

Excerpt from *The Reward Unseen*, chapter “At the Crossroads.”

During their time in Bambili, the Haases lived next to a store run by a Greek merchant. William frequented the store mostly to speak to the merchant in Greek, with both of them being familiar with classical Greek. Through their discussions of the New Testament, William led the store owner to the Lord. Excited about his newfound faith, the merchant used his influence to lead many Africans to salvation in Christ. He also stopped selling liquor. He already knew the detrimental affect it had on the African population, but losing the sales slashed his profits in half. The salvation that William brought was of much greater value to him than money. In gratitude, he gave the Haases a mule that made traveling much easier for the weary family.

The clop-clop of the mule’s hooves beat a soft, steady rhythm along the twisting Uele River path. Westward progress was slow, but the Haases used the journey to spread the completely unheard-of gospel message everywhere they went. One joy along the route was a week-long visit to Boa’s village. The Zande chief had enthusiastically shared Christ with his villagers, who showed exceptional interest. At the Haases’ arrival, most were already saved, and nine people were ready for baptism. William triumphantly immersed the new believers in a clear stream nearby. That evening, they held a communion service and formally organized the church. Boa was chosen as pastor and two men, Kabundu and Zelisa, were made elders. Even decades after the Haases left, the church kept growing and thriving autonomously. Knowing the profound transformation the gospel brought to them, the church members were intensely evangelistic and they suffered considerable persecution as a result.

The next village on the Haas family’s route was led by Boa’s eldest brother, Gingi. On the way, William and Genevieve entered a scene reminiscent of Jesus’s preaching in the Gospel accounts. Crowds of people surrounded the family, making it difficult to eat or rest until nightfall. When they finally arrived at the village, Gingi was impressed with the message but not yet ready to receive Christ. Later, 22 believers were baptized in his village. Gingi watched solemnly and said at the close of the service, “You are now men of God, but I remain a man of the benge [witchcraft].” It was only several months later that he sent word for William. He had made his decision and was ready to be baptized himself.

God’s smile of blessing crowned William and Genevieve’s desire to take the gospel where no man or woman had yet brought it. Progressing northwest toward the Mbomou River, they reached the military post of Lebo five days later. Surprisingly, the chef de poste [the outpost’s top official] was Protestant and eager to have a mission established there. Yet his desire was surpassed at the nearby village of an influential chief named Dura. Throngs of people gathered around William and begged him to be their spiritual shepherd, to live with them, and to teach them “the path of God.” They even chose a site for their mission.

Leaving a people so hungry for the Word of God was excruciating, just as it would be for a farmer to turn his back on a long-awaited field ripe with grain. William promised he would tell people in his homeland about their need and pray for them. William frequently peppered his letters to supporters with pleas for more workers. The harvest was extraordinarily ripe! Before they left, Dura sent two of his own sons to travel several days with the Haases to learn more about “Yesu Christu” and bring the teaching back to their village.