

OUT OF SUFFERING SURGED SONGS

Samuel had fled to Biafra as a young teenager. He came back a man. The Lord had been forming his vessel like a potter. To carry out His workmanship, the Lord leads some into the desert, like Moses or Paul. But others he leads to a hostile land, like Joseph to Egypt or Daniel to Babylon, to be shaped in the service of foreign masters. Samuel was one of these.

At the outbreak of the war, when he had heard that we were not allowed to return to the Izi region, Samuel's disappointment was great. We had, of course, always been talking of our imminent departure for furlough and had promised to support him in Bible School. But because of the war, Bible Schools were not functioning anymore. How good that we had also talked about other things he could do and had left him the books for it: try to write a first draft of the gospel of Mark, and also to take the Reading and Writing Book to various parts of Izi and sell them, together with the few printed Bible stories. He had set to work immediately.

During that time - it was before he fled to the South - he came to realize two important things:

Firstly, that there are vast contrasts between the different Izi areas. It was the first time that he had travelled through his own home and country. While some received him with open arms, others nearly drove him away. He rode on bicycle from school to school, talking with headmaster and teachers. Some said: "This is too hard to read", or "You are just trying to sabotage things by telling the Izi people they are not Biafrans". But in other schools he was allowed to give an introduction to reading and writing Izi in front of the whole assembly. "We are so happy to see our own language written," was a comment he often heard. And those were the people who could read Izi straight off the pages without any difficulties!

"I have to tell the Meiers to work in this particular area when they come back; that's where the most responsive people live," Samuel thought.

A second truth became clear to him through his preachings on Sundays. He would take the passages he had been translating during the week and preach to a small group gathered from his home area. The whole service was in Izi except the songs! At the beginning, preaching in Izi was hard, but he had already discussed many biblical expressions with us. Everybody understood every word of his preaching. Nobody slept! Every so often he would be interrupted by exclamations from the audience, showing their consent, wonder, disagreement or their disbelief, as Izis always do in social gatherings. The little group on Sunday grew. Samuel was full of joy. How different this was from the church services when he had first become a Christian. He thought back to those beginnings.

Though not the oldest, he had been the only child from his family to go to school. His father had three wives and several children; however, in this family it was no longer a sign of wealth, but a heavy burden. Samuel remembered how his father -



The Izi people plant their seed yam in big heaps of earth

- come harvest time - would go to the field and dig into the earth to see whether the cassava or yam roots were big enough to be eaten and how he would come home crying because they weren't. He was the fetish priest for a large area and was respected for his wisdom. On his frequent trips to the various fetishes, accompanied by his little son Nwibo - as Samuel was then called, according to the day of the week he

was born - he would tell stories and so pass on to him the cultural and religious heritage of his clan. His

mother died when he was still a child. His memory of her was vividly connected with a wealth of songs which she taught him and which he still remembered so clearly.

Samuel walked daily for about an hour to attend the school near the main road, at the famous market place, Nkwegu. It was the only non-catholic school in the Izi area. This of course didn't matter to him for he didn't even know it. But God used this to bring a protestant missionary to his school to show a film about the life of Christ. Several children were touched, including Nwibo, then a boy in fifth grade, and his best friend, Uguru.. They joined a little group of Ibo believers on Sundays at the market place and decided to give their hearts wholly to the Lord Jesus. On the Sunday School register Nwibo was given a new name - Samuel.

At first his father made no objection to Samuel's going to church, but he insisted that his son continue to accompany him to the sacrificial places, carrying the basket with the sacrifices. Out of love for his father he would do it, but at the same time weeping and greatly fearing lest he should be seen by the evangelist; until one day, his father could bear his tears no more and looked for another boy to be his helper.

Harvest time was approaching, and with it the great yam festival, Jioha. On that day every Izi, from the oldest to the youngest, is obliged to go to the graves of his forefathers to feed the spirits of the dead with fufu made from the first yams. Samuel knew what his father believed. Not do this would involve the anger of the spirits and bring a great curse or even death to a man's family. He also knew that his new-found faith would not allow this practice. On Jioha day, Samuel refused to go with his family to the ancestor worship. Father was furious. Samuel was thoroughly beaten up, and forbidden to attend church ever again.

The following Sunday, Samuel prepared for church as if nothing had happened. There was a big scene again. His father knocked him to the ground, threatening to kill him, burn his Ibo Bible, then kill himself. Samuel threw his Bible at this father's feet in terror and fled.



at the festivities of the Izi a masked dancer is watched by men only

Where should he go? Who could reason with his father? His pastor was only a young man, just a few years older than himself and an Ibo. Then he remembered the headmaster at this school. He was an older man, and kind. He would surely help him.

He was not only kind, but very wise and knew how to deal with people and challenge them. So, when he brought Samuel back to his family again, he said to the old father:

"Iyoku, I have trained your son Nwibo for five years in my school. We have taught him every day. He can read and write and speak English and many other things. Have you ever thanked me for this?"

Father Iyoku hung his head; he didn't dare look the headmaster in the eyes.

"Have you ever come to me with a chicken, or some yams, to thank me?"

It was true. If someone does good to your child, you have to go and thank him. This is Izi custom. Father Iyoku had neglected this and he was embarrassed and ashamed. The headmaster continued:

"And now I hear that you have beaten him and want to kill him. Is that how you are going to thank me for what I have taught to your son?"

Iyoku had never thought about it in this light. He was miserable with embarrassment. What else could he do but take Samuel back again? From now on, Samuel was never hindered from going to church or forced to participate in sacrifices.

As Samuel now thought back, he remembered how his worries then started to come from another side: something was wrong with the church, only he could not pinpoint it at that time. Today the picture was so clear to him.

After the evangelistic meetings, Izi people had flocked to the church and at the beginning there were about 300 who attended every Sunday. However, numbers decreased every time. The pastor preached in English, which was then translated into Ibo, both languages foreign to all the Izis. Only the oldest school boys understood English. Ibo, although taught in school, was either not understood by the Izi adults, or, which was worse, misunderstood because of its similarities to Izi. Because Samuel was the most knowledgeable in both English and Ibo, he had been appointed interpreter.

He shuddered now, thinking back and remembering how often he and the others had misunderstood the preaching and had passed on a message that meant nothing or nonsense to the people. In addition, he had thought it was wrong to use his own Izi language either in singing or praying. He thought God could never answer a prayer made in Izi. Yet he was afraid to ask the pastor to explain what he did not understand.

A few days after one Christmas, a rumor had spread through the area like a bush fire: 'If you go to the Christians' church, you will only get one child.' Samuel had followed up this rumor and found out that an Ibo Christmas song had caused it: 'A child is born to us...' It had been misunderstood to mean that as a Christian you can never have more than one child. No wonder that people shunned such a church. This idea was an abomination to Izi ears.

After some time, there were only two left in the church: Samuel and his friend Uguru, with the new name of Paul. They truly loved the Lord and knew that such rumors stemmed from misunderstandings. But they were helpless. A great desire awakened in them: to go to a Bible school and be taught the Word of God correctly.

How well he remembered when he and his friend Paul left the Izi area and tried to earn money for their first term at Bible school. It was hard work, clearing the forest for stern masters. How their bodies ached each evening! And then, what a thrill went through them in Bible school when they heard of the two white people who had come to live in Izi to learn the language.

How different everything was now! The white people had encouraged him to pray in Izi, to preach in Izi. Oh, how he longed for the day when the New Testament would be translated! If only that war would end quickly! Diligently he continued translating the gospel of Mark.

Then came the day when the news ran through the area that the Federal Troops were approaching. It was rumored that the troops would either conscript all the

young men into their army or kill them, especially those who had been to school. And everywhere they went, they left a trail of looting.

All the young people around Samuel were getting ready to leave. What else could Samuel and his friend Paul do except go with them? He packed his precious books into a box and asked his father to hide it and keep it safe. He took with him only his translated manuscript of Mark and his bicycle.

The road was thick with people, on foot and on bicycles, all fleeing south. Several times as they fled, the planes spotted the stream of refugees, swooped down, shot into the crowds and dropped bombs. In panic the people ran into the bordering fields and forests. It was in one of these commotions that Samuel lost all his baggage, including the treasured translation.

In Umuahia town the refugees were gathered in camps. Food there was getting short, and as the women and children were cared for first, he often had to suffer hunger. But he still had his bicycle and this helped him to earn some money. He would take someone on his back carrier and taxi him around the town for a small sum. In this way he made about 50 cents a day, until one day even this source of income was robbed from him.

His life was in danger not only from bombing attacks, but also from people. Young men who hadn't joined the Biafran army were hated to the point that they couldn't leave the house anymore. They would have been thoroughly thrashed by the population. So, in order to stay alive, he had to join the army.

Again the Lord kept His hand over him. The commander of the training camp came to appreciate Samuel's integrity so much that he 'raised' him to the job of a servant to his own wife and children! Instead of being sent to the war front, he was sent to another town to protect and serve the commander's family. He was able to stay with them right to the end of the war.

How many times he cried to the Lord when bullets swished through the air from all sides and bombs fell, and when he saw people around him dropping down dead. And how many times he promised the Lord:

"Lord, if you really are God, and if everything that is written in the Bible is true, then I know that you will protect me today. And if I stay alive, then I will serve you with my whole life and I promise to work among the Izi people!"

The Lord took him at his word. He did protect him again and again. When the news of Biafra's capitulation leaked out, the army was dissolved, and a great stream of people started north again. Samuel was among them. His hopes of getting a ride on one of the many Red Cross trucks were shattered. The Biafran money he had earned was worth nothing now. With his strength almost gone, he started his homeward journey on foot - 100 miles! Just once a small child had pity on him and took him home where he was given a meal.

On the evening of the third day, he reached his father's compound. As he approached, he heard the pounding noise - the evening yam fufu was being prepared. Across the high fence he called:

"Be sure to leave some for me, too!"

None of them heard or understood him except a little girl who shouted:

"It is Nwibo, surely it is Nwibo!" but nobody believed her.

But as he entered the compound, for all of them to see, they ran toward him, shouted for joy and pressed around him. Many hands lifted him high into the air and they danced around with him! His father called his name dozens of times, just to make sure it was not a dream. Everybody had thought he had died in the war. Just a few days before, an alleged 'eye-witness' had come back telling he had seen him being killed by a bomb.

In the next days, he called on many of his friends, and again and again asked this question:

"Have you heard anything about the Meiers?"

He rejoiced when he heard that we were living in Northern Nigeria now and even that his friend Simon was with us. He lost no time in writing us a letter:

"...please come and fetch me so that I can resume our common task, for until I die, I will not forget the Izi language on which we worked. I am even ready to become a linguist if you will help me. I love you ..."

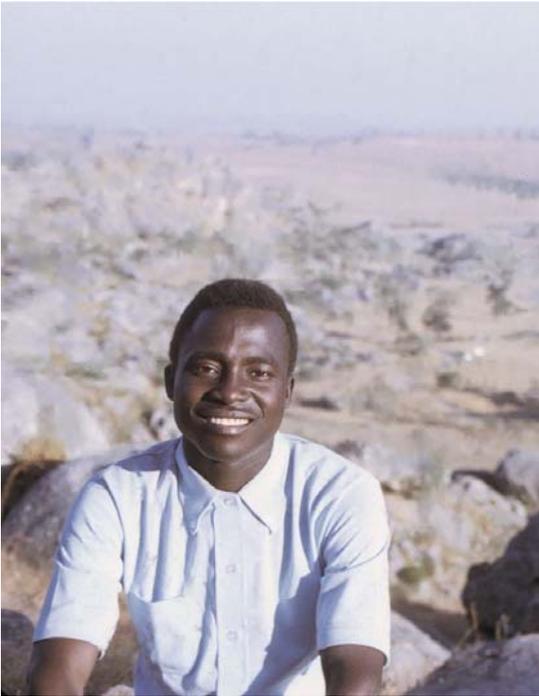
But he didn't know our address. Where should he send this letter to? Then he remembered one of Simon's friends who lived at the main road. Surely he must have Simon's address which was also ours. He must go there and find out!

Indeed, that friend did have the address! As they were still talking together, right there at the main road, a car stopped. A young man stepped out and ... Samuel ran towards him with a shout - "Simon!"

Yes, it was him, and the car was the Institute of Linguistics car. Simon, heading back to Zaria, just wanted to greet his friend at the roadside and enquire if they had any news about Samuel. What perfect timing! Only a loving Father could arrange such a meeting of the two at that exact moment!

And now, Samuel and Simon had arrived in Zaria and were standing before us. Two and a half years had passed since we had last seen Samuel. It was the old Samuel with his joyful extrovert spontaneity, but a new Samuel in his utter dedication to the Lord. He had promised that he would make the Izi New

Testament his first priority and he meant to keep that promise. He and Simon decided to arrange their remaining two years in Bible School in such a way that one of them would always be with us working on translation.



Samuel came back to us matured

For the present Bible school term it was too late; this meant that both Simon and Samuel could work with us for a few months. With Paul tied down in much administration and me having four small children at my apron strings, this meant that the two would have to work fairly independently. Samuel resumed writing a first draft of the gospel of Mark - for the second time, his first version having been lost on his flight to Biafra.

Only a few days after his arrival, Samuel joined us one evening in our living room.

"I have to tell you what happened to me in the car coming up to Zaria," he began. "Simon was reporting to me about all the things you have been working on. Suddenly, he remembered the chorus he had composed in Izi and he sang it to me. His face was just aglow with excitement and joy. I quickly

learned it too and we have been singing it over and over again. Then I remembered a certain time in Biafra when I told the Lord that I would like to make songs in Izi." He paused...

"This is great! Do you realize that we have been praying for this for a long time?"

"Yes, I know. After the war broke out in 1967, I was preaching in Izi and conducting the whole service in Izi too, except the songs. I saw for myself what a difference it made. I marvelled! I then cut out all the English songs, but I just loved those in Ibo and thought we could still use them. Only in Biafra I saw how mistaken I was."

"How did you come to realize this?" we asked, beginning to get excited.

"Well, you see, I had thought I understood these Ibo songs. But in Biafra I was forced to learn Ibo well and quickly! Otherwise people would make fun of us or even get angry about us 'foreigners'. So, when I went to church and these songs were sung again, I suddenly understood the real meaning. I realized that I had completely misunderstood before! Sometimes I was just horrified and ashamed to realize what wrong sense we in Izi had derived from the text!"

What Samuel then said, amazed us:

"I see now clearly that the Lord used the war for a purpose in my life. He knew that I used to think, way back in my youth when I listened to my pastor: 'If only I could die and rise again in one hour, then I would be happy'. I just wanted to see if all these things which the pastor was telling us were true.

I wanted to know if there was a heaven and a hell, a God and a Satan, and whether God answered prayer or not. But instead of letting me die, God sent me to Biafra. There I experienced the truth of His word. But now I am just longing to make sure that my brethren will no longer misunderstand the preacher. And also the Izi songs should proclaim the Good News. Please pray for me. I don't know how to go about making songs."

We discussed and prayed.

It didn't take Samuel long to get ideas for songs. First he translated English choruses, but we continually encouraged him to try to compose his own texts and tunes, the kind the Izis were used to hearing.

So over the months many songs came into being. He took Bible stories as a theme, or a psalm as his model. He expressed the believer's love to Jesus, or thanks and praise for what Jesus had done for him. He praised God the Creator, proclaimed the power of Jesus, His coming again, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, Judgment, Eternal Life. He created songs for church events like Christmas and Easter, but also for the feast which Samuel saw by faith only: the yam festival - when the future Christians, instead of putting their yams on the graves of their ancestors, would bring them to the church to present to their Lord.

Samuel's songs were extremely practical. There were no clichés, no commonplace phrases, no 'church language'. The contents should be easily understood, very relevant to the Izi culture - the words would speak right to their hearts. The example below is a song for times when Christians are suffering persecution. Samuel was sure that such times lay ahead for the Izi Christians.

1. Even if your yam will finish
Even if your possessions diminish,
Even if you have to go hungry,
Child of God, don't go back,
Child of God, only believe.

Chorus:

For you have become a Child of God, who is good.
For you have become a Child of God, who is peace.
For you have become a Child of God, who saves.
Child of God, don't go back,
Child of God, only believe.

2. Even if you cannot conceive a child,
Even if you cannot beget a child,
Even if death comes to kill in your home,

Child of God, do not mourn,
Child of God, only believe.

3. Even if you have fought your fetish (i.e. abandoned it)
Even if you have left the grave (i.e. refused ancestor worship)
Even if you don't go to the fortune teller,
Child of God, do not fear,
Child of God, only believe.

4. Even if the people of your family,
Even if the people of your village,
Even if the people of your clan,
Hate and disdain you, don't mind,
Child of God, only believe.

5. Believe that God is the One who gives yams,
Believe that God is the One who gives possessions,
Believe that God is the One who gives food,
Child of God, do not divide your heart in two,
Child of God, only believe.

6. Believe that God is the One who gives a child,
Believe that God is the One who gives life,
Believe that God is the One who has most power,
Child of God, do not fear,
Child of God, only believe.

7. Believe that later you will meet God,
Believe that later you will be given the hat of life,
Believe that later you will praise God,
In the Resting place of God the Father,
Child of God, only believe.

Sometimes he would have a tune in his head, and just couldn't get the right words. Sometimes he would have the words in him, but just could not find a tune. As the Izi language is highly tonal, it was of utmost importance that the tune go up if the tones of the words were high, and vice versa, that the tune would go down if the tones of the words were lowered. And because many question sentences differed from ordinary sentences just on one tone in the first syllable, it was of course necessary that such a syllable would, even in a song, be pronounced with a proper low tone. For tunes of some songs he experimented by closely following the spoken tones - just singing them - and he succeeded beautifully.

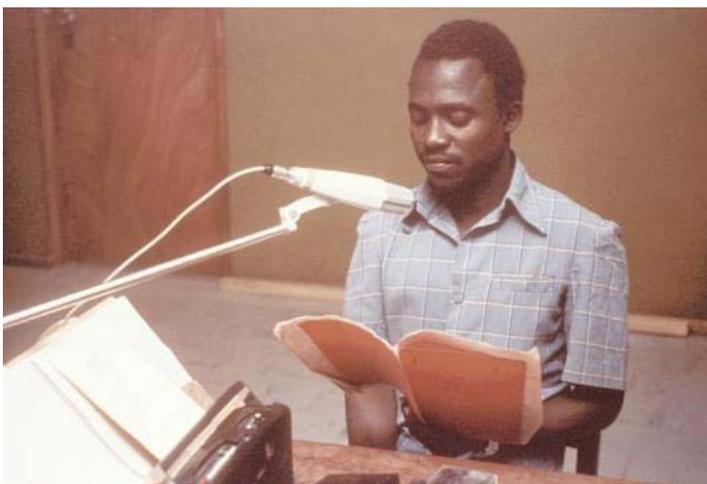
"Samuel, we asked him one day, "what will happen if one of the Christians dies? Will they have nothing but those hopeless dirges and wailings?"

This question touched his heart and troubled him for several days.

"Last night I just couldn't go to sleep for hours. Suddenly I began to think of my little half-brother who died a few months ago. I had to cry, I couldn't restrain myself. Then it was as if God said, "Get up and write!" I switched the light on and took pen and paper. Immediately this song came to my lips and shortly afterwards a second!"

The introduction of both songs came from the Old Testament. In one, Jacob was mourning for his son Joseph; in the other, it was David weeping for Absalom. Both show the hope the Christian has - to meet the Lord in whose presence there is no more suffering. The chorus has a striking similarity to the Izi custom of calling the name of the deceased. The songs were a truly cultural substitute for their dirges. In place of Jacob and David, calling the name of his son, the Izi can insert the name of the person to be mourned.

Song writing and composing, however, was not Samuel's main work. It was just a hobby and a sideline from the translation of Mark. He would write a first draft which I would go over with him while Simon would do the typing of manuscripts and stencils. In the evenings, when Paul was free, we would discuss difficult biblical terms. Out of those discussions would often come new inspiration for songs! We realized only much later on what a wonderful means these songs were, not only to get new and unusual terms across, but to put them actually into the mouths of the people to use. For some terms we had to create new word combinations, like Son of Man = the relative of the people of the world; to pray = to talk to God; to repent = to change one's actions and let the 'had I known' feeling come to oneself, etc. For other terms, we tried to use Izi cultural equivalents, like to forgive = to count the evil as done the first time (i.e. that which is not counted); to praise = to given an honoring name, and so on. Would the people accept those terms and use them?



Samuel had yet another hobby. It was writing sermons. He was an evangelist at heart. There in Zaria, he was surrounded by people of various strange tongues which he didn't understand, except when they spoke English. But he had to preach! If he couldn't do it in front of people, he could at least put his thoughts on paper! His zeal was kindled even more when Paul promised that he would put his best sermons on cassette tapes,

interspersed with his songs, and let him travel with it to Iziland.

I remember well one of those first sermons. It was an Izi version of the apostle Paul's speech in the Areopagos (Acts 17), culturally for the Izi people only, but timeless in its message. It later became the cassette which the Lord used most to turn older men and women to Him. With the introduction, an original recording of the incantation of the ancestor spirits, Samuel captured the attention of his audience right away. While transcribing this tape recording earlier, Samuel had come across a recurring phrase, which was added in a low tone after each calling of the ancestor's name. It meant: 'and the greater one which is in you.' Samuel had been amazed! Could it really be true that the older Izi people knew about a greater being behind all their ancestors, the 'unknown God'? So in his sermon he let his people listen to these incantations. For many it would be the very first time to hear it at all, for such a ceremony was only for the Izi elders. Samuel's voice interrupted what for every Izi was a fascinating recording:

"Did you hear what he said? 'Okalibe', 'the Greater one in you'... He is even thanking him! ... listen again..." Then he went on to explain that this knowledge of the Great God had been lost in the present generation and told them how they could even today hear about Him again and get to know this God in Jesus.



My kitchen storeroom was emptied and transformed into a tiny recording studio, where the first Izi sermons were preached on cassette and where - using technical equipment - Samuel's and Simon's voices were reduplicated into multivoice choir for the songs! We were all getting excited.

In July 1970, hardly six months after his return from Biafra, Samuel was ready to go to his Izi people. He would have 6 weeks there prior to this Bible school term, carrying with him the first tools to reach the Izis: a booklet on the life of Christ, a songbook with about 25 songs and an equal number of choruses, a cassette player with a choice of 4 cassettes, having a sermon and songs on each side.

Samuel had filled these six weeks with travelling and preaching. On his first day in Bible school, he was at last free to write to us:

"Many have heard His Word who otherwise would never have had the chance! Many would like to buy their own player. Many would like to start a church service in their area - at least in six areas. Chief Echiegu promised to give us land for building a church hut. We use only our Izi language throughout any service. We use our booklet with the Jesus stories as our Izi Bible and it is just wonderful! Just

think how it will be once we have our New Testament! As soon as Bible School closes, I will rush back to Zaria..."



listening to the « Talking box »

Not only did we hear from Samuel, but other people wrote to us, too. It was clear that the songs had made a quick and lasting impression on everybody and the cassette player was one of the miracles of the new age. As people were sitting around the 'talking box' (as they soon named it) and listening, they would guess at whose voice it was, but couldn't decide. Samuel, of course, would not reveal his authorship.

"It must be an older, experienced Izi man!" was the consensus. Had they known, however, that it was young Samuel who was sitting in their midst, the message would have carried half the weight!

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Even our former language helper, Sunday, was stirred up by these happenings. We had not heard from him since the Biafran war had broken out. Now he told us how he had been conscripted into the Biafran army and forced to fight at the war front. However, God had always been able to protect him from bombs and bullets all that time. In spite of his 18 years, he had been allowed to start his first year in Secondary School. He continued:

"We have a good teacher for 'Religious Knowledge'. He was just beginning Matthew chapter 1. After he had read the English version, he also read the passage in Ibo so that we would understand more. Then I told him that I had a translation in my own language. As soon as the class heard this - half of them are Izi and Ezaa boys - they called out: 'Read it aloud! Read it aloud!' The teacher agreed. From our little 'Life of Christ' booklet, I read the story: 'Listen to the report how Jesus was born into this world'. After a while an Ezaa boy exclaimed: 'Incredible! See now, how lucky the Izi people are!' He was all excited. He came over and stood behind me in order to read along with me and so did the teacher. All were amazed. The Izi boys were so thankful. After the lesson, they all came to me and because each one wanted to have a look at the booklet, they half tore the cover off... In my Christmas vacation, I will read the stories to our villagers and tell them why it is that we celebrate Christmas every year..."

Samuel was so keen to go on with translation that he had asked the leaders of the Bible School to allow him to continue translating during the times when the others were doing chores. He started with the Acts of the Apostles.

"When I am working on translation, I tend to forget everything around me. I don't remember anymore that I am in school. I hardly know myself. It seems to me that I am really seeing Stephen as he talks..."

Samuel came back to us for his vacation, although people in Izi pressed him hard to come to their area to evangelize, preach and encourage the few young Christians. Four small, weak groups of Christians and interested people had come into being. But Samuel realized rightly that, at that moment, translation work had priority. How could the young believers be strengthened if they were not grounded and rooted in the Word of God? He looked forward to participating in his first translation workshop in December.

Meanwhile we had received a number of requests for cassette players and sermon tapes so that we considered the purchase of a small number of players a necessity. We wrote to our friends to send us as Christmas presents cassettes with a short personal message - these could come in duty free, whereas the duty on importing empty cassettes was 100%!

The first Christmas cassette was recorded and someone took two players and two sets of cassettes down to Iziland. One set went to Sunday who had so earnestly asked us for it. Here is what he reported shortly after Christmas.

"I preached with the cassette player to the people in my compound and in my whole area... People from the surrounding villages would come to us in the evenings, to sit with us around the fire and listen by moonlight to the message from God. Many can sing the songs by heart. My old father is deeply moved. Three compounds in our village are ready to leave their old ways and follow Jesus. That makes about 20 people in the three compounds who are hungry to hear more about Jesus... One day I was invited to a place where they held a dance and drummingfeast. As soon as they saw me arrive, they all left their drums and formed a circle around me. I could hardly move. They were not interested in dances anymore. They asked many questions, like 'Who is Jesus?' 'Who is God?' 'Where do the dead go?' and others."

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Our own inner tension grew as Paul's two years' administrative duties drew to an end. In a few weeks, January 1971, our membership would decide whether another team could take over the administration and we would be released to return to Izi. The Lord brought us to a point where we were ready to do joyfully whatever was decided. It was a relief when the decision was made - we were free

to go back south to the Izi people! Samuel and Simon rejoiced most and would have liked us to pack up the house right away! The handing over of Paul's duties, however, took some time.



Paul on a walk with his children in Zaria

A new question needed an answer: Where could we set up a new home in Izi? One thing had become clear to us: We would not want to return to our former house in Chief Echiegu's compound. For our family, we needed a larger home and for our work, it needed to be in an area where people were more open and keen to learn. But where to find a house in a land with no villages, where only individual compounds were scattered over 1000 square miles? In order to find a solution, Paul and Samuel planned a survey trip.

As the spies of the people of Israel returned with samples of fruit from the promised land, so Paul and Samuel returned with two giant banana stalks - to us a tangible sign that the Lord had gone before them. God even held a house ready for us. It was not what we had imagined, but one that best served His plans - which we were not yet aware of. It did not stand in the Izi area, but in neighboring Ikwo: an agricultural station that had been abandoned since the war.

We were completely ignorant of the Lord's plans. Knowing what the future held would have been too much for us. One glimpse through the veil at a time was enough. And although we felt a deep joy at the Lord's leading, it was not all rejoicing. We had our share of trials and testings. First Samuel was attacked and robbed in town. Later, he fell from his bicycle and broke his collarbone. Three of our children and I became sick with a throat infection, so Paul had to look after us. At last the Lord spoke to us through a verse:

*"Purify yourselves... for you shall not go out in haste
and you shall not go in flight,
for the Lord will go before you,
and the God of Israel will be your rearguard." (Is. 52:12)*

We felt secure in the knowledge that the Lord had planned the next chapter of our lives too.

