



The Zulu evangelist and revival

Nicholas Bhengu, a Zulu, called the 'Black Billy Graham' by *Time Magazine*, was the son of a Lutheran pastor. Bhengu joined the Communist Party as a young man. After his conversion in a Pentecostal Church, he went to Bible School in Dumisa, Natal in 1936. He gave the following testimony about his time at Bible School, "*I experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit as never before. It was there that I learned of the amazing grace of God and His love that surpasses all understanding. It was there that a passion for souls was born in my heart. Mr. Suter, our teacher, emphasised the need for messengers who would go at God's command, without a salary. One day he said, 'God wants a man.'"*

He spoke Zulu, English and Xhosa fluently and could also communicate in several other languages. In 1938, he joined the Assemblies of God and began to preach with much blessing and fruit. He had a dream in which he heard the words, "*Africa must turn back to God.*" Out of this was born his 'Back to God Crusade.'

For forty years, his crusades toured systematically through South Africa. His first big crusade was in 1945 in Port Elizabeth and it produced 1,000 converts in six weeks! He started work in East London and declared war on sin and crime. Thousands were converted, among them thieves, gangsters and murderers. He preached to crowds numbering up to 7,000 people.

It was like the Book of Acts repeating itself. Many sick were healed. At one place, a crippled man suddenly jumped up, threw away his crutches, started to walk and then to run! There was a tremendous uproar in the crowd. It happened while nobody was even praying for him! Sometimes people felt the power of God on them so heavily, that they could not walk. Many lay prostrate on the floor, as if dead.

Bhengu sent for busses to pick them up to take them home. As soon as the drivers and conductors tried to pick them up, they also came under the power of the Holy Spirit. In this way, many of the bus drivers and conductors were converted also. After a few days, police asked the public not to bring any more stolen goods to the police station because there was not enough room to store it all! Gang leaders handed over their knives and other weapons.

The *Daily Dispatch* newspaper carried an article which detailed the goods that had been returned to the police before the public was asked to stop returning stolen items. The list included eighty sheets of linen, twenty-five blankets, twenty-four jackets, thirty shirts, twenty-five dresses and much more.

Many times when Bhengu preached, the Holy Spirit fell upon people. Boys, as young as twelve, started to speak in tongues and prophesied. Thousands were converted, and many churches were planted. Sometimes gangsters grew so angry by this turn of events that they planned to kill Bhengu, but God protected him.

Each year witnessed fresh revivals. People from all walks of life were reached. A Zulu queen, for instance, was baptised in 1971 in front of 5,000 witnesses. Influential African political leaders were also among the converts.

This revival continued for decades in what was known in those years as the "Black Church" of South Africa. Over the years, work gathered momentum, and each year seemed to witness fresh outbreaks of revival. Bhengu preached into his late seventies, and he was widely respected. He ministered across the world in countries such as Japan, Britain, Canada and America. He was accepted across all denominations. For years he never took time off to rest, consumed by his divine commission.

Extract taken from *South African Revivals: 1786 - 2015*, written by Bennie Mostert.