep down within his very innermost being as if he had never laughed before. It seemed to come from his belly and soon hearty roars of laughter rolled off his lips as if a dam had burst within him. His face shone with joy. His outbursts of joy were unstoppable and continued for a long while and seemed to come in waves. As each wave came it was greater and longer than the one before. Other people also received mighty touches from the Lord as if angels were pouring out buckets of joy like rivers. Eventually this man unable to contain his joy began to crawl on hands and knees between the rough wooden benches, down the hard baked clay aisle to the open doorway and out. It took him a while to do this as he had to stop often and burst into worship with joyful peels of laughter. Once out he crawled on all fours another fifty metres to a shady tree and there he rested his back against the trunk. For the next hour he worshipped the Lord between bursts of rolling laughter. This was not a show in some plush carpeted

chapel. This was a man, who had endured much adversity for many years and now rejoiced with unconstrained emotions like a great spring over flowing into a thunderous water fall. For the next day he continued to bubble over like a vessel filled with sparkling wine. Later that day he was still bubbling but serene enough to talk to me. He expressed such amazement and gratitude at what God had done. He had lived such a hard life with such tragedy that he could not express his thanks sufficiently to have received such deep infusions of joy, something worth more to him than earthly riches. This was long before any such things were seen in congregations elsewhere.

I have seen people in Africa profoundly touched by the Lord. Sometimes people will walk many miles to attend a meeting so that they can have prayer and be healed. Their faith in God's power is strong. Once in Swaziland where I was teaching on Biblical principles of salvation a woman came in who had been badly injured in a boat accident in the ocean off Mozambique. She came on crutches and hobbled in very weak. The moment she came in through the doors I knew that she was going to be healed. After a time of Bible ministry I invited those who needed prayer to come forward. She did so but could hardly stand on her crutches so I quickly got a chair for her to sit down on. She pulled up her long skirt and showed her leg and thigh which had deep ugly scars when she was mangled by the propeller of a boat after she had fallen overboard into the sea and gone under the boat. She asked for prayer and we prayed for her and the Lord began to touch her in strength and healing. I could feel a warm power coming into her and she was visibly moved. After a short while she could stand and then walk strongly. The pain had gone and her leg became subtle and strong. The awful scars were still present but she left the meeting able to walk without her crutches.

During those years I teamed up with my friend Kenneth. He helped me to minister to people in ways that would not be offensive. Black and White culture is quite different and one can unwittingly cause offence. For example the way whites often show respect to others is by standing up when someone enters a room. However, in African custom this is often quite the opposite and they remain seated. On one

occasion a friend and colleague in the ministry, Alan, and I accompanied Kenneth to a remote area only to find that many of the men who attended the meetings came dressed in their best clothes with jackets and ties. We were in the middle of the hot, dusty bush and yet here the congregation came dressed in their best Sunday suits. Alan and I had brought only one tie between the two of us and in order not to cause offence we decided that whoever was to conduct the lesson would wear the tie. As we quickly took turns to speak after one another this required some rapid tie exchanging. The people were aware of the situation and saw the humour in it. When we departed someone asked for the tie. Perhaps it is still being used every time someone reads the Bible.

To be in a Christian meeting in Africa is an unforgettable experience. It is not like a conventional church service in Europe or England. It is African, and full of strong expressions of exuberance, with powerful and emotive singing, crying, laughing and dancing. People are mightily moved upon and sometimes fall down, other times shake and there are always volumes of music, clapping, stamping and swaying. I have found in some Western Churches that there can be a lot of beautiful music but not always real evidence of the Spirit. But in Africa its not just noise but there is a deep sense of reverence and “the Presence of the Lord” is real with healing, infilling, confession, visions, demonic release, prophetic words and other amazing things. Such meetings can go on for hours. Time means nothing in Africa. Africans can be very enthusiastic about their faith. Their enthusiasm is catching. I have been in many such meetings, often in isolated places with the dust and heat of Africa all around and with flies buzzing and people sweating and yet the sense of God’s presence very real. If held at night then the vastness of the African sky spreads above like a jewelled curtain punctuated by the Southern Cross and the Word is preached by the light of a paraffin lamp or candle and to the chirp of crickets in the bush. Yet I have seen people changed by the Gospel message. When one has been in such meetings one comes away invigorated, knowing it has all been worthwhile.



*Baptism service held in swimming pool.*



*Ben and the new church building at Mutemwa*

## *Chapter 11 -*

### *A snake converts a Witchdoctor*



*A Harmless Egg Eater Snake*

Lovemore was a devout young man and after his conversion he grew in Christian character. One day someone who did not like to see him doing well put a curse on him. Lovemore came to me visibly distraught. He explained what had happened and before my eyes all the strength and spirit drained from him and he collapsed on the floor in a heap of crumpled limbs and clothes. I thought he was about to expire but I aroused him by speaking firmly to him, exhorting him to fight off the attack and getting him to say after me scriptures to strengthen his spirit. We then prayed for his deliverance. There was a real fight going on in Lovemore but he overcame and eventually become an ordained minister in the church in Zimbabwe.

Robert worked for me but fell foul of the spirit world. He also had a curse placed on him but he was not a Christian. He said he had several visitations from spirits in the middle of the night and he ended up going crazy. When I saw him early one morning coming out of his room he could hardly walk and was bruised all over by an assailant who had been invisible, or so he said. Then there was Jeffery. He

worked well until one day he ‘lost it’ and tried to burn down our house but ended up burning the hedge. Another person was Rosemary, a happy woman who worked in our neighbour’s house. She too went to pieces when apparitions appeared in her room. She completely lost her mind and ran away. As said before, the phenomena of demonic manifestation is very real in Africa. In the Western world these things would be explained in medical and psychological terms but in Africa they are “spirits”. Only Christians who made a determined break from the power of *ngangas* were able to get free of the destructive influence of these “demonic” influences. However, demonic manifestations are not unique to Africa. When ministering the Gospel in other places I have experienced similar manifestations! In Scotland I spoke in a church and then asked those in need of prayer to come forward. The people were very conservative in nature but several came up. I never laid a hand on them but some fell down and horrible harsh, abusive, hoarse threatening voices spoke out of them. They were prayed for and experienced wonderful release. Simultaneously others received spiritual infilling and visions without any manipulations or cajoling. I have seen similar manifestations elsewhere. I have noticed that deliverance always comes though faith in the Name of Jesus. Demonic activity follows similar lines the world over, it’s just that in some “civilised” countries spirits mask themselves so well and masquerade in many disguises that people completely deny their activity.

There were times when we witnessed amazing conversions of *ngangas*. Most people were involved with "spirits from the ancestors". They had been brought up from childhood with the dark reality of spirits all around them and were often initiated in voodoo and black magic from a very young age. Witchdoctors held power over people, often the power of life and death for if a curse was put upon someone that person would surely die unless they went to another witchdoctor to get help. People believed that only *ngangas* could release them from the power of spirits. In African religion possession by spirits is frequent. I have seen people possessed, whirling and twirling, falling into trance and then acting and speaking

as if controlled by an unseen force. Christians had to be delivered and taught, encouraged and prayed for, so that they might have courage and faith to stand against these powers. When *ngangas* saw that Christianity was stronger than their spirits they sometimes renounced their spirits. Whenever a *nganga* made a confession of Christ as Lord it was a significant event. They would bring all the “tools of their trade,” their charms, divining bones, claws, teeth, vertebrae and other grotesque paraphernalia and burn all of them in the presence of Christians and then kneeling down confess their sins and receive Jesus as Lord. One knew it was real when done like this in front of the whole community and when they publicly renounced their past way of life. They were prepared to do what many others were too timid to do. Some *ngangas* were active in the liberation war and worked with communist-trained terrorists. They used their spiritual powers to motivate people to fight. They even promised “freedom fighters” that bullets could not harm them! Unfortunately this did not help those who died in combat.

My friend Kenneth built a pole and mud thatch church on the top of a hill in the remote Goradema area of Gokwe near the wild Chisarira Game Park. This remote wilderness area had lions, elephants and other big game. The church on a hill was like a beacon that could be seen for miles around. Over the years, even during the war, we went out there to teach and preach. The enthusiasm of the locals inspired us to give our best to them. We found it easy to share the Christian message with them for they had a spiritual thirst not often found among whites and a level of faith that at times was perhaps similar to the early Christians of the New Testament.

African mythology was rich when it came to the creatures all around us. They were especially superstitious of snakes, which were viewed with utmost dread. Some completely harmless snakes were considered deadly. For example little Egg Eaters are placid snakes and cannot even bite. However, they have markings that are similar to Night Adders and when alarmed behave in typical adder fashion, coiling and hissing and striking at one in an aggressive manner. They are viewed with much dread.

One night Kenneth and I conducted a Gospel meeting in this remote area of Goradema. A crowd had gathered by the veranda of a small building which acted as a platform for ministry and as we stood on its steps the people sprawled in front. The light from the paraffin lamp caused shadows to fall in distorted shapes and a mass of bodies crowded together in the shadows making it difficult to discern between people, ground and bushes. The dark African night pressed in. It was an eerie scene as we spoke about the power of Jesus to bring light into the darkness of the human heart. Suddenly, in the middle of the sermon, a commotion broke out amongst the people seated in the shadows. Screams of fear erupted as bodies began to squirm and people fell over each other as they scrambled for safety yelling “*nyoka, nyoka, snake, snake.*” Quickly lifting the lamp high and stepping over and between sprawling, writhing bodies I searched for the cause of the panic and saw a diminutive Egg Eater slithering around among the limbs of the fear stricken people. I had always been interested in nature and in my youth caught many snakes. In one easy movement developed from years of snake catching I gathered up the offending culprit and without a backward glance strode out into the darkness where I released it some distance from the crowd. Well if they weren’t believers before they certainly were then. A hush fell upon the crowd behind me followed by exclamations of awe and astonishment for they had witnessed what they considered to be an astounding miracle! The preacher had done just what the Bible said could be done, “to take up serpents without suffering harm.” Now we had a captive audience and our reputation spread like wild fire. It was not long before the whole district heard about the event and, not to be left out, the local *nganga* or “witchdoctor, claimed it was his personal snake that he had sent along to the meeting to see what was going on. The extraordinary event the people had witnessed brought even more people to the meetings and the witchdoctor also came and wanted to be a Christian. He brought all his paraphernalia, his charms and bones and other things he used in his trade, and burnt it all. He asked how to become a Christian and expressed his wish to be baptised and join the church. This had a profound effect on the community and revival broke out.

## *Chapter 12 -*

### *“The Boys From The Bush”*



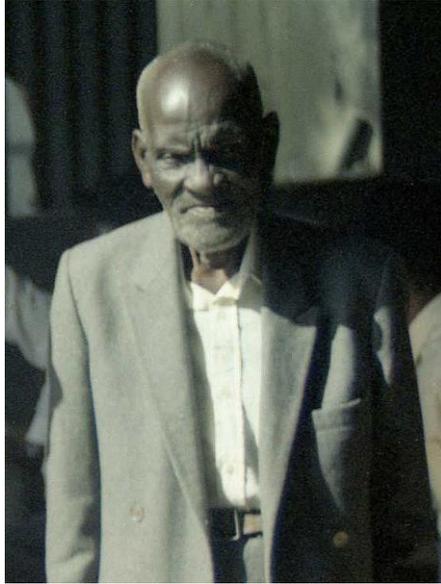
#### *Innocent children play war games with clay soldiers*

On one of our bush trips during the height of the liberation war Alan and I had an experience that could have been disastrous. We travelled out with Kenneth to conduct several days of Christian teaching. All went well with numbers of people attending and responding to the teaching. We taught during the mornings and afternoons and then had evangelical meetings in the evenings. As I said, Kenneth had built a pole and grass church. It was no cathedral but crowds crammed into this rough bush chapel. The interior was lit with a paraffin lamp that threw a dull light and made long shadows. The sides were open so as to allow fresh air and crowd expansion. The people did not sit in nice pews but on the ground wherever they could find space or on rough logs for benches. Standing at the front and peering out at the sea of faces was quite an experience in itself. There were old and young, from tiny babies to wrinkled grey-haired ancients. The people were so keen to hear the Gospel they had walked for miles along the twisting paths of Africa to attend the sessions. Several days passed and we were pleased with the way things were going.

Then quite suddenly without explanation a foreboding fell over me and I became deeply troubled. I could not shake off this feeling. I spoke to Alan suggesting that we cut short our visit. He was keen to stay but I think he could see how genuinely agitated I was and agreed. Later Kenneth told us what happened. That very evening the “boys from the bush” came looking for us, a polite way of saying “rebels came to kill us”. In fact two men had already secretly come to spy us out and then gone to call their comrades in arms. When Kenneth told us about them I recalled noticing on one of the evenings two rough looking men sitting right at the back of the gathering. They had appeared detached from the rest of the people as if somehow they did not belong. This had sub-consciously disturbed me and the Holy Spirit had warned us to leave. After we left they returned with their comrades ready to kill us. Numerous missionaries and church workers were killed by “freedom fighters” during the war. It was intended that we too would suffer the same fate but our lives were spared. Very often if we listen to the inner voice of the Lord we can become aware of things our natural senses cannot discern. The Holy Spirit speaks to us from within. Our Spiritual intuition is a marvellous gift but is often ignored and not developed or understood.

Kenneth had a brother, Bob. Bob and Kenneth were both brought up as Christians but Bob was a rebellious child. He tells the tale of his conversion. They grew up in a rural area. Their home was a simple mud hut and their food came from fresh vegetables, maize and home reared meat. Their playground was the open spaces of Africa. Life was idyllic but tough. Bob was not responsive to the teaching of his Christian parents. Then he fell desperately ill and it seemed as though he would die. His parents prayed for him but over the next few days he grew weaker. For hours he lay motionless on a little reed mat on the floor of the hut. Then Bob tells how one night an angel came into the hut and appeared to him. Bob mustered the little strength he still had and getting to his knees began to worship the angel who promptly struck him to the floor and commanded him to worship Jesus, which he did. Bob was healed, grew up as a Christian and later became a minister of the Gospel in the USA.

*A Church elder who has seen many “seasons” come and go.*



## *Chapter 13 -*

### *Missions and War*



*A deserted village.*

In 1976 I moved to Mutare (Umtali) as minister in the small ‘Assembly of God’ church where I had come to salvation in my teens. Umtali was where I spent much of my youth and so it was good to be back in my hometown in the land I knew so well. It was a town on the border of Mozambique, which was now controlled by Frelimo forces who were fighting Rhodesian forces. It was a town besieged. The Rhodesia Army now patrolled the district and the town was full of army personnel and vehicles. These vehicles were designed to deflect landmines and had heavy reinforced metal to withstand explosions and ambushes. They came in many weird shapes and sizes and were called all sorts of strange names: Hippos, Crocodiles, Pumas, Rhinos, Leopards, Kudus and so on. The town bustled with men and women in uniform and had all the feel of a frontier border town.

Our church was linked to the Elim Mission in Inyanga North so one of the first things I did was to visit the mission to see friends there. Peter was the man in charge. It was a long drive north through Tribal Lands and the majestic hills of Inyanga. The evidence of fighting was

all around, burnt out homes and vehicles, army trucks and soldiers and a sense of foreboding that at any moment I would be ambushed. I arrived late in the afternoon to a warm welcome. The mission was established years before and was staffed by dedicated missionaries from England. Over the years they had achieved great improvements in education and health among the people. The church had a strong local following but the missionaries were having a tough time for since Mozambique had become independent in 1975 more and more “freedom fighters” infiltrated across the border into Rhodesia and caused havoc amongst the peace loving community.

Not only were missionaries under increased danger but people in town were under more and more stress. Garry was a young man who attended church regularly. He was full of enthusiasm and greeted everyone with great gusto, throwing his arms around the men and plonking holy kisses upon the sisters, from teenagers to grannies. This caused some consternation amongst the ladies but he had a good heart. With the increasing difficulties in the country Garry came under pressure at home and at work. He had an ailing mother and extended family to support and he spent long hours working in a local cafe in order to do so. One day he cracked under the pressure and arrived at church ready to shoot the minister whom he accused of preaching heresy. He walked down the aisle brandishing a loaded gun. Where he got it from is uncertain but many people had guns during the war. The congregation ducked under the pews and the minister hid behind the lectern as Garry waved his gun around at random. He then proceeded into town waving his gun and threatening to do battle with heretics and antichrists. The police got him and took him to the mental hospital. I had to go there from time to time to visit patients at Ward 12, as it was called. These were the casualties of life, destitute old timers, alcoholic men and women, youngsters who had suffered breakdowns, all with shattered lives, walking in a world of dumbness and pain. As the war intensified their numbers increased.

During my stay in Umtali I kept fit by running through the suburbs in the cool of night. African nights are beautiful and temperate. I enjoyed the exercise and ran up the long main street and on through

the suburban hills. When tired I would stop and pray for a while. The war was escalating. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1976 Frelimo soldiers in Mozambique bombed Umtali. In the early hours of morning I awoke to what sounded like rolling thunder followed by loud detonations. To the reverberating thud of exploding rockets and mortars I ran outside and watched as they rained overhead and landed haphazardly around town. Looking towards the east from where they came I saw Cross Kopje silhouetted against the sky. Cross Kopje was a conical hill on which a huge cross had been constructed with granite blocks. It stood on the pinnacle of the *kopje* as a memorial to the many Rhodesian African service men who had fought and died for the British in East Africa during the First World War. It was a beacon over the town, prominent during the day as the symbol of Christianity, loyal service and sacrifice. Every night the cross was lit with spotlights and stood like a beacon giving comfort to the town residents. Now it guided Frelimo bombs aimed indiscriminately at the town. The rockets were interspersed with the rattle of spasmodic small arms. I watched and wondered, "Where will all this end?"

Next day, early in the morning, the Rhodesian Air Force sent over their jets as a show of force but that night the light on the cross was switched off. Over the next four years Umtali was bombed several times and the people of the city and the district took a tremendous beating as farmers, missionaries, Government Officials and Security Forces were killed and rural people brutally terrorised, abducted and exposed to great suffering. Korean trained terrorists ran rampant throughout the province for it was a rugged tract of country, interspersed with granite kopjes and dense jungles that were ideal hide outs for them. Farms, forest plantations and towns were all attacked. Ambushes were set on roads. Tractor drivers and farm staff were killed. Scores of plantation workers were lined up and gunned down execution style. Some whites were abducted and taken into Mozambique.



*Collecting thatching grass.*

## *Chapter 14 -*

### *Our Beloved Missionaries Killed*



#### *The Elim Mission, Place of Martyrdom*

Missionaries were caught in the fight with the “freedom fighters”. Many devout missionaries from different denominations had worked in the country for many decades. The Catholics had long been in the country and Catholic missions were established in most areas. They had established schools and clinics. Other churches had done the same. Some missions gave assistance to “freedom fighters” for there was little else they could do if they did not want reprisals. Some clergy believed that the conflict was a necessary evil for majority rule to come to the country. Regrettably the help they gave the “boys from the bush” did not prevent them from suffering at the hands of these same “boys”. Missionaries, priests and nuns were targeted by them and some cruelly killed. One massacre was at Musane where eight Roman Catholic missionaries, including four nuns, were cold-bloodily killed in a most cruel manner. The World Council of Churches financed the so-called liberators but local Christians often

expressed disgust at what the Council did in promoting violence. Many black Rhodesians suffered horrendous crimes by the so-called liberation army many of whom had been trained in “terrorist tactics”.

The Rhodesian government deported several missionaries because of the help they gave to these “liberators”. One man who earned the displeasure of the Rhodesian government was an ex-Rhodesian Prime Minister! Garfield Todd had come from New Zealand as a missionary and after some years on the mission field entered politics and became Prime Minister for a term. This was when the electorate was all White Rhodesians and Todd proved too much of a liberal for them. After he was ousted he spoke against the Rhodesian regime and was a powerful advocate for majority rule. He favoured the “boys from the bush” and gave them food, so they called at his farm to get supplies. When the war was over Mugabe made Todd a Senator in the new Zimbabwe legislature. For his part in helping towards majority rule Todd got a knighthood from the British Queen in 1985, at the very time that the regime was killing thousands of Matabele people! Before Todd died, in 2002, he went on record to say how terribly sad he was with it all, especially the regime’s violent, dictatorial rule. At Todd’s death the regime wanted to confer “Hero” status on him and have him buried at “Hero’s Acre” but his family vigorously declined this dubious honour.

In 1978 we were given a cruel blow when “freedom fighters” killed our missionary friends at Eagle School situated in the beautiful Vumba Mountains. When the Queen Mother came to Rhodesia in 1953 Eagle School was the colony’s show piece. She and young Princess Margaret visited the school and all the colonial white children came out and waved their little Union Jacks for the Royal Party. However, in the mid 1970s with the escalation of the liberation war the school packed up all the white pupils to Springvale School near Marandellas (Marondera) which was in safer regions. When they moved out the Elim Mission moved in and brought all their African pupils from their remote mission in Inyanga to what they believed were safer premises in the Vumba. The Elim Missionaries had come under increasing danger at Inyanga and they thought that Eagle

School was much safer. On several occasions our missionary friend Joan had hidden under her bed or even out in the bush when “liberators” came to the mission and demanded food. They came to “re-educate” all the Christians and, irrespective of age, all pupils and teachers were subjected to hours of political “brain washing”. They were forced to sing political songs in praise of Mugabe and to listen to hours and hours of political indoctrination. As a result Joan suffered from hypertension and took sick leave. Her sickness was to save her life for she was not there when the massacre happened at Eagle School.

Tim, a member of our church, was on army duty when early on the morning of June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1978 he and the fellow soldiers with him were plunged into horror. They were rushed to the Vumba Mountains. The sight that awaited them was beyond anything they could have prepared themselves for. Lying amongst the soft green grass was the horrendous evidence of an orgy of carnage, the mutilated bodies of thirteen missionaries. Scattered about like discarded rag dolls were remnants of humanity, heaps of blood-stained clothes and twisted, grotesque bodies. Could these bits of flesh be our lifeless loved ones he wondered? Yes, they were. All thirteen whites had been brutally killed by terrorists. Most of them had their hands tied behind their backs. All of them had been viciously beaten on the head. Their faces were bludgeoned beyond recognition and they had been bayoneted. One man had his eyes gouged out and was stabbed at least fifteen times. The women were naked from the waist down. The baby’s head had been smashed into the ground. It was a barbaric “slaughter of the innocents.”

So as to remain neutral in the conflict the missionaries had declined the protection offered by Rhodesian security forces to guard their mission. The terrorists took advantage of this and under cover of darkness they sneaked in from nearby Zimunya Tribal Trust Land. They rounded up the missionaries shortly after their evening meal. They tied their hands behind their backs, led them out onto the soft green grass of the sports field, raped the women and girls and then bayoneted and bludgeoned all of them to death including the children

and baby. During the ordeal the missionaries had attempted to comfort the children by singing hymns. Eight adults, four children and one new-born baby lay dead. One child lay where she had fallen with her little hand reaching out for help to her mother who lay nearby. The murdering gang melted back into the darkness. A pet Labrador spent the night sitting by the bodies and her howling eventually attracted attention to what had happened.

When the sickening horror sank in we went into deep shock. The Rhodesian Security Forces followed the tracks of these brutal murderers, which led them to villages in the nearby Zimunya Tribal Land where the gang had dispersed to hide. Hot on their trail soldiers found and killed a number of combatants and captured others before the remainder crossed the border into Mozambique. The leader of the gang was later caught and confessed to the deed. One of the perpetrators was not caught but was so moved by the manner in which the Christians had died that he later became a Christian minister. Perhaps the way the missionaries had attempted to sing hymns as they were sexually violated and then brutally killed convicted him of his terrible deed. The local Africans say that on some dark nights when the wind sighs through the trees the sound of hymns in the midst of wails of fear and pain can still be heard drifting across the sports field at Eagle School. Our dearest friends had died but there was one amazing miracle. Joan survived and she later retired to England. Some time before this the Lord gave her a special promise, that she would survive all the dangers of Africa. This promise came one day when she attended our church in Umtali. At a communion service the Lord gave her a personal message through the gift of a spiritual language. Moved by the Holy Spirit I was led to spontaneously sing several verses to the tune of that beautiful hymn "The Lords My Shepherd" in a language totally unknown to myself and for that matter everyone else present, *except* Joan. Amazingly it was an African dialect that Joan understood, for as a missionary she had learnt to speak it. In this way the words of the song were directed to her *especially* and were a message that told her not to fear, God would keep her from all danger and preserve her through every difficulty. The following is Joan's own account:-

*“When a Spirit-filled believer ‘speaks in tongues’ is it a known language?” is a question often asked. As on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6-11) the Holy Spirit gave the languages of the visitors to Jerusalem, so in these days God does the same thing for a special purpose. On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July (1976) I was in the Assembly of God, Umtali, having been brought two days previously from a mission station on the Eastern Border suffering from hypertension and exhaustion. During the time of open worship a brother sang the tune ‘Crimond’ to which the words ‘The Lord’s my Shepherd’ are usually sung. I realised he was singing in the Spirit in the Shona language, the language of the local African people. Fascinated, I listened intently as he sang the tune a second time with the words ‘Ishe wenyu akakunda...’ In English “Your Lord has conquered. You need not be defeated. Because He has conquered, you will conquer too.” The message came to my heart with tremendous comfort and as I considered that nobody else present could understand the Shona language (including the brother who sang the words) I was thrilled that the Lord cared for me enough to let me know it by means of the miracle of a beautiful song in the Spirit. Thank you brother for being in such a place of yieldedness that the Lord could use you to bring encouragement to me.*

*Joan*

She shared the translation of the “unknown song” with us but at the time we never thought these words would have such a terrible fulfilment. She was the only person to survive the massacre for she was away on a respite break. I cannot explain why the Lord chose her to live and allowed the others to die. God’s ways are not our ways.

During four decades of mission work I heard similar accounts of the Holy Spirit speaking to people in languages unknown to others but known to the recipient of the message. I have heard diverse languages such as Zulu and some European languages. One man understood a message in Russian, another in Italian. Contrary to opposition from some factions of Christianity the gift of tongues, as well as all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, are still available just as they were in the book of Acts. Perhaps one reason why they are still appreciated and used is for people on the front line of adversity and danger.

## ***Chapter 15 - WAR YEARS***

*Blown up by a landmine.*



### ***The Man on Death Row, Soldiers in Bright Clothes***

After a while I moved to Salisbury (Harare). One day the telephone rang. “Are you willing to visit a man in jail awaiting execution?” A colleague of mine made the request and after a moment of thought I replied, “Yes.”

Together with an official of the Christian Prison Fellowship we drove to the central jail, a sombre complex surrounded by high walls with towers and barbed wire. A small metal door marked the entrance and we pressed the bell. A few moments later a narrow peep latch slid open and a pair of eyes appeared. We explained who we were and that we had authority to see a prisoner and keys rattled as the door

swung open and we were led into the reception area where we went through the formalities of signing in. From there we went into a cubicle where we were searched and relieved of everything we carried; car keys, pens, wallets and money. Having signed for it all we were ushered through several narrow iron gates into another waiting area. After several more minutes we were escorted from there down a long corridor into the bowels of the building. I began to wonder whether having got in we would ever get out again. The corridor eventually led towards a row of cells and we were shown into one. Sitting in the cell was a small, neat Black man. He looked up and smiled. This was our killer, a man under sentence of death for committing acts of terror. He did not look like a terrorist. We greeted one another and exchanged pleasantries. He expressed his faith in God and requested prayer for himself. He knew he would hang and had resigned himself to that fate. What he wanted was just to speak to some Christians, especially a White priest, and have a prayer. We prayed for him, Black and Whites sitting together on a bench in the austere surroundings united by our faith. We asked if he had a family, shook his hand and left. It was so complete. I will never forget the long walk out of that jail.

“A naked man came to church on Sunday.” This is the entry in my diary. He turned off the main road and came walking down the driveway, stark naked! Our eyes nearly popped out of our heads. Maybe he thought he was Adam. We read in the Bible that the Lord delivered a naked man from demons and afterwards the man, clothed and in sound mind, sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to him teach. Our faith failed to meet the challenge. Instead, some of the men blocked the path of the naked visitor and the women ran inside. Then someone called the police who came and took him away. I am sad that we failed him, gave him no garment to wear or helped him.

During those difficult days another revival broke out in my church in the small town to where I had moved. It was a small town in the centre of a large farming district. Our meetings were full of both young and old seeking the Lord. It all started at school where children came to faith in Christ and went home and told their parents who then

started to come to church. Soon business people, farmers and others began coming to church to seek spiritual renewal and a wonderful revival began.

The area was a farming area with many commercial white farmers both British and South African. After World War II many servicemen who had fought for Britain came to Rhodesia and purchased farms. The British government encouraged them and the local administration gave them incentives. Other people from Britain followed. John was such a man. As a teenager in England he had faked his age and joined the RAF in about 1943. He didn't get to fly for after his initial training he was transferred to a contingent of soldiers who were eventually shipped to Burma. It was there that he was recruited for the famous "Chindits" the supreme fighting force that gave birth to the SAS. He saw action in the forests of Asia and was captured by the Japanese where he witnessed horrific acts of violence and torture. He and a small number of his men were some of the very few prisoners who managed to escape from the Japanese and with the help of an Indian Gurkha unit that operated deep in Burma they were led out of the jungles and back to Allied lines. They fought several skirmishes in the jungle and swam wide rivers before they escaped. His story would be good for a movie but will probably never be told.

After the war he rejoined the Royal Air Force and eventually in the 1960s came to Zambia with a squadron of RAF sent to protect Zambia from the Rhodesians! The irony was that the men who flew the aircraft categorically said they would never enter a combat role against Rhodesia and the whole exercise was a big show for the benefit of the Zambians. John soon resigned from the RAF and moved south, to Rhodesia. He established himself on a farm in our district and then stood as candidate for the Rhodesia Party, which was the White opposition party to the ruling Rhodesia Front Party. He was a seasoned military man and a most unlikely person for anything spiritual but one night he had a profound experience that deeply changed his life. He was a great drinker and after having his quota at the local pub he got in his car and drove home. He knew the route so

well he could drive it even if he was blind drunk but on this night it seemed he drove through time into another dimension. He drove for a full hour and came out where he had begun. He was shaken. The experience made him take stock of his life and soon he began seeking spiritual things. At the time he was in the office of the Town Clerk and had been dishing out summons to crooks but had himself been “cooking the books” for a long time. He realised that as a Christian he could not continue his little sideline and stopped. However, the Holy Spirit worked deep in his heart and convicted him so much that he decided to confess to the authorities his misdeeds and make restitution. Never before had the authorities had anyone come along and confess their crimes so they threw the book at him and he was convicted of theft. He lost his job and went to prison but the judge was lenient with him and he did not serve too long but when he came out he was a changed man and the talk of the town. More people began to come to church because of him.

While he was a convict he had time in prison to study and he held Bible Study groups in the cells and won numerous inmates to faith. He even baptised converted convicts in an old bath. There was a revival in jail as convicts became converts. When he came out of jail and despite his amazing track record throughout life he could not find a job largely due to his “police record” so instead of becoming a Minister of Parliament he became a Minister of the Church. He shared the gospel with Blacks and Whites alike and had a rapport and empathy with people second to none. Due to his changed life others began attending church and revival broke out. More and more people from all walks of life came to church.

Farms were now attacked on a weekly basis. As the local minister I was expected to visit the farming community and give encouragement and so I found myself travelling around the district. Farms were often far from town and isolated from neighbours. These solitary dwellings were vulnerable and many were attacked. Sometimes farmers fought off bands of gunmen armed with automatic weapons and rockets. Women and teenagers fired back from windows using old farm guns, hand weapons and army issue rifles. It was like the Wild West.

Desperate battles were fought. Sometimes farmers and their families were ambushed on farm roads. Farm workers were intimidated and killed. This occurred throughout the country. Farmers took the brunt of the terror war and they and their staff had little protection from roving bands of “freedom fighters”. Some farms had a permanent army presence, usually a couple of reserve soldiers who had left their own families to come and guard someone else. I travelled to farms and held services and prayers. It was a privilege to help in some way. A spiritual awakening took place on the farms among both White farmers and the large African labour force. The people were so hungry for Christian teaching that they all attended from very aged to young babies. They would express their faith by singing and dancing, praying and clapping with exuberant rejoicing. The meetings could go on several hours for they loved to express their faith with testimonies and prayers. It was great to be among these happy people. Living on the farm they were all part of an extended family and enjoyed the benefits of farm life with fresh produce and rations. Many farms also had a school, paid for by the farmer and provided with a government teacher. It was a simple lifestyle but wholesome. These worship meetings were in direct contrast to the fearful meetings held by political gangs who forced all, both young and old to sing “freedom songs” and denounce one another and where innocent people were sometimes tortured and killed.

I was also able to minister in many rural English speaking churches of all denominations scattered in rural farming areas. I also held special services in Country Clubs and other venues. One day I was the visiting speaker at an interdenominational church at a small village named after the famous explorer and naturalist Courtney Selous, set in the midlands farming district south of Salisbury. I enjoyed opportunities to minister regularly among dedicated farmers of the area many of who were devout Christians. My ministry in many different churches and districts gave me opportunities to meet many people, African, European and Asian. On this occasion the local Minister of Parliament was a man called P.K. Van der Byl. He had Dutch origins and came from a well known Cape Town family. He was also the Minister of Defence and spoke English with an

impeccable accent having been educated in England. My sermon was about the Second Coming of the Lord but I felt it had not gone well as I struggled with it. At the end of the service I met the congregation at the door. The Honourable Van der Byl came out and as we shook hands he said with sincerity how interesting my talk was; I felt it was a compliment for he was well known for his under statements. I well recall shortly afterwards when he was interviewed for TV and asked "What will the Rhodesian government do if terrorists came into Salisbury?" he replied very coolly and with his precise impeccable manner that "They will be shot" a rather simplistic statement I felt and out of touch with reality.

As the war intensified more and more accounts were given of extraordinary supernatural interventions as people faced extreme dangers. A friend in the army called Charles was ambushed and his group fought a pitched battle and beat off the attackers. When it was all over he gave thanks in prayer. As he did so a wonderful light settled on him and shone around him. It was visible to the other soldiers. Someone shouted out, "Switch off that spotlight" but it was not earthly. Was it a sign? Rory was a member of our congregation and had an amazing deliverance. He was in an army unit tracking a group of insurgents when without any warning he came under fire from close quarters. A man had crept up and from point blank range opened fire on him letting off a volley of bullets from only a few metres away. Not one bullet hit him! It was miraculous. Even more astounding was when his vehicle hit a landmine and he was thrown into the air and the vehicle crashed back right on top of him. He was pinned beneath the huge vehicle but was unharmed. Fellow soldiers prized it off him and he emerged without a scratch. Then there was Pete who drove right over a land mine and it did not go off. There was little Cherry. Her mum crashed the car on a lonely farm road and she left her to walk for help. When she returned the little girl was singing happily and described the nice man who had come to speak to her, dressed in a long shining robe. There were numerous other strange encounters, too many to recount here.

During the war farmers on isolated farms often had little protection

except their own weapons, usually old sporting rifles. Very often women were left alone on farms to fend for themselves when their husbands and sons were called into army service. A communist guerrilla who was captured told a strange account. He was part of a band that had surrounded a farm with the intention of attacking the residents. They had watched the home for some time and saw a woman come out and peg her washing on the clothesline. However, they also saw “bright soldiers” standing all around her and so they withdrew and did not attack. Yet the woman’s family had not been there and there were no soldiers either. She was alone. Who were the soldiers in white robes? There were many similar testimonies of people who had miraculous escapes.

I was called on for army Chaplain Duty. It was an unenviable task. I had to minister to bereaved families who had lost sons, husbands or brothers in battle. I visited people in homes and hospitals. Andrew Fleming Hospital in Salisbury was at the time one of the best equipped hospital in Central Africa but it was full of soldiers. Yet there was a community spirit of care and courage.

Up in the hills at Inyanga was a special place of recovery for wounded soldiers, called Tshanga Lodge. It was run by a dedicated staff of Christians.

All over the country people from all walks of life were suffering and yet there was a spirit of courage and fortitude and many people of all races were seeking spiritual renewal. I never felt endangered or unwanted by the great majority of people all bravely facing the suffering and adversity.

## *Chapter 16 –*

*Richard pointing to the plough under which he fell and survived. The photo shows the heavy, razor sharp discs that went right over him.*



### **People of Faith and Courage**

In the Middle Sabi River area there was extensive wheat crop under irrigation. During the 1970s a Christian community had grown there and a spiritual renewal took place. The farms stretched along the banks of the Sabi River in the hot, dry valley and water from the river made it an ideal agriculture area. In the surrounding hills that overlooked the valley was a pioneer settlement from the late 1800's called Chipinge. Alan, a friend of mine, was the local minister and the community experienced a revival. Descendants of the original pioneers came to church services and a strong Christian community grew. I was fortunate to go there and minister.

An astounding event considered almost a miracle happened. Richard, one of the farmers, fell beneath a heavy eight disc plough as it was

digging deep into the red alluvial soil. When the tractor driver felt the plough hit him and literally go right over him he stopped the tractor and walked back expecting to see the man torn to shreds. He found him alive and in fact totally unharmed. There was no reasonable explanation. At a time when many horrible things were happening this event touched people in the community and hearts opened to believe in the Lord's goodness and protection.

Michael was a member in our Umtali (Mutare) church but he went into ministry and mission work and moved to Chipinge. He conducted outreach throughout the district to both Black and White people and also went into Mozambique. At that time that country had just come out of a long bitter war of liberation and the people were war weary with many casualties and severe poverty. Now a civil war broke out between the two liberation factions; Frelimo that had formed the government and Renamo that was in opposition. Once again the people were flung into despair and absolute destitution as communities were decimated and crops failed.

Michael went into Mozambique on foot walking vast distances along tracks and footpaths with nothing but what he and his companions could carry. At great risk to himself and through many near death experiences he won the acceptance of the military leaders and brought the Gospel to multitudes of people.

Rob and his wife Elaine farmed in the Chipinge area and also experienced an extraordinary call of God upon their lives. Ellie came from a pioneer family and her dad was killed during the liberation bush war but despite this they had a deep love for people which compelled them also to go into Mozambique to help that suffering, war torn nation. At that time Mozambique was still involved in the cruel civil war. After the Portuguese pulled out in 1975 the opposing liberation factions fought one another. The nation sank into a quagmire of poverty, starvation and disease. Labelled the poorest nation in the world at that time many, many people were dying. Yet the conditions of starvation and poverty were entirely man made.

When Michael moved his ministry activities to Sudan Rob managed to buy an old plane that had stood neglected at a local airfield. It needed to be rebuilt so he laboriously restored it. He then put himself through pilot training and with no international aid they began a flying ministry into the poorest country in the world landing on rough bush hewn landing strips. They bought food, clothes and medicines and flew supplies into remote villages where people were totally forgotten by the outside world and never received any kind of help or compassion from anyone.

Michael went to the Sudan and ministered the Gospel in that nation as it also went through a horrendous civil war between the Muslim north and the Christian south long before Southern Sudan gained Independence. Millions of Christians and others perished during this conflict. He established a school and Christian outreach. When he left Sudan he went to Malawi and established a Christian Secondary School and College. He continues to minister as an international missionary into many nations.

Another man who sacrificed for the people of Mozambique was old man Gorge. He had no resources but he gave himself in endless self sacrifice. He walked hundreds of miles on the narrow paths of Mozambique visiting villages to help the starving people. Gorge was an elderly White who had become a Christian late in life. He dedicated the remainder of his life to helping the war-ravaged people of Mozambique. He was based in Umtali but spent most of his time somewhere deep in the interior of the bush seeking people he could help with food and clothes. For years this task took all his energy and he eventually succumbed to exhaustion and went to be with his Lord. He was a bit like David Livingstone.

## *Chapter 17 – Death and Deliverance*



### ***Murder Most Foul and the Bishop who became Prime Minister***

The slaughter of missionaries was not a random incident. The general policy of many communist fighters was to neutralise church leaders and especially evangelical Christians. With the escalation of the war trouble came into towns. I was now based in Harare and early one morning I had a phone call from a member of our congregation. There had been an attack on their home. I jumped out of bed, pulled on my clothes and drove to their home not far away. The house looked sombre, deserted, with an air of foreboding. The front door was ajar and I peered in but could not see or hear anything. I stepped

into the hall and walked to the living room. Lying sprawled on the floor in the middle of the room was the body of a man with blood spattered around. It was her husband I knew so well. His body lay where he had fallen defending himself and his family. So as not to disturb anything I carefully stepped over the body and not knowing whether the killers were still inside made my way down the passage to the bedroom guided by muffled sobs. Here I found the widow in a state of shock with her son, also in a state of shock, trying to comfort her. The police had not yet arrived. The perpetrators had already made their get away.

This marked the beginning of a new awareness for me of urban violence and the murder of defenceless civilians that did not abate during the next three decades and escalated into wide spread massacres after Independence.

John Bradburne was an extraordinary man who lived at the Leper Colony at Mutemwa and my wife had known him. He was a Catholic lay priest who gave up everything to care for the leper colony in a village near Mutemwa. He was a highly decorated British soldier, an eccentric man but well regarded by the people with whom he lived. One day he was murdered. His body was found lying on a road in a pool of blood. There was no rhyme or reason for his death. All in the community knew that it was the work of a faction of so-called “freedom fighters.” This was the sort of thing they did. They would single out the most prominent local citizens, those that seemed to do the most good for the community, and then murder them in the most awful manner possible. It put fear into everyone and spread the message that anyone who did not support the “liberators” would also be killed. Strange accounts were witnessed after his death. Those who approached his body heard a choir singing yet saw no one. The body was guarded by a huge white “bird” and three beams of light ascended from the body. Were they angels? Many think so.

The murder of John Bradburne was a shock to everyone for many considered him to be a living saint. His funeral service was held in the Catholic Cathedral in Salisbury and a large crowd attended. Then a

strange phenomenon occurred. In the middle of the service, attended by many hundreds of people, attention was drawn to the fact that fresh blood was dripping out of the casket and had formed a small pool on the floor. The sight of the blood disturbed people and a tissue was put over it. After the service the casket was opened but no cause could be found for what had happened. However, his Last Will and Testament stipulated that his body should be buried in the Habit of his Catholic order and this was discovered not to have been carried out. His Habit was then placed on the body and the gasket sealed. People were stunned by the event and took it as a sign from above.

After months of negotiations between the White government and internal Nationalist leaders an agreement was signed and in April 1978 African voters went to the ballot box for the first time ever. The poll had an overwhelming 64% of the national vote and a substantial majority of them voted for Bishop Muzorewa who represented the African National Council party. Six years earlier, back in 1972, he had led the ANC to reject a constitutional offer supported by Britain that would have brought a fairly rapid phased transition to majority rule. One can but wonder how things would have turned out if only he had accepted it.

Many of the nationalist leaders had close links with missions in the country. Most had been educated in mission schools of various denominations. Joshua Nkomo, who was considered by many to be the father of nationalism in Zimbabwe was in fact a Presbyterian Minister. Ndabaningi Sitole was a Reverend and so was Abel Muzorewa. Robert Mugabe was a product of Catholic missions. It was at times a little confusing to tell the difference between reverends and revolutionaries.

Bishop Muzorewa was a Methodist minister. Although he was versed in the Bible the Bishop was not versed in the ways of intrigue, plotting and double talk and was no match for the external political leaders who had refused to participate in the national vote. He was to be out-manoeuvred on every hand and would soon fall from favour as the war raged on.

Then in March 1980 new elections were conducted on the insistence of the British Government. These were anything but free and fair for the various nationalist factions and their different supporters perpetrated intimidation and violence. Mugabe's radical and violent Zanu PF party won the victory. However, right up to the very last we had been assured that the moderate government of the Bishop would win the day and when he did not many people despaired. The tension now was tangible. Trucks of chanting bush fighters came in from the bush and sped through the cities. Grim faced Rhodesian troops manned the streets. For a while it looked like a big "punch up" was coming. There was talk by Army Chiefs of an impending coup and a rumour went around of a plan to kill all the "boys from the bush" and, if need be, to send the whole country up in smoke in a scorched earth policy. Many people felt betrayed and there was fear and bitterness. The situation was as volatile as any situation could get, anything could happen. It was a time of madness. White women and children were sent out of the country. We held our breath. The nation stood on the brink of anarchy, poised on a blood letting. We feared a Congo type blood bath. Thousands of undisciplined fighters let off rifles, beat up people, jeered at whites and killed "sell-outs." The Rhodesian Army took up strategic positions. There were visions in our minds of a repeat of Mozambique Independence when whites abandoned their homes and fled, and of the Congo when both Whites and Blacks were massacred. Would we get out alive was the question on our minds.

A huge crowd of many thousands gathered to meet the leader of ZanuPF, Robert Mugabe, when he flew in to a hero's welcome at Salisbury airport. This was his day of triumph and he was the Messiah. Soon after this he was inaugurated as Premier of the new country of Zimbabwe. Later he was described by his followers as "God's second Son". It was not too long before the Bishop was arrested and imprisoned on a trumped up charge. When he was eventually released from jail he went into exile in the USA. Over the years he had worked towards majority rule but when it came he had to run away!

Robert Mugabe was educated in a Catholic Mission. Later he trained

as a teacher but soon joined the nationalist movement. He was imprisoned by the Rhodesians and something very sad happened to him while in detention. His young son born in exile in East Africa died. When this news reached Mugabe he pleaded with the authorities to allow him to travel outside the country to attend his funeral. His pleas fell on deaf ears because the authorities could not believe that he would return voluntarily and his request was denied. This profoundly affected him and in his deep sorrow he resolved to fight the white regime. When he was eventually released from detention he left Rhodesia to join the external liberation movement that was working for the violent overthrow of the white government. His mission education and his ruthless determination soon made him leader of the Zanu Patriotic Front.

Christians, both Black and White, had been praying for peace to come to the country. The miracle some had prayed for, that the communist-trained “Marxist” party should be defeated, never materialised. However, perhaps there was a miracle after all, for the widespread massacre of thousands of people was averted. Under the Lancaster House agreement brokered by Britain the “freedom fighters” came in from the countryside and were gathered in large camps throughout the country. The plans by elements within the Army to eliminate them never came about. The army had actually surrounded important camps and was poised to strike. The order never came. The “freedom fighters” also had a plan. They threatened that if they did not “win” the election they would “go back to war” with brutal consequences on thousands of defenceless people. However, instead of violence came restraint. The troops did not break discipline and remained controlled in the face of extreme provocation. It was a miracle that the country did not plunge into bloodshed.

## *Chapter 18 –*



### *A Royal Steed*

## **Zimbabwe Independence – 1980**

After Independence I spent time contemplating the future and while in prayer gained insight concerning what was to come. I had a vivid vision of central Harare in violent turmoil as men in military uniforms and helmets fought pitched street battles. The vision was so real that I knew one day it was to occur. Although I did not know when I felt convinced that sometime in the future the country would sink into a state of anarchy that would plunge the whole nation into crisis, cause violent conflict even in the capital and reach the halls of government. I shared this with church leaders but, as with my previous prediction, it was not received by most and played down as fertile imaginations of an over stressed mind. So many people wanted stability so badly that anything less was not considered.

Shortly after Independence the denomination I worked with held a general meeting of ministers and missionaries. About fifty leaders, pastors and missionaries attended and each was given an opportunity

to share what they were going to do now that the country had achieved independence. Many people had been exposed to terrible things and most had suffered emotionally and psychologically. Some of them had themselves experienced tragedy and others had emotional breakdowns of various kinds. We were all casualties of the conflict for we had been in the “front line” for many years. Many whites in church congregations wanted to leave the country and white congregations were shrinking rapidly as a general exodus took place. Churches were generally comprised either of English speaking people or indigenous language people, in other words either White or African members although there was no discrimination in churches. Ministry became increasingly difficult as English speaking congregations began to shrink and could no longer financially support their ministers. Although we worked with Africans our funds came from White congregations. While the World Council of Churches poured vast amounts of money into “liberation movements” much of which had undoubtedly been used for warfare, local Christians had sacrificed financially to help improve the lot of Africans. For many years both Black and White churches had worked together and we had racial harmony. However, things changed when churches were infiltrated with politically motivated leaders. This came clear to me with a shock when at a gathering I opened my eyes during prayer to see African church leaders giving black power salutes and then using the forum to preach politics. It opened my eyes to the tensions that divided us. Many whites were conservative in stance and feared the future because of the rhetoric from African Nationalist leaders and the appalling track record of some independent nations.

At this general meeting of ministers emphasis was placed on remaining in the country despite all the uncertainty and danger. I was only one of a very few who said I would leave. I was still young and could start again in another country. After the conference several men gathered around me and began to dispute my decision saying that “as a shepherd of the Lord it was my duty to stay and tend the sheep”. I advised them that I would reconsider. I recalled that the new President had on national TV asked Whites to stay and make Zimbabwe their home and that many people needed help now more

than ever. My own colleagues wanted me to stay. I decided I would do so. It was a decision of my heart not my brain. Of all those people who attended that meeting I know of very few who remained in the country. I stayed despite my conviction that it would lead to trouble in more ways than one but that it was where I should be. I loved Africa, the people and the land of Zimbabwe.

Soon after this another conference was held for the English speaking congregations of my denomination which had historical and spiritual links with church leadership in South Africa. After much conflicting deliberation it was decided that the new political situation compelled cutting links with South African with whom there had been union for many years. The reason given as I understood it was that the new realities in Zimbabwe, now an independent African nation, made it unacceptable to remain under authority of leaders in the Apartheid State. However, there was internal discord and much hurt which broke the fellowship. We had just been through a nasty war, were weary, traumatised and shell shocked and now faced an uncertain future. I felt I could not support the decision and withdrew from the denomination. From now on I would be on my own but I continued to minister and remained in fellowship with as many denominations and leaders as possible both in and outside the country. Somehow we all became more challenged for now there were new borders and new issues of confrontation. New fellowships would be forged within the country as Christians of all denominations and races came together in times of reconciliation and blessing.

## *Chapter 19 – THE DARKNESS CAME*

*An abandoned village.*



### **Persecution, Conflict and Torture**

Shortly after Independence saboteurs blew up a number of Zimbabwean Air Force aircraft. They breached the security at the main air base at Gweru and destroyed several planes including some brand new Tornado jet fighters purchased from Britain.

The aftermath was far reaching. The Zimbabwe Government was embarrassed and angry. A witch-hunt was conducted in traditional African style, which meant that suspects were arrested, physically abused, forced to confess and then declared guilty. Six top-ranking White officers were detained and subjected to medieval methods of torture in order to get confessions. They were held illegally for

months under appalling conditions, suffered torture including electric shocks, were deprived of sleep, isolated in solitary confinement and barely fed. For most of this period their whereabouts were kept secret and family and lawyers prohibited visits. All six men were badly beaten and eventually broke under the treatment. They “confessed” to a crime they never committed. Many cynical comments passed around at the time. When they were eventually brought out for a news report a journalist asked one of them, *“When they said they were going to charge you did you realise they meant with electricity?”*

Why I mention this incident is not to draw attention to the politics but to the faith. Daily prayer vigils were held by combined churches in Harare where people of all races met every lunch hour. The High Court ordered the release of the detainees but they were promptly re-arrested on the direct orders of the Minister of Defence. Western governments were impotent to change anything and they continued to languish in jail. Eventually after many months the men were brought to trial and acquitted. The State had no case but they were immediately re-arrested and detained on the direct instructions of the Minister of Home Affairs, a particularly obnoxious individual who vowed they would “rot in prison”. After more threats and even more tears all of them were fortunate enough to be deported from the country they served so loyally. They faced uncertain futures abroad. They had been so badly treated it would take a long time for them to fully recover. However, while in prison their faith had been strengthened and when released they were able to build new lives elsewhere despite having lost all their worldly possessions. The Minister who was responsible soon died, of Aids it was rumoured, and Britain and Western nations continued to pour financial aid into Zimbabwe.

The really bad thing was that torture was now becoming widespread in Zimbabwe jails. There was an element within the powers that did not hesitate to use brutal ways.

In the early 1980’s a veneer of peace settled upon the country but underneath was violence and slaughter. In Matabeleland commercial

farmers came under attack from what were called *dissidents*, ex-Zipra combatants who, it was alleged, were sponsored by Apartheid controlled South Africa. Farmers were brutally killed and cattle rustled. The Zimbabwe army moved in. Not only was tension very high between Zimbabwe and South Africa but there was much ill feeling between internal factions of the new Zimbabwe army. The army itself was comprised of three different hostile forces, the remnants of the colonial Forces, and the Zanla and Zipra forces who had always opposed each other even while fighting. Inter-faction friction was still a problem. In 1983 the regime moved the North Korean trained 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade into the Matabeleland province.

The Fifth Brigade started their campaign by conducting “*pungwes*,” a term given for all-night indoctrination meetings during which party songs were sung and “sell outs,” or traitors, were weeded out and punished. Everyone in the community had to attend, even little children. Being subjected to days without sleep was in itself a means of torture and subjugation. After so-called “sell outs” had been identified they were beaten in front of the people. Witnessing such brutality and hearing the screams of the suffering victims had a devastating effect upon the people. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, which causes long term depression, dysfunction and even death, was the result. “*Pungwes*” were no different from the barbaric “sniffing out” ceremonies conducted by witchdoctors in medieval Africa. In Matabeleland people were killed in public executions conducted by the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade. A large number were murdered at Lupane. Sixty two men and women were publicly shot in one incident alone. The Fifth Brigade leader was called “Comrade Jesus” a well known official in the regime. He had a special speech that he gave when he came to a community. This is some of what he would say: “*I have gallons of blood in my car. The blood comes from people. My life is to drink human blood. I want more blood because my supply is running low and so I have come to this place to kill and get more blood.*” One can imagine what this did to his audience. He certainly was not a comrade and definitely nothing to do with the real Jesus.

People were taken away and never seen again. Torture camps were

set up, the most notorious being “Bhalagwe” where many thousands of people are said to have been tortured and killed; it was called Zimbabwe’s Auschwitz where methods of cruel torture were committed; beatings and floggings, being held underwater until the victims were nearly drowned, having a cloth stuffed down ones throat and then having water poured into it, electrical shock treatment, forced sex, arms tied tightly to restrict flow of blood, gang rapes, the list is diabolical. All this has been denied but the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe records many of these atrocities. Mass executions took place. Often the people were not allowed to bury the corpses and they were left to rot. Any bereaved people caught shedding tears were severely beaten. No one dared to cry for if they did they were beaten. Matabeleland became known as the “Land of no Tears.” Close friends told me how army trucks loaded with bodies moved through the streets of Bulawayo under cover of darkness. Hundreds of bodies were hurled down deserted mine shafts.

Horrific accounts came out of the province. A woman and her husband were accused of being “sell outs”. She was murdered in front of her husband and the whole village. They strung her up by her ankles, gouged out her eyes and lit a fire under her head and roasted her until she was dead. She screamed a lot. After that they killed her husband too. <sup>(1)</sup>

A close friend of ours, Alan, was witness to a murder. While in the employment of the Zimbabwe Roads department he had to journey into the rural area to inspect a bridge under repair. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade gave him a military escort. On the way back to town he noticed that the soldiers had detained a man who was held on the back of the truck. On a quiet stretch of road the truck stopped and the man marched into the bush where upon a shot rang out. The soldiers returned with only the handcuffs. Alan went into shock.

Eventually the Matabele leader Joshua Nkomo, leader of the opposition in parliament and considered by many as the true leader of African Nationalism, fled the country. In his book he estimated that

the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade killed over 20,000 civilians but others say this is a very conservative number. Many more must have died from their injuries and from starvation for the regime placed a food embargo on all Matabeland. No food was permitted to enter and all food found was confiscated or destroyed. Four hundred thousand people resorted to digging up roots and eating grass. Many elderly, weak and sick people died including many children. During the Argentina military rule in the 1970's it is estimated that 10,000 people went missing. In Zimbabwe many more perished. In fact, state-induced hunger caused the unrecorded deaths of many thousands. It was a bitter harvest. Britain said and did nothing. United Nations said and did nothing. Brave journalists risked their lives to expose it but the world did nothing. An excellent article appeared in a British newspaper but no one took up the story. Top officials of the British government confessed years later on BBC TV that they had known all along about these crimes against humanity and had done nothing. Now that Zimbabwe was "free" the attention world media gave to the sins of the colonial administration lapsed as the new regime got down to the serious and murderous business of staying in power. The Western press, blinded by its support for the liberation struggle against the Whites, now turned a blind eye to what Blacks did to Blacks. It seemed no one cared what happened to innocent and defenceless people. What we witnessed certainly was not democracy, it was more like genocide. It seemed the horrors committed on Africans were either ignored or excused. Many Zimbabweans felt totally abandoned.

The Catholic Commission for Peace in Zimbabwe researched and recorded atrocities and a written report was given to the President but nothing was done. Fortunately copies of the report were eventually made public but nothing was done. Catholic priests and missionaries verified the contents of the report for they had first hand encounters. It records barbarous crimes perpetrated by the regime's troops on innocent people. These were not isolated events but were an orchestrated government policy. It chronicles atrocities in only two provinces but there were eight others! What happened in the rest? The mind boggles. The world turned a blind eye to it. Yet western governments knew exactly what was happening! Officials who

conducted the genocide remained in power. No one was brought to account for these crimes against humanity and there is no lasting memorial to thousands of innocent victims of brutality, no roll call of the names of many who perished.

One ex-combatant and so-called “father of nationalism”, Edga Tekere, was a provincial leader in Manicaland, my homeland. He was a notable warlord and after Independence took it upon himself to kill all those against whom he held grudges. One was a white farmer he particularly despised. He and his band of thugs drove to the farm in broad daylight and hunted down the farmer and shot him dead in cold blood. Tekere was never brought to justice although he went through a sham trial in the Zimbabwe courts. I saw him one day at my bank. I was close up, in fact right next to him. With him were his body guards, bristling with weapons, men you did not want to meet on a dark night and he leaned over the counter and looked at the teller with eyes as dead as door nails. Tekere was a law unto himself. His men invaded the Anglican Church in Mutare where our friend John was priest. At that time Tekere was the political strong man for the town and he decided he would teach Christians a lesson. He and his storm troopers stormed the church, desecrated the sanctuary and occupied it for weeks. They lived in it, slept in it and defecated in it. All were powerless to stop him for he was untouchable by normal forces of law and order. He and his men eventually grew tired of their games and left. As perhaps one may imagine the church needed more than a sweep to clean it afterwards. What was worse was the political terror unleashed against Christians and all other people who did not support the regime.

## *Chapter 20 –*

### *The Mighty Victoria Falls.*



### **Missionaries and Mercenaries**

The Zimbabwe Police cracked down on all political opposition. Police road blocks became common. On one occasion I was stopped up at a police block and the officer bent down and peered into the car.

“Who are you? Where are you going?”

“I am a minister” I answered his first question.

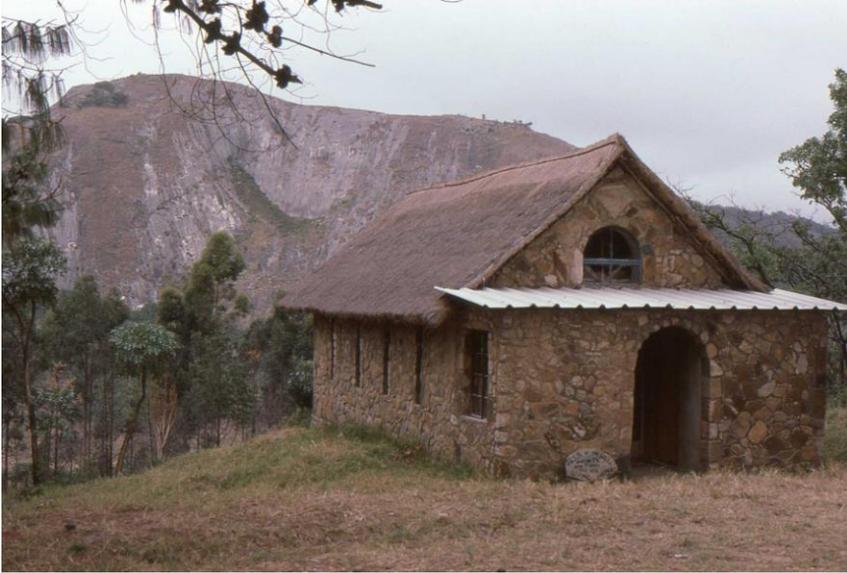
He got a shock and I could see his mind working overtime as he leapt to attention and waved me through the barriers thinking I was a Minister of Parliament. I chuckled as I looked in the rear view mirror and saw his colleagues remonstrating with him for there were very few whites indeed who were Ministers in the Zimbabwe Parliament.

On yet another occasion I was careful to give a totally different answer. The Zimbabwe police had arrested a group of American “missionaries” who had flown in with a number of rifles and ammunition in their possession. The missionaries said that these were part of their hunting equipment for not only had they come to

evangelise but also to do some part-time hunting, something some Americans liked to do in Africa. They were promptly thrown in jail and the police went on national alert believing an attempt to assassinate the President was imminent and fearing that other members of the “armed mercenary gang” were on the loose. At this time we were travelling from Victoria Falls to Bulawayo when the police stopped us at a roadblock. The officer leant down and asked me the same old questions. I knew this time that if I let on I was a missionary I would be detained as a potential assassin and so I was careful to evade the question by saying I was an artist. This was true for we had our own business selling art to foreign tourists who visited the country. It was our means to provide financially so we could continue our ministry. Church finances had dropped very low. Meanwhile the American missionaries languished in jail in appalling conditions and were subjected to the same old Zimbabwe methods of investigation before they were eventually released and deported. I wondered, however, if perhaps it had been a lesson for these evangelists who it seemed to me came to the country with wrong motives. Too often it seemed evangelists came from overseas, preached their sermons and claimed to win thousands of converts to their brand of Christianity and then departed leaving nothing substantial but a whole lot of wrong ideas. It was sometimes left for resident missions and ministers to try and correct the mess.

During those years there was a lot of evangelic outreach throughout Zimbabwe and into the rest of Africa. An overseas evangelist made his base just north of Harare on Tony’s farm. His team of evangelists travelled the African nations preaching in campaigns that were attended by hundreds of thousands if not millions of people many of whom made decisions for Christ. There is no question that Africa had opportunity during these years to hear about Jesus. State leaders also attended meetings in Zimbabwe. The wife of the then President Banana became a Christian. One afternoon my wife went to tea with Mrs. Banana and found her to be a lovely lady. Mugabe’s first wife, Sally, also attended the meetings and professed Christ as Lord. She came from Ghana and some people think it was her Christian influence that helped to keep some moderation on the regime.

## *Chapter 21 – Courageous People*



*A small rural church in the mountains of Inyanga.*

I was part of a small fellowship and we continued to help where possible. We visited a farm near Rusape and met a young man who as a lad had seen his dad gunned down by terrorists. Now, as a grown man and with deep Godly faith he had restored the farm and remade his family's lives. This was typical of the spirit of farmers. I visited farming areas to minister the Gospel to both the farmers and workers. I linked up with Paul and other ministers in other churches and visited rural areas. I started in Virginia district and held services in Macheke, Inyanga, Mutare, Nyanga, Concession, Selous, Kadoma, Bulawayo, Kariba, Karoi, Chinhoyi, Beatrice, Kadoma, Victoria Falls and Mangula speaking in halls, clubs, farm barns and family homes. I spoke at gatherings on farms where both white farmers and African staff attended. These meetings could number hundreds of people for the extended families of workers also lived on the farms and enjoyed

all the benefits of staff. We also went to communal lands and held meetings in schools, halls and villages. There was a spirit of reconciliation among most people. I had opportunity to minister in many different denominations throughout the land. People were helping each other in positive ways. I was able to go further afield to Zambia, Swaziland and South Africa. People were receptive everywhere. This was Christianity in action. The goodwill among people was amazing. There was renewed hope.

Every morning my wife caught a bus to work and sat next to an African woman who was a Christian. With one arm and one eye she walked with a severe limp. Her name was Mimie and she was a casualty of the war. The roads into rural villages were booby-trapped by insurgents but usually the local people knew where the mines were placed and avoided them but they killed security forces. Government soldiers were tired of being blown up so they took Mimie and her husband and made them sit in the front of an army vehicle as surety that there were no land mines planted on the road leading into their village. Unfortunately there was a landmine that Mimie was unaware of and the vehicle hit it. Her husband was killed and she was severely injured. We grew to love Mimie. She was a beautiful person who bore no malice and worked hard to bring up her only child despite getting no assistance or support from anyone.

Another dear person who became our close friend was Stella, the divorcee of a cabinet minister in the new government. She had remained faithful to him throughout the long liberation war when he had been in exile but on his return at Independence he had dismissed her for a younger woman. Now she was struggling to bring up her family. She was a member of our church and an example of inspiration and courage in difficulty. One day I had to go to the office of her ex-husband and do some business. A massive man, over weight with the good life, he sat in the plush surroundings of government and was very amiable but I felt I should not push him too far by mentioning my friendship with his ex-wife.

Jim was a man who was a member of our church in Redcliff. I

received an urgent request to visit him in the central hospital for he had been seriously injured in a quarry accident where he worked. He had received severe head injuries in a massive explosion and was rushed to hospital where the top brain surgeon in the country had operated on him. He was in Intensive Care and in critical condition. I went to the hospital and spoke to the surgeon.

“How is he?” I asked.

“He has survived the accident and also the surgery, so I am optimistic” the surgeon replied in a non-committal clinical sort of way. The surgeon had managed to minimise the bleeding but the extent of his injury was extremely grave. The tone of his words conveyed doubt as to whether he would survive and a very real possibility that he would be severely disabled if he did.

I then spoke to the matron in charge of the ward. Her prognosis was more descriptive and astonishing. Apparently Jim was paralysed down his entire right side and was unable to speak English. He could, however, talk fluently in a foreign language but no one understood a word he said. She wanted to know what nationality he was so as to get an interpreter and thereby communicate with him but John was English.

I walked into his ward with apprehension wondering what I would find. Jim lay very still but as I walked in a flicker of recognition flashed across his face. Then he began to speak in a most beautiful and fluent language evidently conveying something of great importance. Immediately I recognised the language of God’s Spirit and my heart leapt for joy. Together we praised God in worship and it seemed as if angels joined us in our praise. Our hearts were filled with thanksgiving. The nurses came in and were astonished and at that moment I knew deep in my own spirit that God would raise John up and restore him.

Sure enough he began to make an extraordinary recovery. Within a short time he was moving his fingers, then his hand and arm and then

his leg. He had to learn again how to speak English, a very frustrating process for him to recall vocabulary and grammar. But he persisted and grew stronger until he could walk, first with crutches and then with a stick. His extraordinary courage was a testimony to miraculous faith and healing. Everyone was astonished including doctors and nurses. But he never lost his spiritual language and continued to praise the Lord in it.

So life continued with a façade of normality. However, not all was well. An insidious evil stalked the land. Six foreign tourists were kidnapped on the main road from Bulawayo to Victoria Falls. They were never seen again. The Zimbabwe Army conducted a massive manhunt but only years later were their remains found. They had been bludgeoned to death.

At times the Lord was gracious enough to use me in gifts of the Spirit. On one occasion I was asked to visit a woman in hospital. She was about to have surgery the next day so I wanted to pray for her safety and full recovery. As I was about to pray I felt a check in my spirit and paused. I waited on the Lord and heard soft words of knowledge coming to me and as I listened I understood she was not going to survive the operation but would die during it. I was shocked but was not going to tell her what I heard. Instead I spent extra time with her encouraging her in her faith and salvation. When I eventually left she was assured of God's love and saving power and had a full assurance of her salvation through the Lord Jesus. She died and afterwards when I spoke with her family I was able to recount to them what had happened and they were enormously comforted.

I noticed that sometimes when Christians receive a "gift of knowledge" imparted to them they mishandle the information. If I had told that dear woman she would die she would have been distraught and fearful despite her faith. By using wisely the knowledge that the Lord gave me it became a source of much comfort. I think most spiritual knowledge one may receive is not for general sharing but entirely for one's own use. This information was given to me so that I could concentrate on her salvation not healing.

One Sunday in the midst of my sermon the Lord showed me a man in the congregation and quietly told me to be careful how I spoke with him because he was “a spy”. My course of action was to get to know him and win his confidence. Over several years we grew to love him and his family but at that time when the country was in the midst of conflict it could have been very serious to confide in him. But I got to understand him and in fact he ended up telling me all sorts of helpful things. To receive gifts of knowledge is a tremendous responsibility and should be handled without judgement or condemnation.

At times the Lord used me in gifts of knowledge when counselling people. After a time of ministry a woman came to me and requested a meeting with me but where no one could hear us so we sat on a bench out in the open. She was extremely troubled and just could not come out with her problem and I certainly was not going to compel her to say or do anything. She was in distress and deeply sad. As we sat together I quietly prayed for wisdom and immediately the Holy Spirit gently showed me exactly what her problem was. She was tormented and wracked with guilt about something she had done which caused her great sorrow. She was broken hearted. I knew what it was and I also knew the Lord had forgiven her. I gently spoke to her and said “The Lord has shown me what you have done and he wants you to know that he has forgiven you”. She collapsed in relief hardly able to comprehend what I said. Then she herself confessed the deed without me saying so. We prayed and she was healed, forgiven and restored.

The Lord sometimes gave me dreams to prepare me for future events or ministry. Several months before I had contact with someone I had a dream of him in which the Lord showed me something amazing about him and the personal battle he experienced in his life. The cause of this was clearly revealed. When I awoke I wondered what to do with the information and prayed for wisdom. The Holy Spirit told me to say and do nothing but impressed upon me the solution. About six months later the man unexpectedly contacted me and we had a counselling session in which he shared things I already knew. I told him about the dream and he was able to receive the instruction the Lord had already given me.

On another occasion I was asked to pray for a lady who I did not know, not even her name. It was during a collective gathering. She needed guidance and encouragement. I placed my hand on her shoulder and quietly waited for the Lord to show me how to pray. During this time I had a mental impression given to me; it was as if an electrical current was coursing through her and I saw sparkles of light radiating from her. Then I said; "I see sparks of light coming from you and touching others wherever you go."

Everybody within ear shot began to laugh. Oh dear, I thought, what have I said. After my prayer and the end of the service I asked what the joke was and why so much laughter. "Oh" I was told, "her name is Sparks. Now don't tell me the Lord hasn't a sense of humour."

On yet another occasion, again with a young lady, as I prayed for her I saw in my mind the unmistakable picture of a rose blossom beginning to open, petal by petal until in full flower it looked magnificent. I described this to the girl and she was visibly moved. Afterwards she told me her name was Rose. Now how kind is the Lord to speak so directly to His children.

Let me hasten to say that ministers should not touch anyone when in prayer if they are alone. Prayer should be done in groups and counselling, although totally confidential, should always be done in an area accessible to others so that no room is given to the enemy of our souls. Also, there is no scriptural instruction to cast out demons by laying on of hands in prayer but only by command in Jesus name.

I could give many examples but sufficient to say that God still has gifts of the Holy Spirit available and it is a pity that some leaders do not have the faith and maturity to use them. In the meanwhile God's precious children are left to struggle on without the aid they need. To be used in gifts of knowledge and understanding, prophecy and spiritual languages, one has to be yielded to the Lord's Spirit and not be judgemental towards the person concerned. The information is always confidential, must never be revealed publicly or to anyone, or used in a humiliating or disrespectful manner but always handled with

compassion, humility and never condemnation. One has to be like Jesus, not judging but forgiving; these gifts are used to minister healing and salvation not judgement or condemnation.

How we judge others is how we will be judged ourselves. In Africa there is a little bird called a Honey Guide. It is very clever. It loves to eat honey and once it has found a hive it will call and call until eventually a passing hunter will hear the cry and come to see where the hive is. The bird will then lead him to the hive and he will be able to break it open and with smoke calm the bees and extract the honey. However, if he does not leave some honey for the bird it is said that the next time the bird sees him it will call and call until he follows and then lead him to a lion where upon he will be killed for his selfishness.

This is a reflection of our own hearts; if we are generous, kind and forgiving then God will be the same towards us but if we are mean, judgemental and harsh then we will suffer the consequences of our own actions.

## *Chapter 22 –*

### *The Lion of Africa and the Honey Guide*



### *A Healing Visitor*

Sometimes my wife would come with me into remote areas where malaria was rampant. During the days of the British colony malaria was greatly reduced. However, during the bush war facilities broke down. Health officials could no longer go into rural districts and many hospitals and clinics were destroyed. Stagnant pools where mosquitoes bred were no longer treated so malaria increased and reached epidemic proportions. Many people were dying especially those who also had HIV. Their immune system had no resistance to fight malaria. Virulent new forms of malaria also developed and it was not unknown for someone to collapse and die of malaria within a day or two. Malaria causes high fever and hallucinations. Cerebral malaria was particularly dangerous.

We came back from a trip to the Zambezi Valley and we both seemed well. However, on the tenth day my wife suddenly went down with a high fever, terrible headaches and cold shivers. Malaria normally

takes exactly ten days from when one is bitten by a mosquito to when it breaks out in the body. Our doctor confirmed our worst fears, it was indeed malaria. At this stage there is nothing that can be done but let it take its course and treat it with the appropriate anti-malaria medication.

Many of the early missionaries succumbed to this disease and my wife was now very ill with cold sweats, shivers and shaking, followed by blinding headaches. She lay in bed for several days without any change despite the medication. The days seemed better than the evenings when all the symptoms seemed to worsen. One night I awoke in the small hours of the morning. Something very strange had woken me. I was aware that “somebody” was walking on top of the bed. The room was dark but soft light from the stars and a waning moon streamed through the window and lit the bed allowing me to see that there was no one there. Yet as I lay with my eyes open I followed the silent footsteps and felt them make their way down the side of the bed, along the bottom and then up on her side. The footsteps were gentle but firm. It was an extraordinary event and I lay very still not wanting to disturb our invisible visitor who was walking around us. This was a real unmistakable heavenly visitation.

My heart was full of peace and it seemed as though my wife became more peaceful. Within a day she was on the road to recovery. I said nothing to her about our strange visitor in the middle of the night for I did not want to upset her. After a day she was well enough to get up and made a full recovery and has never had a recurrence, something that usually occurs with malaria. She was fully healed.

When she was better she said something to me.

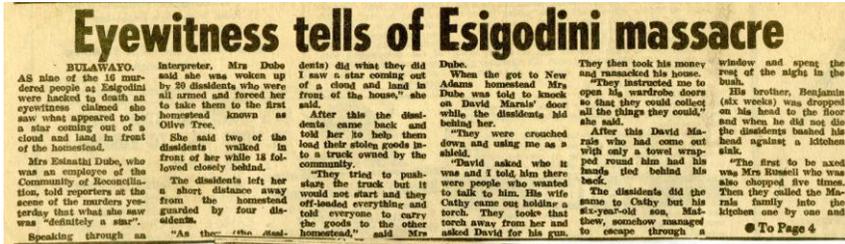
“Remember when I was so ill, I felt somebody walking on the bed”.

“Yes” I replied “I felt it too”. In this way I was able to confirm this extraordinary visitation at a time when she was desperately ill and needed a healing touch from the Lord in an hour of sickness. I could independently verify to her that she was not hallucinating but that

“someone” had actually walked on the bed.



## Chapter 23 – Our Friends Hacked to Death



### *Missionaries Abducted and Christians Killed*

In the mid-eighties we joined a Christian community in the beautiful farming area of Enterprise Valley about twenty five miles north east of Harare. This district was a prime agriculture area where farms had been developed over several generations and produced fresh vegetables and fruit for the capital city. Commercial farmers had worked very hard in developing a strong agricultural base to the nation. This was achieved in the face of great hardship for the land was totally undeveloped when they started and the resilient farmers had to overcome many difficulties to achieve their success. The British colony was famous for its dairy, beef and crops and this farming tradition continued after Independence through the dedication of many commercial farmers. Shiloh Shalom was a Christian mission based on a farm owned by friends of ours. It was founded for prayer and Christian service to local African people in the nearby Communal Lands. Denis was an ex-captain in the British army and had fought in the Far East. He was also a dairy farmer and loved his Jersey "mombies." He was especially proud of the thick yellow cream they produced and we had fresh dairy produce every day. His wife Joan was a good cook so we ate simply but well with healthy fresh farm vegetables. Many local and international visitors came to the mission and we had many good times. However, the

sweet aroma of our prayers ascended in the midst of strong odour for we were right next door to a pig farm and the smell was at times quite overpowering. I went off pork for good.

One night we were deep in sleep on the mission farm at Enterprise when we awoke to a tremendous earth-shattering explosion. We sat bolt upright in bed. It felt as though the whole earth had exploded and everything was shaking. It sounded like a mighty bomb and we wondered whether the Liberation War had started all over again. A bright light lit the entire outside landscape, flooded the inside of our bedroom and then gradually faded. It turned out to be a large meteorite that had exploded as it entered the atmosphere right above us. The whole earth shook. Somehow it was the prelude to the next act.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1987 Renamo rebels abducted from Maforga Christian Mission in Mozambique our missionary friends Phil and Vicky together with their infant daughter. The Mission was a sister mission to our own and Phil was Denis and Joan's son. A civil war raged in Mozambique and Renamo rebels were fighting against Frelimo Government Forces. The rebels had warned the mission at Maforga that they must close down but the missionaries refused to do so. One night a band of rebels came and closed the mission for them. It was early in the night when Phil and Vicky heard the sound of gunfire. They gathered everyone together and prayed and then Phil and Vicky and their infant daughter, plus dear old Joan affectionately known as Nana and several others all squeezed in to the toilet. It was a most frightening experience. They could hear the rebels moving through the mission trashing buildings, burning vehicles and destroying equipment. Babies were screaming, chickens were cackling and people shouted in confusion as they ran for their lives. When the rebels got to their house they burst in and moved from room to room. Phil put his strong arms around his family and silently prayed committing them all into the hands of the Lord; the missionaries trusted the Lord but feared the worst. Suddenly the toilet door was flung open and the barrel of an AK automatic rifle was thrust in. They looked down the tunnel into what seemed certain

death. Rough hands grabbed them and hauled them out and marched them off into the dark African night to the sound of the crackling flames of the burning mission and exploding fuel tanks of vehicles. It was the start of a most gruelling experience.

They were interrogated and thankfully it soon became evident that the rebels had no intention of harming them. Instead they set out on what was to become one of the most gruelling experiences ever imaginable. During the next four months they marched right across Mozambique through hundreds of kilometres of bush and dense jungle crossing deep rivers and climbing mountains, walking at night and hiding by day. They lived off the little they could get from poverty stricken people along the route and bush food, such as caterpillars and rats. Their route criss-crossed the steps of the great explorer David Livingstone who had walked those same rough paths over a hundred years before.

Back at home we waited and prayed but no word of them came for months. Eventually a message got through that they had arrived in Malawi where they were handed into the care of the American Embassy. They had walked hundreds of miles, crossed the mighty Zambezi River in dugouts and eventually arrived in Malawi. During the forced march they had won the hearts of their captors and no harm had come to them. In fact the tough, hardened bush fighters had done everything possible to feed them and care for them especially the little baby even going without their own food to give her extra. The account of this amazing journey and incredible deliverance is a story all on its own. How they survived the rigors of this march through the bush especially with such a young infant is a miracle. After such an arduous experience one would think it would cure anyone of the mission field but soon afterwards they were back on the job. Phil and his family eventually left Africa to foreign shores where they could bring up their children in safety.

Shortly afterwards another mission with which we were linked was also attacked, this time in Matabeleland. On the night of November 25<sup>th</sup> 1987 and the early hours of the 26<sup>th</sup> sixteen Zimbabwe Christians

at a farm near Hope Fountain just south of Bulawayo were savagely hacked to death. The Community of Reconciliation had as its aim to reach local people in a spirit of reconciliation, to help them with their agriculture and to share the truth and love of God in the Gospel. The mission comprised two small adjoining farms one called New Adams and the other Olive Tree, beautifully situated as they nestled between majestic granite hills near the renowned Matobo World Heritage National Park. Hope Fountain, an early mission started in 1871 by the London Missionary Society, was very near to the farms. Christian witness had been active here for more than a hundred years and there could be no more dedicated Christians as those at the Mission of Reconciliation.

Hazel was a member of the community. She was our friend. We had known her many years. She had an adventurous spirit and with her family had spent eight years on the high seas of the Atlantic Ocean. She had sailed around the Caribbean and other places but her heart called her back to Zimbabwe to serve her nation and the people she loved. She was part of a fellowship with which we had close links just north of Harare on the farm of our friend Tony. He and his family were precious believers who were well known in the community for their charity and generosity. A church met on the farm and many people, both Africans and Whites, joined in fellowship. One glorious day I was privileged to baptise Hazel in the swimming pool on the farm. All our friends were there, the sun shone brightly and we sang songs of praise to Jesus our great Saviour and Friend. Hazel had a very tender heart for the people of Zimbabwe and dedicated herself to their service. The mission farms began to blossom and so did the local community. The aim of the community was to help indigenous people and demonstrate the teaching of Christ in sacrificial ways, to give aid to the women and mothers in the care of their families and other essential help to the men with instruction in agriculture. Everything was geared to help the local people. Communion life is never easy and they had to work through many issues but a depth of commitment grew among the families and the local community.

After some years, however, the Christians faced a grave test. Even

though the farms had been legally purchased squatters moved on to the farms and claimed that the spirits of their ancestors gave them the right to be the true owners. A gang of dissident squatters, incited by local *ngangas*, threatened the community with dire consequences if they did not immediately abandon the farm and move away. The Christians tried to negotiate but things grew worse. They prayed earnestly and decided that despite the threats they should remain on the land and continue their work. That very night a terrorist gang of twenty “pseudo squatters” attacked the defenceless farmers. The killers came under cover of darkness and forced an African woman who was an employee at the mission to lead them to the two homesteads. They entered the first home and tied the hands of the men, women and children behind their backs and then, one by one, axed them to death. Then they moved onto the next house and repeated their ghastly act. A young six-year old lad managed to wriggle from their grasp and scramble out of a window and run for his life into the wild African bush. His newly born baby brother just six weeks old had his head bashed in against the kitchen sink. Hazel was the first to be axed but her young daughter was spared. The last words we know Hazel said was as she was led into the room where she was to be killed. She turned to one of the fellow believers and said “We are going home tonight.” It took several blows to kill Hazel and then one by one the others were killed including another baby. It was a repeat of the Elim massacre. Only the young girl and little boy survived. When the police were called they found the gruesome, grizzly evidence. One homestead had been totally gutted by fire leaving only unrecognisable charred human remains but in the other homestead bits of flesh and hair, congealed blood and corpses was all that remained. Sixteen people were murdered and the perpetrators left behind an abusive letter telling all people of “Western and capitalist orientation” to leave the land.

Yet something else very strange had happened that night as these men had carried out their horrendous deed. The local people told of it afterwards. When the gang went into the homes and did their awful act the African Christian members had been left outside and had witnessed an amazing thing. They saw what appeared like a “star” in

a bright white “cloud” descended to both houses. It shone brightly and lit the black night with its radiance. One of the gang shouted “Switch off the light” but it was not an earthly light. It came to both homes after the occupants were killed and remained for a while and lit the gardens and vicinity before lifting and departing. What did it mean? Scripture has much to say about angels and the “Cloud of the Lord’s Presence”.

Another extraordinary event shortly after this was that one of the first people on the scene found an open Bible lying as if discarded in haste but it was open at Psalm 52, a Psalm that tells of God’s blessing upon the righteous “as on a green Olive Tree” and of judgement upon wicked people who do them violence. This is remarkable when one considers that the name of the community was Olive Tree and that there is but one such reference in the entire Bible!

We motored from Harare to Bulawayo to attend the funeral service in the city hall. The deceased were well known and a big crowd had gathered. People spilled onto the streets. An air of solemnity, sorrow and awful shock rested upon the proceedings. Many churches were represented. It was a sobering affair. A sombre atmosphere pervaded the gathering and somehow we knew that there was more to their martyrdom than we could understand. The Community of Reconciliation was dead and our hearts had taken a severe blow. These victims, thirteen white Zimbabweans, two Americans and one Briton, had sacrificed their lives to bring reconciliation in a land that had been divided by a tragic war. They had shown genuine and sincere reconciliation and Christian service towards the people whom they loved. They had represented the sacrificial attitude of many Christians, African and European. They had all perished. Why had it happened? No one seemed to understand.

Our friend and resident adviser to the mission had been overseas getting much needed equipment for it. He came back to a community that was totally annihilated. He was devastated by the events. He met with local administrators, district governors, local MPs and the police, and even went as high as the Vice President to get help to move the

squatters off the farm or resolve the problem in some other way. No one helped him. After exhausting all human agencies and being a spiritual man he asked the Lord in prayer what he should do and got a distinct message from the Spirit of the Lord; *“Do nothing for ten years.”* It was a strange answer to his prayer. It seemed that nothing was going to be resolved quickly and that ten years had been allocated for the outworking of the matter. He shared this at a Christian conference attended by church leaders but it seemed his words were never taken seriously and I became concerned about our lack of understanding. In the meanwhile the President had gone on national TV to assure the nation that the perpetrators of the crime would be hunted down and brought to justice. He described the act as one of *“unbridled savagery demonstrating a killer instinct and a thirst for human blood of unparalleled proportions.”* He went on to say *“the security forces have been fully mobilised to track down these bloody evildoers and bring them to justice”* and *“their tragic death in defenceless circumstances must move the heart of every peace-loving Zimbabwean.”*

It did not take long to catch the perpetrators for they were known thugs. Their leader and others involved were arrested and brought to trial, found guilty and, in keeping with Zimbabwe law, sentenced to death. As already mentioned, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Zimbabwe army had since 1983 subjected the whole of Matabeleland to the most heinous crimes of genocide in order to force the Matabele people to join the ruling party. The aim of the regime was to destroy parliamentary opposition and establish a One Party State. Shortly after the massacre of the Community of Reconciliation the ruling party ZanuPF comprised mostly of Shona people and Joshua Nkomo’s opposition party Zapu comprised mostly of Matabele did in fact resolve their differences, on paper at least. What was called the “Unity Accord” was signed, which joined the two factions as one. The accord was seen by Nkomo as the only way to stop the severe persecution of the people as well as the violence against white farmers. The Matabele people are a dignified and proud people. From what we saw at the funeral it was evident to us that these diabolical killings were the last straw for them. The killing of defenceless whites

brought great shame to them and also a realisation that nothing would stop the subjugation of the Matabele people. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade had already killed in excess of 20,000 people. The true figure will never be known, probably many, many thousands when one counts the elderly and infants who died of starvation. It is significant that it was the massacre at the Community of Reconciliation that had finally brought an end to the brutal killings in Mataberland. In some strange way the community had fulfilled its name.

With the capitulation of the Matabele Zimbabwe became a de facto One Party State. In his book “The Story of My Life” Nkomo, considered by many to be the true father of African Nationalism in Zimbabwe, wrote that he wept when he saw what the country had become and denounced it as being undemocratic. However, President Mugabe soon declared himself President for life and everyone rejoiced, outwardly anyway. Then in a grand show of reconciliation he passed an amnesty that released thousands of people who had committed crimes. He pardoned and released the very perpetrators of the atrocity against the farmers. It was later alleged that the gang was the personal “hit squad” of politically powerful officials. The squatters remained on the farm. The significance of this was not missed by many people for it seemed that to kill Whites for land was quite acceptable to the regime. Was this justice, we wondered or an abuse of the law and a travesty of justice? It seemed our world had turned upside down, good was punished and evil triumphed. Exactly ten years into the future the appalling consequences of this policy would come to fruition when the regime would unleash their killers upon defenceless White farmers. The future for White farmers was numbered; they only had ten years left but most people missed this. Many of the farmers of Zimbabwe were hard working, the “salt of the earth” willing to go the extra mile to help their neighbours and care for others. Many of them had loyal staff workers who were absolutely committed to the farm where they quite often had good conditions; housing, free schooling, home grown food and other perks. When the regime decided to kick out the commercial farmers it was not because of staff discontent but the greedy officials who wanted to grab the land and maintain their own hold in government.

## *Chapter 24 –*



### ***Persecution in Mozambique***

Our friend Michael who at one time had been part of our congregation in our Umtali church was led by the Lord to go into Mozambique in the midst of war and violence and witness to the people and combatants. He risked his life to take the Good News of the Gospel to people who had no other way of hearing it. For years he laboured in the jungles and brought many to Christ. His amazing witness changed the course of history in that country. As mentioned Michael went on to become a missionary in Africa; in Sudan, Uganda, Malawi and he continues to minister internationally wherever the Lord sends him. When Michael was forced to withdraw Rob filled the gap. They continued their incredible witness to the Mozambique people.

After Rob got the old plane flying and learnt to fly he began to take Bibles, clothes and food to thousands of remote people whom the world had totally forgotten. Mozambique was in the grip of famine from the scorched earth policy conducted by during the liberation war. After independence the Marxist Frelimo regime unleashed a

horrific reign of terror to purge the land of everyone they considered to be their enemies, including Christians. Defenceless peasants were killed in cruel and barbaric ways. President Machel openly declared war on the church, *“I declare war on the church. I call on all Mozambicans to destroy this remnant of colonialism, this tool of capitalism, this instrument of division.”* He called priests *“monkeys”* and unleashed a campaign to destroy the church. A great persecution arose throughout the rural villages resulting in death and famine. Frelimo appealed for international aid which was channelled through Frelimo and went only to its own supporters leaving thousands of starving peasants without aid. The Renamo Resistance Movement gained an extensive following in their fight against this persecution and they *“liberated”* large areas of the country.

The Frelimo regime called on the Zimbabwe government to help them defeat Renamo and troops poured into Mozambique to guard the rail and pipeline from Beira and to assist Frelimo. Missionaries witnessed first-hand the way troops conducted this new war. They moved into Renamo villages, either by truck or helicopter, and systematically destroyed everything in the village; people were killed, old and young alike; women were bayoneted, children dashed to pieces. Others were rounded up and herded into huts that were set alight. It was a scorched earth policy using the same tactics used in the Liberation War. Eyewitness accounts tell how troops came to villages and totally destroyed them and burnt down churches. They systematically devastated crops and killed domestic animals leaving hapless survivors of their scorched earth policy to starve to death. As a result of this barbaric policy widespread famine overwhelmed the remaining people and hundreds of thousands died of starvation. People were publicly executed. Some things done are too hideous to describe. Hundreds of innocent people were sent to *“re-education camps”*. Many of them never came back.

The missionaries called international reporters to see what was happening. One reporter came from a well-known American magazine. He was appalled at the carnage but took no photos and made no notes. When asked why he was making no effort to record

what he saw he replied that he was unable to report the situation because his magazine, a world renowned news publication, had taken an official stance in favour of Frelimo. Other journalists also felt they too could not write the truth about these crimes against humanity. It just was not in vogue to reveal the carnage committed and would have been too costly for them to do so.

The influence that these missionaries and their associates had on the Renamo leadership was profound. They won their trust and sowed seeds of peace and became intermediaries in talks that eventually led to reconciliation. Rob was the only person the Renamo leader trusted to fly him from Mozambique to Kenya where talks were held which eventually brought peace to that war torn country. The little aircraft restored from standing discarded on a bush strip flew as an angel of peace. A new chapter of healing was opened for a country that had been raped and plundered and become the poorest nation in the world.

Today the Christian witness continues in Mozambique. Slowly the nation has recovered from this devastating period of violence and persecution. Since then Southern Sudan has gained its independence but some estimate that millions of Christians perished. Many Christians have suffered in these nations but the “church” still survives even though persecution continues.

## *Chapter 25 – Murders, Setbacks and Hardship*



*A little rural church at Odzi.*

A colleague of mine who was Chaplain in a local church often resorted for prayer to a quiet spot at Cleveland Dam a few kilometres out of Harare. I too used to go there for it was a beautiful place. The setting was conducive for quiet meditation among beautiful picturesque woodland and large granite boulders with birds calling in the trees and ducks on the lake. It was an idyllic place for a murder. One morning my colleague went out to the lake and was quietly sitting under some trees reading the scriptures and praying when two men crept up on him and jumped him from behind, stabbed him several times and went off with his wallet and car. He died on the spot. After that I never went back to the place, it had lost its appeal.

We spent much time counselling people including those who tried to take their own lives as well as those in hospital, the elderly, the distraught and others in trouble. Many people were under extreme stress. We were on constant call twenty-four hours a day and the phone rang day and night. One morning its sharp trill awoke me at

about 2.30am. A young woman was in a desperate state and wanted to take her life. She was not pretending for a few weeks previous to this a friend and I were called in to the hospital where she was having her stomach pumped out after taking an overdose of drugs.

At that early hour it was not possible for me to get to where she was so I spent the next hour counselling her over the phone. As I spoke with her I prayed and God's Spirit began to move. She asked questions and prayed the sinner's prayer and came to faith in Christ and was then wonderfully filled with the Lord's Spirit there and then as we prayed on the phone. As she yielded her life to God she was released into a prayer language in the Holy Spirit. When she put down the phone she was converted from a woman who had wanted to destroy herself to one filled with faith and hope. She went on to marry and have a child.

In 1994 friends of ours returned to Zimbabwe from UK to start an orphanage. Ben was a man with exceptional skills in building, carpentry, farming and other trades. Years before this he and his wife farmed at Wedza and our church had commissioned them into Christian work. They sold their farm and went into the mission field. It was a difficult time, right in the middle of the Liberation War. Nevertheless, they made a great impact in the Karoi and Sinoia districts where they established churches in towns and ministered into farming areas in total disregard of their safety. On a visit to them at Karoi they asked if I would like to accompany them to see a member of their congregation. I immediately agreed but did not realise how far it would be, he was a farmer many miles out of town. On the way Ben called on a number of other farmers. At one farm we were told that the bush fighters had been seen in the area we were to visit. Knowing their methods of ambushing civilians on lonely roads we were discouraged from going further but Ben was not to be deterred for he had given his word to the farmer that he would visit. He felt the man needed encouragement and he was not going to fail him. After a prayer for safety we left for the farm even though it was now late. On we sped through the evening and with tall rank grass on either side of the gravel road it was ideal conditions for an ambush. It was with

relief that we arrived at the isolated farm and were welcomed. A supper was waiting and we had fellowship late into the night. Early in the morning we heard on the farm-radio that a land mine had exploded on the access road but after a hearty breakfast we nevertheless left for our next visitation.

After years on the front line Ben and his wife moved to South Africa and after a while went to Glasgow in Scotland where revival broke out in their church. After some years in Scotland they felt called back to Africa and returned to Zimbabwe after assurances were given by government officials that they were welcome to establish a mission orphanage. At the time the Zimbabwe government had appealed for international help to cope with growing numbers of AIDS orphans. In some communities, especially on main trucking routes, over 75% of pregnant women tested HIV positive! Large numbers of orphans were stretching meagre facilities. Thousands of orphans now lived on the streets or in the bush. Ben had a plan to build an orphanage for these orphans and asked me to help set up the mission. An exhaustive process of negotiations, over several months, ensued as we visited officials and waded through all the red tape required to set it in motion. Numerous interviews were held and forms filled in and fees paid. Hundreds of questions were asked such as, “Why did we want to set up a mission, what purpose would it serve, how much money did we have?” How we managed to get through it all was a wonder for it was exhausting and they certainly did not make it easy.

Ben had financial backing from UK as well as his own costly equipment. His major contribution, however, was his remarkable skills for he was a master builder and experienced farmer. He visited local church leaders in Zimbabwe and obtained their support as well as the rural council at Mudzi near Mutemwa, on the border with Mozambique at Nyamapanda. They allocated him land next to a beautiful dam. Ben then approached central government. His plan was to build an orphanage, a school and clinic and then a home for the aged, all part of a training farm where young people could be taught trades such as building, carpentry, livestock and farming. The farm would create employment and be held as a trust by churches in

the district. Not only was there great need to care for orphans but also a pressing need to train farmers. Central government turned Ben down. Ben put in another application and in the meantime twiddled his thumbs as he was not allowed to work while he waited. He got the churches to start making bricks and several hundred thousands were made at his expense and a church hall was built. His application was again turned down. He put in a third and waited losing money all the time. After ten months the reply came back again, a flat No! Ben had another interview with the authorities to enquire why. The answer he got? “We do not have to tell you why we do not want you.”

He left Zimbabwe, moved to Zambia and within a month had purchased a farm and started the project. Zambian orphans were also in dire need! He built his own house using local stone and home made bricks. When it came to finding water Ben simply got a fresh fork and held the ends in each hand and walked across his farm. When he crossed an underground water stream the end of the fork swung downwards. This is not because of some spiritual force but because of the magnetic and electrical fields of the earth. Underground rivers generate electrical currents and this causes the fork to respond. He was an expert at it and showed me how to do it. His farm thrived. One wonders why the Zimbabweans turned him away. Was it because they could not control the money coming in? Did they want a bribe, something he would not do? There is still no orphanage or training farm at Mudzi, despite the local Member of Parliament assuring the people that government would build one.

## *Chapter 26 –*



*The Tonga of the Zambezi*

### **Zambia and Mozambique – A people in Poverty**

We traveled to the remote northern shores of Lake Kariba in Zambia.

Zambia was an impoverished country yet the people showed us great hospitality. Wherever we went we were welcome. However, we had to constantly look out for thieves. We also had to have gifts ready to present to officials as people expected generosity from us. Everywhere we went young and old people welcomed us sometimes begging for money and food. We journeyed to the northern shores of Lake Kariba to conduct Christian ministry. The Tonga people live along the banks of the lake. Traditionally they are a fishing people and also keep a few indigenous livestock. Their primitive villages are scattered throughout the hot Mopani forests and rocky hills of the Zambezi Valley. We met the old chief of this remote district. He sat on a rickety chair and we sat on stools a little lower than his, as is the

custom, for the chief must always be higher than his subjects. It is the custom to come into the presence of a chief with gifts and the first thing he asked us for was Coca Cola. Unfortunately we did not have any but we did have some oranges which we handed over to him and his aids immediately peeled several for him and he gulped them down. I realised he was craving sugar and looked at his feet with poor circulation and his almost blind eyes and came to the obvious conclusion that he was suffering from diabetes. I enquired further to his health and he had all the classic symptoms. Here was a chief unable to get the medication necessary for his ailment. In the whole area there was only one small hospital. It had been constructed and was run by a lady missionary from the UK. The land was as poor as the dark ages. We camped on the beautiful shores of the lake and observed the people. Everyday the women and children set out in small bands and spent the day in the bush gathering whatever was edible. We watched them return in the evening carrying on their heads what they had found, from bark to tortoises, berries, wild fruit, insects, lizards and bird eggs, all going into the pot. This kind of pressure on the limited natural resources of the land had done untold damage to the ecology of the region. The men would laze about at the lake and catch fish. This formed their main diet. It was a truly primitive community.

My friend Kenneth was one of the most extraordinary men I have ever known. A devout Christian and faithful minister he withstood great adversity and persecution. Back in the 1980s he lost his house in KweKwe when political thugs went on the rampage and destroyed it. This was shortly after Independence when the country was experiencing a political purging and many people were killed. They came for him one night and hauled him away for interrogation. He was a minister of the Gospel and as such considered a “sell out.” After beating him and verbally abusing him they took him outside and told him to sit on the ground with his legs straight in front of him. They surrounded him and were about to execute him by chopping off his legs. As he sat there like a lamb about to be slaughtered something happened to the men and not one of them could strike the first blow. They lost their nerve and he lived.

Kenneth saw extraordinary miracles including people seemingly raised from death. On one occasion he went to Mozambique to minister the gospel. Unlike Western evangelists who flew in with all their modern conveniences he walked for miles to reach people in need. He walked right into some of the most isolated and poverty stricken areas of Africa. Civil war and a severe drought had ravaged Mozambique and the people were starving. On a bush track he found two women. One seemed dead and the other sat beside her companion weeping. The older one had collapsed of exhaustion and hunger and seemingly had expired on the side of the road. Kenneth prayed for them both and continued his journey. Shortly after he left them the “dead” woman stirred and opened her eyes. “Well,” people may say, “maybe she wasn’t dead after all.” According to Kenneth she certainly looked dead. He went to a village and asked the people to help the women. They found both women alive and walking on the road. The younger woman told an amazing account of how the “dead” woman had come to life. The impact of this event opened the doors for Kenneth to minister widely in Mozambique and without any support or aid from abroad he helped numerous groups of people. That was not the only time he saw God work wonders. He had a simple faith and as far as he was concerned if it was in the Bible it was true. Many times he prayed for sick or dying people and saw them raised up. This simple but strong faith is one thing I have seen often in Africa. Because of their unquestioning faith many people are healed through prayer. They had no hospitals or medicine but when they turned to the Lord many were healed.

## *Chapter 27-*

*The Baobab, called the upside down tree.*



### **A Funeral & a Warning**

Years later I attended the funeral of Kenneth's teenage child. The results of the great drought of 1992 and 1993 were long and severe and there had been many funerals. At about that time he phoned to tell me his daughter had suddenly died. She was rushed to hospital in the morning with a headache and was dead in the afternoon. Even his prayers had not helped. They were going to bury her, would I come to the funeral? "Yes, of course," I replied. I was the only white person among the gathering of hundreds of Africans and it was a great honour for me. From early morning people steadily arrived, on buses, bicycles and cars, old and young from far and wide. It was like a

carnival as brothers and sisters in faith met after long separation. Their greetings were mixed with sadness yet they rejoiced in victory, the victory that simple faith has in the midst of sorrow. Speaker after speaker rose to testify about her life and of God's grace and provision during long years of drought. Kenneth and his wife Grace wept and laughed and wept again. Her name symbolised their faith. At last it seemed all that could be said was said and the afternoon was almost through. It was time to go. Then unexpectedly, from the very back arose an aged man who began to speak as he slowly made his way through the crowd, stepping over people spread-eagled on the floor. He was withered, wizened and grey. How many seasons had he seen, I wondered? He himself could not remember he said, but he could remember the day he first came to believe in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. He called forward his wife of many years and she came to stand by his side, the grandparents of the dead girl. I looked at them and concluded they were in reality Abraham and Sarah. They stood as giants among these pilgrims of God. His words did not come from eloquence learnt in classrooms or Bible College but from years of experience, adversity and trial. He told of his conversion by early missionaries and how afterwards he had been ostracised by the community and how the *ngangas* had put spells on him all to no avail. He had been baptised in water and filled with the Holy Spirit and had served God all his life. He testified how even now when all other springs and wells in the district had dried up because of the drought his little spring that fed his home kraal still trickled with water. He challenged those present to get their priorities right, to forsake the ways of the world and to follow Jesus. His life was nearly over, he said, soon he and his wife would go to join his granddaughter but even in the midst of death he exhorted his family to choose the way of Christ. That day I heard the voice of an African patriarch. This was no mere Sunday sermon preached to tickle the ears of those who came for an hour or so. This was the valedictory message of a man and a woman who had chosen to follow Jesus Christ as their King no matter what obstacles or difficulties stood in their way. I will never forget it. People who have not worked with African Christians can not imagine what they have endured. Their Christianity is so different from that of many in the West. It is people like this who are the future

hope of Africa.

We had many strange things happen during the 1990 years, especially as we approached the end of the decade and violence took over the country.

In 1997 the President announced sweeping changes including the compulsory acquisition of commercial farms. Because of the racial rhetoric that was constantly fed to the people animosity grew towards whites and Mugabe actually went so far as to declare war on Britain, the white farmers and the opposition parties. People became more and more despondent. I traveled widely to bring the Bible message to outlying places scattered throughout the land.

I hired hotel conference halls for public meetings to share the gospel and inform people of trends throughout the world. On one occasion I held meetings in one of Harare's popular hotels known as The Jameson. During one session a bright cloud was visible behind me as I spoke. This light remained throughout the entire talk. On another evening, as we closed the meeting, suddenly and without warning the microphone system began to sound an alarm. It caught the attention of everyone present. Then at a meeting at Karoi in northern Mashonaland the local minister opened in prayer. As he spoke through the public address system a voice interrupted him over the microphone. It happened so unexpectedly that the words were hard to capture but I and others heard the message; ***“Get ready, a great explosion is coming”*** said the strange voice that spoke. The church leadership examined the electronic system but there was absolutely no explanation of how it happened. One person commented that it was like “a time warp and came straight out of the air.” It was significant that it was here in the Karoi area soon after this that political instigated violence broke out and plunged the whole area into chaos. Farms were invaded and white homes trashed and farmers and their workers had to flee for their lives. Families camped in the bush unable to get to safety and many African workers scattered in fear of their lives.

My vision from back in the early 1980s still stayed in my mind and I tried to warn of what I thought would happen but people could not receive it. Many people believed “the Lord would do a miracle of deliverance for them”. The farmers were brave men and women and many of them stood firm. Regrettably the results were that when political thugs invaded farms many farmers were forced to flee abandoning not only their belongings but sometimes their animals. Many of these animals were slaughtered in cruel ways. Dogs were impaled, cattle were hamstrung and horses had their hooves cut off.

In Harare we stayed in a cottage on a plot and friends of ours lived in the main dwelling. An elderly man called Luka worked as gardener and he potted around the large property. Strangely, Luka looked a bit like the President so we began to affectionately call him “Mr President”. He was not educated but boasted that he had powerful spirits and that he could astral travel all around Africa. Several other workers who were unfortunate enough to cross his path came off second best when they received the attention of spirits: one went completely mad, another went berserk and another was so fearfully terrified that he became as a gibbering idiot.

The HIV plague continued to run rampant in Zimbabwe. The government had no policy to combat the plague except to run adverts for cheap condoms that were being dumped on the third world. The need to improve peoples' lifestyle and standard of living and to get families living together in decent homes was talked about but nothing happened except top officials creamed off vast amounts of foreign aid to improve their own wealth. Some communities had large infections of HIV. Many members of the army were said to have it. My visits to hospitals became pitiful. Young and old lay dying without hope. The most pathetic were the young. One teenage girl will always haunt my mind as I recall how she lay weakened and thin, ravaged by the killer virus, her eyes filled with resignation and hopelessness as she approached death. Her mother was a devout Christian and spent time praying and trusting her daughter would get better. She was unemployed and her husband had abandoned them. Her daughter died shortly after my visit. It was tragic. Yet, in a way, they missed the

dreadful things that were soon to come upon many of the poorest people of the land.

My wife was in the habit of getting up early in the morning and going for a walk. One morning she did not return from her walk and I became worried. This was Africa, I wondered what had happened. Eventually she returned but she almost carried a woman at her side. She had found her lying in the ditch on the side of the road and she was dying. She was a young woman in her early twenties but was emaciated and weak. We warmed her up with hot tea and food. Leah, our wonderful housekeeper and woman of God, came and prayed with us for the woman. Afterwards Leah said she saw a flash of light come into the woman who momentarily gained some strength and was able to stand up. We shared with her about God's love and encouraged her to believe in His goodness. We got her into our car and took her to hospital. I will never forget the courage and dignity of this young woman when we reached hospital. She summoned all her strength and resolve, took a deep breath and unaided walked through the doors of what had once been the finest hospital in Central Africa. Hospitals in Zimbabwe had by this time collapsed. They had no drugs, their equipment was broken, linen was stolen and patients had to arrange their own food. Professional care was dismal. At some hospitals people died in the queue waiting for attention. So much for the "free health for all" promised by the government. It made me weep to see her walk into an institution that could offer her nothing. She never came out and soon died. At least she had a place in which to die and not in the ditch by the roadside. Thousands of others like her were dying. It was a tragedy. Her aged mother came to see us a few days after her death and expressed her thanks for us caring for her daughter. We wept all over again.

My wife stopped going for walks shortly after this when a man accosted her and threatened to rape her. She rebuked him in the name of the Lord and he slunk off. *Ngangas* advocated the best cure for AIDS was to have sex with a white woman! Rape became the means to be healed of AIDS and rape incidents increased. Such are the ways of Africa.

The Western church is not aware of the activity of demons or indeed even of their existence. The Western world tends to explain many things as mental disorders and no doubt much of it is. However the New Testament says some are demonic manifestations. Without becoming paranoid about this I have been at times directly confronted by demonic behaviour. This was common in Africa but I even found it happened when I toured overseas. On one ministry tour in Britain I spoke about the need for spiritual renewal. When I ended the local minister suggested that people who felt a need should come forward for prayer. A number of people did. One person slumped to the floor and began to have an amazing experience with the Lord. Her eyes were wide open and all she could do was express her utter amazement at whatever she was seeing. She was unaware of her close family standing around her and had an extraordinary vision. Almost simultaneously in another part of the church others also fell but were under the power of demons. I must mention that I never suggest or expect people to fall and in fact try to hold them up when the Lord touches them. Often I would ask them to sit when being prayed for. Anyway, as they lay on the floor demons manifested with horrible rough voices, uttering abuse in angry turmoil. I have seen that sort of thing in Africa but it happens worldwide when the Lord moves in deliverance. Demons like to cause a spectacle and to intimidate and disrupt but must obey the name of Jesus and release their hold upon individuals and be gone.



*The fierce lightning of Africa*

## *Chapter 28 – “Another War”*



### *Destroyed farms.*

Leah was a spirit filled woman who walked with God. She had a strong faith in God and shared with us many things that were happening in the country. She explained the general mood of the people and how the great majority despised the regime. She recounted terrible stories of persecution. She told us how the people in the townships were brutally treated by police and army who invaded their homes and often beat them badly. She shared how talk among the people was about coming trouble and she predicted a time of great tribulation.

As mentioned, a warning of the violence to be unleashed upon the country had been given exactly ten years before in 1987 when white missionary farmers were killed and their farms invaded by squatters. However, few church leaders had understood the significance of the event or gained insight from it or the warning it contained. In November 1997, ten years to the exact day of the slaughter of missionaries, President Mugabe made a public announcement that he was to appropriate 4 million hectares of white owned farmland. This

was over half the country's commercial farmland. The announcement sent shock waves through the community and undermined investor confidence. It was in fact the outworking of the policy that was implemented ten years earlier when white Christian farmers on New Adams and Olive Tree Farms were murdered and the murdering squatters condoned by Presidential Pardon and released to take possession of the farms.

During the night of the 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> November 1997 in the early hours of the morning an awesome electrical storm exploded above us. Africa is renowned for its savage storms but this was unlike anything we had ever witnessed. Massive lightning bolts of pent-up power crashed around us without let or pause. Our dogs hid under the bed and the whole planet seemed to shake. It continued without interruption for several hours as if heaven itself was at war and all the angels were at conflict. It was impossible to sleep so we prayed and felt that judgement was unleashed upon the nation. As we lay in bed unable to sleep our minds went back to what had happened at the Community of Reconciliation and what the Lord had said - "do nothing for ten years." We calculated the ten-year interval between that event and the present time and found it to be *exact* to the day. As we lay in bed we knew something awesome was happening. The next day the national power grid failed plunging the nation into darkness, the Zimbabwe stock market crashed and the Zimbabwe dollar plummeted on international exchange rates. That day became known as "**Black Friday.**" The ten years of grace was over, now the harvest of murder, mass starvation and genocide had come to fruition. Mugabe had chosen his path and the consequences would be worked out to their bitter end. Ten years of opportunity for White farmers were over. Ten years for the people to enjoy peace were over. Soon the regime would unleash its thugs upon the defenceless people. For years many Zimbabweans had prayed for an intervention in our land. It had come but not in the way we wished. Things began to move towards the outworking of spiritual realities. Years of corruption, intrigue, murders, rapes, assassinations and violence were now coming to fruition. The nation was ripe for judgement and the grim harvest would be bleak.

From 1997 events became intense. We had noticed that after South African Independence in 1994 and the removal of the threat from the south a change in the behaviour of the Zimbabwe leaders had taken place. From the mid-nineties they became even more outspoken and blatantly racist in their speeches. More and more of the problems in the country were blamed on Britain and the local Whites. This was not new, the President and his generals had spoken badly of Britain from the start but their speeches now became even more sinister. It seemed that Whites were the problem for everything; all the ills of Africa were blamed on them. If we had not noticed before we were now about to witness the strange way democracy worked in Africa; "One man one vote, as long as it was for the ruling regime." People everywhere were tired but had been lulled into a sense of false security. People had hoped that there would be peaceful change. We should not have been surprised. The regime would now bring ruin to the nation and destroy forever the lives of many people. It started to clamp down harshly on every perceived threat, especially the Black opposition, which they perceived as being White initiated as if Blacks could not think for themselves. The ranting created more and more of a climate in which Whites were attacked with impunity. This violence was not new for the people had already been beaten down but now it was unleashed even more. People who opposed the regime continued to face beatings and death.

As opposition to the regime grew the streets of Harare were regularly filled with demonstrations. The people wanted a change of government and constitution to allow reform and they gathered in peaceful marches. The supporters of the regime mounted violent counter marches which ended with people being beaten and even killed. The police and army moved in to quell riots. My vision of fighting and anarchy in the streets of the capital were enacted before my eyes. At about this time a missionary who had served in Africa for over thirty five years was arrested on a trumped up charge of abusing a teenage boy in his care, one of many under-privileged children catered for in homes he had established. Without recourse to proper legal procedures he was arrested and thrown into jail and spent months languishing there in the horrible conditions that prevailed in

Zimbabwe jails. Eventually the charges were proven false and he was released but not after a great deal of suffering. He never lost faith and was an outstanding example of fortitude in the face of the most grievous treatment. People who wanted to take away his property had fabricated the false charge against him. No compensation was given to him for the trauma and abuse he suffered. One good thing came out of it, there was yet another jailhouse revival through his witness and hundreds of prison inmates met to pray and read the Bible. Perhaps that's why they eventually released him.

Over the next years things deteriorated further. An elderly white couple lived and farmed at Chakari. As a young minister in the church I had visited their home and had the joy of sharing fellowship. They came from a farming family with a long record of Christian service to their community. Their farm had become a beacon of hope to the whole district. One evening the husband, Martin, now old and infirm, stepped outside his home and walked down to the security gate to lock up for the night. The evening air was pleasantly cool after the heat of the day. Suddenly screams came from the house. He ran back as fast as he could and found an intruder had slipped in and was bludgeoning his wife, Jill, with a metal bar. She had collapsed under the heavy blows and was attempting to shield herself while crying out to the Lord to forgive the man who was beating her. Martin attempted to intervene but was also set upon. He sustained broken bones and a terrible smashing. She died of her injuries. He ended up in hospital but recovered, if ever one can truly recover from such an experience. Afterwards he testified of God's goodness and bore no malice. What a man! Bruised and bandaged he spoke at his wife's funeral and testified to her amazing faith. As the intruder beat her so savagely she had prayed for him to be forgiven. Such is the calibre of true saints of Jesus Christ.

My top man, Richard, a skilled artist and artisan, was beaten to death by political thugs. He was a man of dignity and good standing who never was involved with politics, a man of calibre who I highly regarded. He left a wife and young baby destitute. Many other people were brutally killed.

## **Chapter 29 – Happy Easter – 2000 – the Murder of Farmers**



*Early white settlers and a Baobab Tree*

### ***The Ruin of a Prosperous Nation***

On New Year's Day 2000 a celebration was planned among Christians at Nyanga who gathered to worship on a hill called "World's View." This was a truly spectacular spot for it overlooked a panoramic view with mountains on every surround and the valley stretched out below for hundreds of kilometres. It seemed as if we could see forever. A rough cross was fashioned by placing a beam through the branches of a tree that grew right on the edge of a high precipice. Before this living cross people gathered, seated on granite rocks or folding chairs and behind the cross the ground fell away revealing a great expanse of the "view of the world".

The service started and worship lifted unhindered to heaven as if our spirit's expanded into the limitless sky. Christians came from all

denominations. Never had I spoken in such a grand cathedral, my theme being the eternal qualities of Faith, Hope and Love. During the service a lady in the congregation witnessed a strange phenomenon. What seemed to be a pillar of light formed in the sky above the tree and began to rain drops of sparkling light on the cross, which began to shimmer in heavenly radiance. It was as if the sky was filled with angelic hosts that showered divine blessings upon us. People went away encouraged. But a storm was brewing just over the horizon.

Within weeks a Cyclone came off the Indian Ocean and hit Zimbabwe so violently that it was fearful to experience. It literally tore through the country, uprooting thousands of trees, flooding rivers and sweeping homes, animals and people away in its violence. It prefigured what was about to happen spiritually.

At about this time we had another strange omen. We were sitting one evening at home when all of a sudden a foul, pungent smell wafted into the room. It was the smell of smoke, mixed with sweat, unwashed clothes, and a tinge of sulphur. It was the unmistakable smell that often accompanied people who had not washed for many weeks. It was also the smell that sometimes indicates demonic activity. Cautiously I checked through our home to see if there was an intruder. However, despite the odour there was no one. We prayed and immediately the smell departed but the strange incident made me wonder what significance it had.

Our new millennium Easter gift was the cruel beating and slaughter of commercial farmers, the trashing of their homes and farms, and the beating and dispersal of tens of thousands of farm workers. As usual the official story was far removed from the truth. It was put out by the regime that a white farmer had picked a fight with innocent African settlers and shot at them with his gun. The truth was that squatters had attacked a defenceless farmer and his foreman, Julius. Dave Stevens farmed at Marondera. A band of so-called warvets invaded his farm and burnt down his barns and staff homes. He and Julius were captured, tied with wire and taken to the local rural police station. Five other farmers were also captured and taken to the Police Station.

They were then all abducted from that Police Station by warvets without any intervention on the part of the Police! Stevens and another farmer were beaten and Stevens shot at point blank range. After he was shot Julius was also shot and his lips hacked off. Later they would be taken around the farms and displayed as evidence of what happens to people who speak out against Mugabe. The war cry of Mugabe's liberators in the 1970s, "one farmer, one bullet" had never been rescinded. One of the farmers with Stevens was severely assaulted but his life was spared through the plea of women who persuaded the murderers not to kill him. Two of the other farmers were then tied with wire and taken into the bush where they were so badly assaulted that they were left for dead. They lay in the bush all night until the early hours of the morning when they regained consciousness and staggered to an abandoned farm from where they were able to call for help. The remaining two farmers were assaulted in the ruling party offices and then taken off to be killed but somehow managed to escape to the hills where they were found cowering late the following day. Shocking images on international TV of people so badly beaten that they could not walk or talk were awful to see. However, the official story was far removed from the truth. For many years we had been subjected to government-controlled press that simply twisted the facts to suit their policy of political control. Dave Stevens left a widow, two teenager children and infant twins. He had done much to improve the lot of his workers and people of his district as had the other farmers. What was their crime? They were members of the opposition party and were white farmers. And Julius' crime? He had spoken out against the regime. We waited to hear what the President would say when he came on national TV and recalled his words back in 1987 when the Christian farmers of Olive Tree Farm were cruelly killed. At that time he described that crime as;

*"unbridled savagery demonstrating a killer instinct and a thirst for human blood of unparalleled proportions."* He went on to say *"the security forces have been fully mobilised to track down these bloody evildoers and bring them to justice"* and *"their tragic death in defenceless circumstances must move the heart of every peace-loving Zimbabwean."*

Now, ten years later he was far more blatant about his hatred for anyone who opposed him. He claimed that White farmers had caused the whole event. Any pretence of reconciliation was over, the revolution was on us.

In August his followers targeted church congregations that were established on commercial farms by our missionary friend, Stan. Thousands of Christians fled as farm workers were driven out of their homes and off the land. Indigenous Pastors were threatened and some badly beaten. These people had no recourse to hospitals, professional treatment or drugs when injured. They could not call on the police to protect them. They had no means to defend themselves. Pastors fled with their congregations. Many people just disappeared, their whereabouts unknown. A Central Intelligence Organisation exercise dubbed “Operation Zion” targeted missionaries and Pastors. CIO had docketts on all missionaries and from began to harass them. They would arrive unannounced, usually in the middle of the night, at targeted homes and search for incriminating evidence of opposition towards the regime. When an American lady missionary had been visited and interrogated by the CIO they unwittingly left their secret docket behind. It contained fabricated evidence and trumped up charges. It was handed over to private lawyers and the entire contents copied and used in her defence but this still did not prevent her deportation from the country.

Clergy were arrested and thrown in jail for holding “illegal meetings” when gathered in small groups to pray for imprisoned colleagues. Other innocent people were arrested for holding “illegal” demonstrations. I saw all this and I have no hesitation in saying that political thugs committed terrible deeds of barbaric cruelty and violence on thousands.

In the next few months after Easter warvets and squatters invaded a thousand farms. Roadblocks were set up in country districts and manned by thugs. The violence came to our home district at Enterprise Valley, an established farming area that had developed during four generations of White farmers. Rudolphia farm, one of the

most productive farms of the valley, was invaded by warvets. Smoke billowed as homes were torched. The next farm Atlanta, one of the most productive market garden farms in the area and which supplied fresh produce to the capital, was also invaded. Dogs were beaten to death, workers brutalised and chased away, and homes torched. The area became a war zone. People fled in panic, some in cars and others on foot, into the bush and hills. Dear friends of ours who managed the farm fled for their lives with their three teenage daughters. His name was put on a death list and he was threatened with death if he returned. TV images of dogs being cruelly beaten to death shocked the world. The brutal beating of scores of farm workers was not filmed but the burning of their homes was.

Other friends of ours only just got out. We were in Harare and heard what was happening at Enterprise. Concerned for their safety we phoned them on the farm. They had been unaware of the situation despite it being so near to them. When they put down the telephone they went outside to listen and could now hear the uproar from the neighbouring farm and see the flames lighting up the night sky. The noise seemed to be coming closer. Pushing back panic they quickly grabbed some clothes and leapt into two cars, the mother, kids and dog in front and the husband following, and sped out of the driveway onto the gravel farm road. As they reached it a mob of warvets surged towards them running across the open field like a marauding pack of wild dogs. The first car rushed past the mob in a cloud of dust but the husband's path was blocked as they spilled onto the road, shouting and wielding axes and sticks. He knew he would be killed if he stopped so put his foot down on the accelerator and headed straight for them. As he went past, one man lashed out at him with a machete. The thud of the blade on the post of the windscreen narrowly missed his head. When they arrived at our home they had difficulty opening the car door for the impact had buckled the metal. A few more inches and he would have been decapitated. It was a hair breath escape.

In Harare and other towns peaceful demonstrations by Churches and opposition groups turned into violent street clashes as warvets indiscriminately attacked people. Running street battles took place as

police shot tear-gas into peaceful marchers. A friend of ours was so badly beaten on his back that he had deep welts and open wounds. I recalled my vision of many years previous and saw it happening before my eyes this time in reality. Many innocent people were caught and badly maimed after being subjected to such barbarism. Over the years we had become accustomed to dodging violent riots. When we saw a stamping, screaming mass of people we would slip down a side road. Shortages of fuel, petrol, diesel and paraffin caused long queues. That year there was a 300% increase in the cost of living. The black market for foreign currency spiralled out of control. Images of my vision of 1980 took place before my eyes.

Legislation was passed that prohibited criticism of the President. Pastors were threatened that if they preached sermons against him they would be killed. Christians were arrested and thrown into prison for no crime except for gathering to pray. Just as in Walt Disney's film "The Lion King" we saw both sides of the lion; one was a noble king the other the ruthless "Scar Face".

It was announced in the government sponsored Herald newspaper that because the regime had now taken over the farms of commercial farmers Zimbabwe was going to have "a bumper maize crop three times the normal yield". However, headlines in an independent newspaper on the very same day reported an assessment that Zimbabwe needed to import hundreds of thousands of tons of maize to avert a massive shortfall!

As I drove from Harare to Mutare I counted only three small fields of tobacco and no fields of food crops even though it was planting season. The land lay fallow, overgrown with weeds in what used to be a prime farming area. In a country that had fed itself for years and always had a surplus, people were dying from starvation, many were searching the bush for edible roots, rats, leaves and grass! During one hundred years of hard work white settlers and African farmers had developed a thriving agriculture industry but it was destroyed in a few months! The Zimbabwe dollar completely collapsed and one needed several thousand to buy a loaf of bread. Inflation continued to spiral

out of control. 75% of the people now lived below the poverty line.

In June of 2001 a Solar Eclipse occurred. In order to see the eclipse I journeyed to the northern town of Centenary and joined friends still on a farm. They had been subjected to extreme levels of intimidation and threats. A mob of unruly squatters had camped around their house for weeks. They had destroyed trees and crops and beaten their drums all through the nights as they indulged in drunken orgies. The farmers had endured it and were now enjoying a brief respite from the warvets who had temporarily gone off to intimidate others. The scene looked deceptively calm. Tables were placed under trees and food laid on them. Robins flitted through the garden and called their melodious songs. It all seemed so peaceful and normal. Nothing seemed awry. As the eclipse approached we walked into a nearby field to watch the sun go out. A strange surreal dusk fell across the land. The birds began to roost and the cattle started lowing. As the total eclipse started a shadow fell across the land and an eerie, other world feeling fell upon us as we watched the world turn dark. It lasted only a few minutes but seemed to illustrate what had happened to our nation. A shadow of madness had fallen upon our land and it was not going to pass as quickly as the eclipse. It seemed to have become a land like the Baobab, planted upside down.

I had ministered the Gospel for over 35 years much of that time supporting myself financially as local people had few funds to pay a minister. I had seen the rise of African Nationalism with its violent riots, the last throes of a British colony and fifteen years of isolation, sanctions and bush war, followed by Zimbabwe Independence, genocide, a revolution, dictatorship and anarchy. Like so many others in the land I had seen and experienced miracles but also wept inconsolable tears of grief as we buried our loved ones and saw terrible things happen. We had survived the street riots, the bush war, and state of terror but we also lost our homes and possessions. We survived armed terrorists set on killing us. We endured the long fearful nights wondering who was coming to attack, steal or arrest us. We rubbed shoulders with truly great men and women both African and White who met these awful challenges with faith and courage.

We saw people healed, delivered and transformed. We saw miracles. We baptised with crocodiles, sang with angels and slept with lions. We were blessed.

My old friend Kenneth phoned and asked to see me. We set up a time and meeting place. It was good to see him but he seemed burdened. He looked haggard, thin, aged. After greetings were exchanged he came straight to the point, unlike the usual convention of discussing the weather, one's health and every other topic.

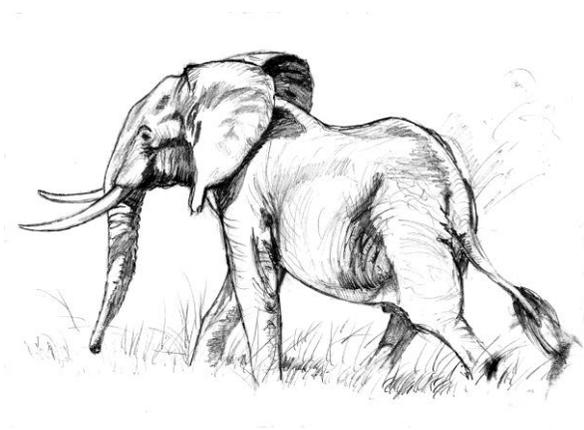
“You must leave,” he said.

“I am planning to do so” I replied, “within a little while.” My wife had already left but I was still trying to tie things up.

“No, you must leave soon” his voice hushed with a rasp of urgency. I sat shocked. “Why?” I asked.

“CIO has dockets on all missionaries and ministers and are checking everyone. It is best you leave.”

I had been followed by two men only days before and had managed to escape them. I brought my departure day forward.



## *Chapter 30 - Epilogue – Thanks for the Memories*



### *A Happy People now in famine and poverty.*

What of my dear brothers and sisters with whom I sang, laughed and cried? My final ministry in the little church I knew so well was heart rendering. Fear was etched on the faces of the teenagers and a look of confusion and weary sadness on the faces of the old people was evident to all. These were people with whom we had a special bond forged by facing adversity together. Will they endure the days of tribulation? Truth may falter but never dies and I hold to the vision of a great resurrection morning when all will be restored. God has a long memory!

My final day of departure arrived. At Harare's international airport I made my way through the customs and immigration. I saw secret police standing around ready to pounce on anyone they suspected. I had spent my life in Africa. I had no wealth to show for it but I was

rich in experience. I had walked where Livingstone had walked. I had seen witchdoctors converted to Christ. I had walked among lions. I had witnessed miracles and murders. I had seen a once wealthy country turn back to the dark ages. Now I was leaving with a life full of memories and thanks to God for His grace and protection. I thought of the words of the Saviour not to store up wealth where rust and thief can destroy but to store up wealth in heaven where none can steal; *“Where your heart is there your treasure will be also”*.

I climbed aboard the aircraft and settled into the padded seat and strapped the belt on. The plane came to life and mighty engines propelled it down the runway and we lifted off Africa. I leant over to gaze down at the earth below, the little villages, hills, rural tracks, farms and *kopjes* – a nation in pain. Then I lifted my eyes to the celestial heavens and breathed a prayer for all those left behind, “Be strong beloved - till better times.”

In the next years Zimbabwe was plunged into persecution, starvation and financial collapse by the actions of the regime. It was as if a rogue lion was loose and went through the country destroying and devouring people. In his wake bands of supporters feasted off the suffering people as hyenas would devour a carcass. Some church leaders supported the tyranny but many people resisted it even when severely persecuted. Many were tortured and killed for refusing to yield to this selfish ideology. We will never know how many. Only God knows. Many were Christians; they are modern day martyrs. They will stand in that great number from every generation with robes washed in the blood of the lamb.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo was one leader who made a stand for justice. An aged man full of wisdom, his quiet manner and dignified words were like a clarion call. He opposed the dictatorial regime and its use of food to starve opponents into submission.

*“What would Jesus Christ say if he were here today? Would he keep quiet when people are being held to ransom”* the Archbishop said.

He was one of the brave Zimbabwe leaders who spoke out. He spoke tirelessly and courageously and in 2005 made a plea for world intervention to save the broken humanity of his nation. It seemed to fall on deaf ears. Later he was persecuted and had to leave his post. Then in June 2005 in the middle of winter the regime ordered the destruction of thousands of homes of middle class and poor people. Several people were killed and others died as a result of this cruelty. It is estimated that at least seven hundred thousand people were made homeless in their own country, probably many more. They had food confiscated, their furniture burnt and their wealth stolen. Their businesses were demolished and a huge sector of the economy was destroyed. No one knows how many died of sickness and starvation.

It was not possible for people to withstand the regime's police and troops. Firstly, it was illegal to speak out in any way. An act of Parliament forbade all criticism of the President and anyone caught doing so faced heavy penalties. Secondly, to oppose the regime one had to be brave enough to endure imprisonment and possible death.

Twenty years before this the entire world media, after hounding the colonial administration for many years, had given President Mugabe a fanfare of applause and praise. Now the events in Zimbabwe were a minor side show hardly worth watching. Most people in Zimbabwe faced this persecution and adversity with dignity and fortitude. By 2008 the economy had collapsed with inflation in the millions! Some sanctions were placed on the regime but they continued their private war against the people. It seemed nothing could stop them. The President even boasted that "Only God could remove me!" Yet many faithful people in the country continue to follow the way of Christ in gentle peace and love.

At the beginning of my ministry in Africa I marked in my Bible the following verse –

***Isaiah 43:2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. Though you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame***

***burn you.”***

This verse was a comfort and inspiration for me throughout all the years I worked in Africa for it seemed to carry the promise of God’s protection in the midst of danger. It was fulfilled in a wonderful manner, for the Lord kept me and my family through nearly four decades of Gospel witness, through a war, ethnic cleansing, a revolution and many years under an oppressive regime. We saw people converted and filled with the Holy Spirit. We experienced revivals in towns and villages and renewal sweeping into churches, tents and homes, touching people in healing, salvation and deliverance from demonic power. I personally was delivered from killers who sought to kill me and on another occasion was miraculously saved from drowning when the canoe I was in on the Zambezi River capsized and my companions and I were swept away. I survived three hippo attacks, a close call with a leopard, several escapes from snakes and other wild animals. We survived the fires of war and the natural hazards of Africa as well as bandits, ambushes, corrupt officials and men of violence. We had angelic visitations, saw visions, and witnessed the changed lives of witchdoctors and hundreds of people. I saw shining messengers in the sky and we felt footsteps on the bed. We witnessed murders and miracles.

We left with nothing but two suitcases and some clothes and photos, our income failed and our savings eaten away by hyperinflation. Everything that one normally trusts in was brought to nothing. The years of oppression have brought a great spiritual harvest in the land due to the faithfulness of those who continue to stand for Jesus and spread the Gospel. I can only admire all the brave believers of Zimbabwe.

The words of the Great Teacher stay in my mind;

***“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where***

*your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matt.6:19*

*“Stop weeping; behold the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome” (Rev. 5:5).*

*One day the savage lion of death and destruction which goes about as a “roaring lion” will fall permanently asleep and there will be lasting peace under the reign of the “Lion of Judah” the Lord Jesus. The Gospel will triumph.*

*One day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of Christ and He will reign having overcome all despots, corruption and evil. One day all weeping will cease and peace will fill the earth. Until then God's grace will continue to declare that God is Love.*

.....

*Zimbabwe’s National Anthem –*

*“Ishe komberera Africa – “God save Africa,  
Ngaisimudzirwe zita rayo - Let its name be uplifted,  
Inzwai miteuro yedu - Hear our prayers,  
Isu Mburi yayo” - We, the children of Africa.”*

*To the special, gentle, hospitable people of Zimbabwe who have endured so much and continue to suffer, God Bless and strengthen you; your reward awaits you in the Kingdom of the Great King, Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God.*

*Jesus said, “Not a single sparrow falls without the Father, be of good cheer, do not fear you are of much greater value than many sparrows.”*

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