

2018-04

Mutendi, Samuel (A)

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Mutendi, Samuel (A)
1890-1976
Zion Christian Church
Zimbabwe

Samuel Mutendi was the founder of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). A muRozvi-Shona born in the Bikita district of Masvingo Province, he was raised and educated in the Dutch Reformed Church. Even as a young man, Mutendi had dreams and visions reflecting his church leadership ambitions. As a labor migrant in Pretoria, he first obtained membership in the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission, then in 1925 broke away with Enginase Lekganyane and a few other key figures to form the ZCC. Ordained as a ZCC minister, Mutendi founded the Rhodesian branch of the new church, with its headquarters near Nyika Halt in Bikita. Although he retained ideological and historical links with what was to become the largest Christian Church in South Africa, Lekganyane's ZCC, currently based in Pietersburg, he developed the Zimbabwean ZCC into a fully autonomous church, with an estimated 500,000 members in 1996. Zimbabwean-affiliated ZCC congregations also exist in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique.

As bishop of the ZCC, and unlike his Apostolic counterpart, John Maranke, Mutendi focused on building an impressive Zion City, or Moriah, with schools, church, a faith-healing "hospital," and other symbols of the presence of Christ, the Lamb of Mt. Zion (Rev. 14:1). In Zion City, Mutendi's leadership resembled both that of a Rozvi monarch and that of a messianic "man of God," as he is called by his followers. As a black icon, he mirrored the life of Christ in an African setting. His resistance to oppressive colonial rule, which resulted in several detentions, added to his popularity and stature among African chiefs and commoners alike.

In ZCC theology preoccupation with human well-being through exorcistic healing and agro-economic development contributed toward a strong emphasis on this-worldly salvation. Zionist achievement and progress therefore became essential components of the Good News propagated by the ZCC. Nevertheless, Mutendi's church never forfeited its essentially missionary character. The annual paschal celebrations at Zion City serve as a springboard for massive missionary campaigns throughout Zimbabwe and beyond its borders—campaigns of witness, outreach, celebration, and healing that activate entire church communities.

After Mutendi's death, a schism occurred, each faction operating under the leadership of one of his sons, Nehemiah and Ruben. The relationship between the two factions is marked by meaningful interaction rather than alienation.

Marthinus L. Daneel

Bibliography:

Marthinus L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, vol. 1, *Background and Rise of the Major Movements* (1971).

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Mutendi, Samuel (B) **1890-1976** **Zion Christian Church** **Zimbabwe**

According to section nine of the booklet entitled "Rungano rweZion Christian Church in Rhodesia," Samuel Mutendi was born to Makuwa, son of Mudengezerwa who was the son of Chirume Mushavi who lived at Great Zimbabwe. Chirume Mushavi was born to Dlembeu, the first son of Chief Chirisamhuru of Matopos. This means that Samuel Mutendi was of the "*Moyo wavaRozvi*" or heart totem. His father Makuwa was one of King Chikore's vice regents and a traditionalist who later was converted to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). This history shows that Mutendi was a member of the Rozvi royal family and grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church.

Samuel Mutendi was born in Zaka at Mount Havunga under the chieftainship of Chipinda, the year Chief Chikore of Zaka District, in Masvingo Province, was raided by the Ndebele people. After the battle, Makuwa set up his homestead that shared borders with three chiefs: Chipinda, Muroyi, and Marozva. It was at this homestead that Samuel Mutendi was born. The current Zion Christian Church (ZCC) bishop, Nehemiah Mutendi, explicitly said that his father was born in July 1890 and that: