



General Overview

Zimbabwe is a land-locked country of south-central Africa, bounded on the north by the Zambezi River, with the thunderously magnificent Victoria Falls, Lake Kariba and the Kariba Dam. The Limpopo River marks out the much shorter border 404 miles (650km.) to the south. The game-rich parkland of these river valleys ascends through hill farmland to a central savannah woodland plateau.

Technically tropical, Zimbabwe's elevation makes for a drier and cooler climate than might be expected—but neither strictly dry nor cool!

North of the Zambezi is Zambia,¹ to the east is Mozambique,² to the south is South Africa and west is Botswana. Bulawayo is the chief town of the western part of Zimbabwe, still identified on some maps as Matabeleland. Harare, the capital, is further north and east, at the

centre of Mashonaland, and on a similar latitude to Brasilia in Brazil, La Paz in Bolivia, and Cairns in Queensland, Australia. In an area of over 390,000 sq.m. (1 million sq.km.) there is a population of about twelve million, projected to reach fifteen million by 2025. Some authorities say that the Aids-related death rate is such that the 2025 figure will be nearer nine million.

There are over forty different peoples in Zimbabwe; the largest group is the Shona at 71%, then the Ndebele³ at 14%. English is the official language, but there are about twenty languages spoken in the country, including Afrikaans, and some surprises, such as Gujarati: Shona predominates in the east, Ndebele in the west. Mining accounts for 40% of exports, chiefly gold, but coal, copper, and others abound. Two-thirds of Zimbabwe's population depend on agriculture, mostly subsistence farming. Corn, cotton, wheat, coffee, sugar cane, tobacco⁴ and peanuts are cultivated; cattle, sheep, goats and pigs are raised. Light and heavy industries combine with tourism to contribute to the economy, but the highest Aids infection rates in the world, together with political, and economic instabilities, seriously hinder present use and future development of all these resources.

No sketch of Zimbabwe can ignore the Baobab tree, Arabic *bu hobab*—'fruit has many seeds'. Giant specimens are

reputed to be one thousand years old, and honey from Baobab-frequenting bees is a great delicacy, even known in ancient Egypt. And then the elephants! At 2001 figures there were 65,000 of them, a lure to tourists, safari seekers and ivory poachers from time immemorial. Profitable as the famous parks are, the elephants (and, especially, the black rhino) must regard them as counter-productive!

★ History

★ Preamble

It is important to accept that the names of modern African nations can rarely be related to maps published before the late 19th century. General areas of occupation, agriculture or nomadic activities by tribal peoples, their interactions, wars and movements, are the historical background to this land. On the eve of the Berlin Conference⁵ of 1884/5 a map



of southern Africa could only ‘indicate’ Ndebele and Shona peoples between the Zambezi and the Limpopo Rivers, Lozi and Ngoni north of the Zambezi, Sotho and Zulu south of the Vaal, and so on, not ‘countries’ in our now-conventional way. Most of the peoples south of the Sahara knew themselves as just that—The Peoples, or Ba-ntu—and their languages we group as Niger-Congo.⁶ The main exception is the Khoisan peoples of the south-western deserts—Namibia, Kalahari and Karoo—although their distinctive click sound has migrated to some of the contiguous Bantu tongues.

Early European missionaries went to regions and peoples, rather than to countries, and the people did not always stay in one region! The Ndebele people, for example, under Mzilikazi, detached themselves from the Zulu people of the

south-east coastal land, and settled along the Vaal and Marico Rivers in the early 1800s, before challenging the Shona north of the Limpopo, not very long before the word Rhodesia began to appear on maps and the Matabele Wars flared.

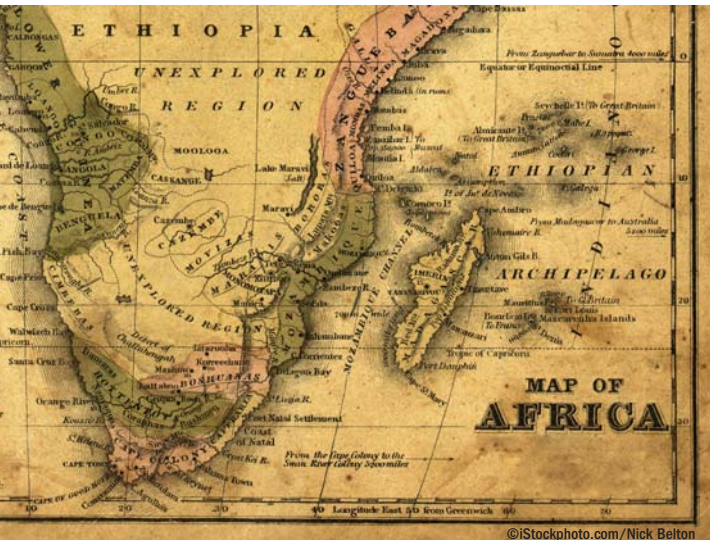
★ **Pre-Colonial:**
Great Zimbabwe and the Shona

The name Zimbabwe is taken from the stone enclosures of ‘Great Zimbabwe’⁷ near the modern city of Masvingo. These massive ruins, built between 1200 and 1450 by ancestors of the Shona people, were abandoned over five hundred years ago. Great Zimbabwe itself was the all-encompassing hub of a large and thriving early Shona state, which had eclipsed an earlier culture centred on Mapungubwe, where the Shashe River joins the Limpopo. By 1400 the builders of Great Zimbabwe

were building elaborate stone structures, without the use of mortar, of such height as to be unique in the whole of Africa. Their management and engineering of water resources were also remarkable.

When the Great Zimbabwe culture waned—too many people, not enough salt, goats or firewood—the Mutapa people separated and settled north and east of Great

19th-century map identifying the then-unexplored regions



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Passageway in the stone enclosure of Great Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe. This Mutapa state was the principal Shona power when Portuguese traders, excited by the coastal Swahili-speaking traders' tales of fabulous wealth in the Zambezi hinterland, came seeking their fortunes.⁸ From this time the Zambezi became the more weighty influence in the region than the Limpopo.

Large birds carved in soapstone were found in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, and are now incorporated in the national flag. Everything that made Europeans—from

Portuguese in the late 15th century to Rhodes and the 19th-century 'scramble' for South Central Africa—covet the region, was known and used by the earlier great cultures. As with the Victoria Falls, they were there and known long before they were 'discovered' by European explorers. There was farming, cattle-keeping, ivory-hunting, mining of copper and gold. The Limpopo, Save, and later, Zambezi, Rivers, provided routes to the east African coast and trade with Arab dhows from the north and ships from India.

★ **Colonial:
Lobengula and Rhodes**

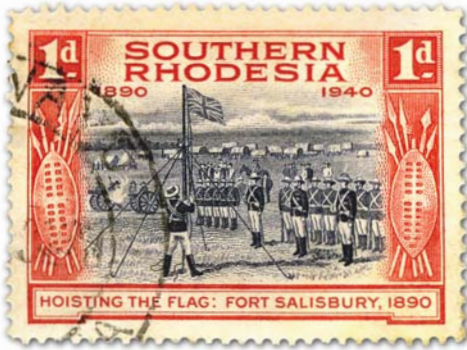
Several hundred years of people-movement in Africa had been from north to south responding to Arab and Muslim pressure. After the 16th century the Portuguese seeding of the west and east

coasts introduced another pressure, as well as the beginnings of Angola and Mozambique. The late 17th century saw Dutch and English settlements beginning to flourish in the Cape region. Their hunger for land and for control of resources, together with their own mutual antagonisms, put enormous pressure on the indigenous peoples, both to resist and to move in a north and central direction. The Orange and Vaal Rivers provide distinctive markers of this process, as do the Khoisan Wars, the Xhosa Wars and later the Zulu and Matabele Wars.

The groundswell north-to-south movement had long brought the Shona to the Great Zimbabwe region; now the coastal pressure from the Portuguese, and this epochal thrusting of the Dutch and English from the south, gathered strange and fiercely unlikely associates in the cauldron of South Central Africa. While the Shona of Mashonaland were squaring up to the incoming Matabele, the English, under the impassioned yet calculating leadership of Cecil John Rhodes, had an eye to the possession of the land and control of its rich resources. They were convinced that European management and technology alone could realise the mining potential. Lobengula, the Matabele king who had succeeded Mzilikazi, was the greatest single obstacle to this

Cecil John Rhodes





Stamp showing Fort Salisbury in 1890

endeavour. In a transaction which many believe to have been deliberately misleading, he made agreement with an agent of Rhodes in 1888. Expecting only a handful of prospectors, he found the heavily armed Pioneer Column setting about the colonisation of the whole land. Lobengula's capital, Bulawayo, fell to the Maxim guns of the Column in 1893, and despite attempts by the Shona and the Matabele to combine and resist, the land became part of a new country. This began under the management of the British South Africa Company, and was eventually to be colonial Rhodesia.

★ **Modern:
Smith and Mugabe**

Fort Salisbury was a tent town when it became the capital of the new country; then, known simply as Salisbury, it was the seat of a white minority government for ninety years. Resistance and resentment were ever present, and in 1957 limited political rights were extended to the African majority population. The Ndebele people generally

supported Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African People's Union, whilst the more numerous Shona formed the Zimbabwe African National Union, subsequently led by Robert Mugabe. A brief attempt to make a federation of both Rhodesias with Nyasaland (Malawi) failed, and the Rhodesian Front party, led by the white politician Ian Smith, pressed for independence from the British Crown under continuing minority rule. It was not given under such a manifesto, and former fighter pilot Smith announced his Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Bitter and cruel guerrilla warfare ensued.

After fierce conflict, in which 27,000 people were killed and 150,000 displaced, an all-party conference was held in London, England, followed by free elections in Southern Rhodesia, in

February 1980. On April 18th Robert Mugabe, an avowed Marxist, became President of the newly independent Zimbabwe: the one-hundred-year-old capital Salisbury became Harare, named after a 19th-century chief, Neharawa.

Robert Mugabe



We have now reached what are current affairs; and the continuing distress, injustice and oppression, the political and racial tensions which rend the country, are never far from news reports. The cities swell with hundreds of thousands of rural migrants looking for non-existent jobs, and

poverty-packed township settlements multiply. This country is potentially an industrial and economic powerhouse, and yet Zimbabweans are 60% poorer now than in 1980. *Operation World* reports⁹ that the Aids calamity in Zimbabwe is one of the world's worst cases. A combination of government neglect, lack of health care resources, promiscuity and social reluctance to face up to the drastic measures required are the root causes. Over 25% of all adults carried the virus by 2000; the number of orphans had risen to nearly one million (9% of the population). Deaths rose to seven hundred a week and the economy and life expectancy has plummeted. Nevertheless, throughout the last two hundred years there has begun, and abides, a rich Gospel history, Christian testimony, and record of much good works.

Mission and Scripture

Let us accept that the 19th century in Africa was particularly a time of excited European exploration, of unquestionably dedicated missionary labour, and of colonial settlement, and that the lines between these things were never clear. Some missionaries necessarily became administrators, some civil servants were better Christians than they were administrators, and all pioneer work attracted commercial follow up.¹⁰

Zimbabwe and the Victoria Falls probably bring the name of David Livingstone [1813-73] most readily to mind in a missions context. However,



Robert Moffat (1795-1883)

www.WholesomeWords.org

Matabeleland was for him more a corridor of passage from Bechuanaland (Botswana) to regions north of the Zambezi (Fort Salisbury a convenient mail post), than a sphere of service. His father-in-law, Robert Moffat [1795-1883], London Missionary Society worker in South Africa and Bechuanaland, is of more interest for Zimbabwe. An instrument of salvation amongst the Hottentots and translator of the Bible into Sechuana, he also made Gospel forays northward into Matabeleland, and on such travels wrote extensively to his wife: the *Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat 1829-60* record this correspondence. Moffat's friendship with King Mzilikazi was the only thing

which kept his party from destruction on more than one occasion.

His younger associate, William Sykes [1829–1887], reduced the Ndebele tongue to script in about 1860, and the Gospel of Matthew was published in 1884, followed by the New

Testament. In the Wars of 1893/4 the Matabele warriors seized hundreds of copies of the New Testament and wore them as headgear!

Dear to the memory of the Shona people is the name of John White [1866–1933] of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. We note his publication of the Gospel of Mark in 1898, leading to the New

Testament in 1907—but they also note, for instance, his distribution of maize at his own cost in the famine of 1922.

But where do we stop? No one then serving the Gospel in southern Africa could miss the influence, direct or indirect, of Andrew Murray [1828–1917], son of a Scots minister in South Africa, Dutch educated in Utrecht, then for forty years pastor and itinerant evangelist in Transvaal. He was a co-founder of the South Africa General Mission in 1889 (now Africa Evangelical Fellowship), which reached out into Swaziland and Zimbabwe, then Zambia and Malawi. Allen Gardiner [1794–1851] felt called to

South America, but was first used mightily of God in the 1830s amongst the Zulus and in the salvation of King Dingane (Dingaan).¹¹ And what about Fanny Jackson Coppin [1837–1913], born a slave in Washington, DC? She was bought

and freed by an aunt, graduated from Oberlin College in 1865 and represented African

Methodist Episcopal missionary interests at the London Missionary Conference in 1888.

Between 1902–04 her husband was a bishop of the AME in South Africa, and they certainly travelled as far as Bulawayo. Back in Philadelphia she promoted mission work by African Americans in Africa.



Fanny Jackson Coppin

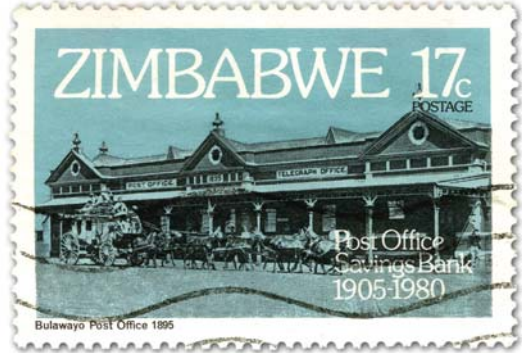
Current reports from Zimbabwe insist that there are Christian congregations in all of the indigenous peoples of the land, Bibles in eleven languages and portions in six more. It would be impossible here to recount or review them. Instead, let's focus on one work that will be of particular interest to many readers of the *Quarterly Record*.

 **The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland Mission in Zimbabwe¹²**

The mission was begun by John Boyana Radasi, a Fingo from Transkei in South Africa. The Fingo, a Bantu people

of south-east Africa, were much harassed by the Zulu and the Xhosa in the early 19th century, but protected by the British. There has been a strong and influential Christian tradition ever since. Rhodes had even invited a group of Fingo people from Cape Colony to settle at Bembesi in Matabeleland. John Radasi had travelled to the United States as a member of a choir, and there he was converted. In a remarkable unfolding of Divine Providence he came to Scotland, and into contact with the Free Presbyterian Church, becoming ordained amongst them as a minister. His desire was to go as a missionary to Matabeleland and he arrived in Bulawayo on 21 December 1904.

Speaking to an African Wesleyan minister standing on the railway platform, Radasi announced that he was looking for a place to begin mission work. A young Fingo porter overheard this and told his father in Bembesi, whereupon a group of Fingos, some of them Christian, invited John Radasi to settle among them, if the Ndebele Chief Ngege allowed. Ten acres of land were granted, and a church, a school and a home were constructed, to become the Ingwenya Mission. Reporting to Scotland he wrote, 'Our main object in keeping a school is that people may learn to read their Bible, for it is there that they can learn the doctrine of ruin by the Fall, redemption by the blood of Christ and regeneration by the Holy Ghost. These are the doctrines of absolute necessity to be taught to the heathen for salvation'.¹³



Stamp showing the Bulawayo Post Office in 1895

Government resettlement policies were overruled of God to the furtherance of the Gospel when, in 1923, Chief Bitisani with his people were moved about eighty miles northwards from the Ingwenya region to Nkayi. The chief requested of John Radasi a preacher and a teacher for his people. John Mpofo and his son Alexander went, and so the F.P. mission extended to the Shangani Reserve, a beginning of great expansion. In 1924 a Scottish minister, John Tallach, arrived in Bulawayo to join the work. On arrival he was greeted with the news of John Radasi's death, accidentally killed by a train at Bembesi Siding. The work continued and more mission stations were added to Ingwenya—Zenka Mission and Mbumba Mission.

'Kraal schools', as they were called, were opened in different communities and in 1954 a Teacher Training Centre was started at Mbumba by Rev James Fraser. A 1965 report listed thirty-one schools run directly by the Mission, 144 teachers and 5,120 pupils. During the war for independence most of these schools were

closed, and on reopening were taken over by African councils in the community. The Mission still maintains the secondary school called John Tallach Secondary School at Ingwenya Mission and five of the primary schools. Preaching at the original school stations has continued, not now in classrooms but in their own church buildings.

The John Tallach School at Ingwenya Mission is a boarding school with a day stream for locals; it has up to six hundred pupils on average with twenty-nine teachers. Students have the regular teaching of the Scriptures in school and regular preaching services. When pupils first arrive in school they are each given a TBS Authorised Version Bible and a Westminster Shorter Catechism. Boarders come from a wide area and each year they are issued with the TBS Golden Thoughts Calendars to take home with them (see the letter on page 56).

The F.P. Church mission extended to Mashonaland in 1981 when P. Mazvabo was ordained and inducted to work among the Shona people, based in Zvishavane. From there the work has branched out to cover ten congregations. Pastoral work in the Matabeleland area of Zimbabwe remains central to the mission. There are two congregations in Bulawayo: Ingwenya Mission, and Mbumba Mission and Zenka Mission with their outstations. Medical work and child care have developed strongly—both reflecting the impact of Aids on the community.

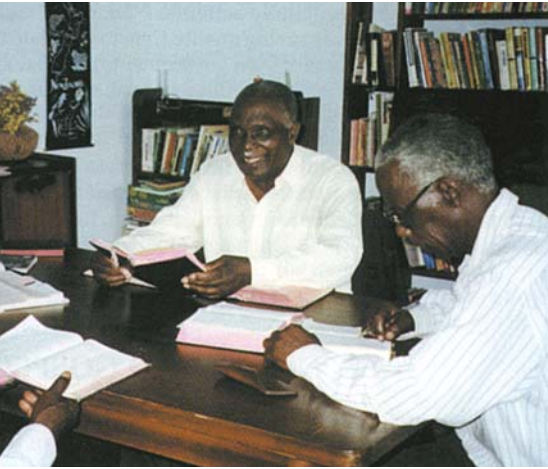


There is a Reformed bookroom in Bulawayo which stocks TBS English Bibles and Bibles in local languages, along with religious books, educational materials and stationery. *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan in Ndebele is there, recently translated by the translation team. This team is currently involved in the revision and translation of the Ndebele Bible (for more on this, see pages 40-42). The New Testament is expected to be published shortly by the Society, who also assist in giving advice in connection with difficulties in translation.

And so the Word of God is sounded forth at over forty centres on Sabbath days by the ministers and elders of the Free Presbyterian Church throughout Zimbabwe. Golden Thoughts Calendars in English, Ndebele and Xhosa are gifted by the Society and so distributed to all these congregations.



Some current TBS publications in Ndebele



Bible study in Zimbabwe home

Finally, Brethren...

What more can be said than 'Pray for Zimbabwe'. Give thanks indeed that in all the turmoil and tumult amongst so many peoples there has been a well-diffused sowing of the Gospel and the production of several Scriptures. Praise God that Marxist Mugabe still insisted that Christian religion be taught, by Christians, in schools. In your prayers remember that, although the Muslim presence in Zimbabwe is small and mostly among the Gujarati, their influence and economic power is not. Pray for the provision of sound Scriptures, and the appearance soon of our revised New Testament. Pray for the maintaining of congregations committed to wholesome doctrine, and for the Lord's own labourers sent into a field of such rich history. Remember 'the fatherless and widows in their affliction' (James 1.27) as their numbers increase.

Endnotes:

1. *Quarterly Record* no. 548, July–September 1999.
2. *Quarterly Record* no. 538, January–March 1997.
3. Tabele, Matabele, Sindebele, amaNdebele and INdebele, all appear in literature and cartography.
4. It is ruefully suggested that Zimbabwe's national slogan could be 'Thank you for smoking' as 10% of the population derive a livelihood from tobacco. The Tobacco Sales Floor in Harare is huge, and Zimbabwe is the world's largest exporter.
5. A caucus of European nations convened to agree the 'spheres of influence' in the African continent.
6. Similarly we speak of 'Caucasian', but do not mean a specific nation, nor is there a specific 'Caucasian language'.
7. 'Zimbabwe' is from the Shona *dzimba dzamabwe*, 'stone buildings'. There were several lesser 'zimbabwes', that is 'stone-towns', as distinct from 'GREAT stone town'.
8. They also brought maize from the Americas, tobacco and tomatoes, to become part of everyday life in those parts; and lemons from India, from which is derived the Mazowe fruit squash.
9. *Operation World*, '24-7 Prayer: Zimbabwe', www.24-7prayer.com/ow/country.php?country_id=52 (9 November 2006).
10. Which, being interpreted, means that I am aware of the problems, but see no need to pursue them here.
11. His later dying efforts to reach Patagonia with the Gospel seemed to fail, but the publication of his journals brought into being the South American Missionary Society.
12. Grateful thanks are due to Catherine Macaulay of the F.P. Mission in Zimbabwe for help here.
13. Jean Nicolson, *John Boyana Radasi: Missionary to Zimbabwe* (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1996), p. 71.