

Tiyo Soga (1829-1871)



Tiyo Soga belonged to the Xhosa people. The Xhosa people live in South Africa. His father was a chief. His mother's name was Nosutu. Nosutu became a Christian. She taught her children about Jesus.

Tiyo went to school. It was a missionary school. The missionary was William Chalmers (1802-1847). William Chalmers came from Scotland.

Tiyo did well at school. He was able to go on to a school for older children. There were Xhosa children in the school. There were missionary children in the school. They all learned together.

A terrible war broke out. The school had to close. The head teacher decided to go home to Scotland. He told Nosutu, "I can take Tiyo with me. He can learn well in Scotland. I am taking two sons of missionaries with me too. They can come to Scotland together. Will you let him come?"

Scotland was far, far away. There was a war going on. What would Nosutu say? If Tiyo went perhaps she might never see him again. But Nosutu had prayed for Tiyo. She knew God would take care of him in Africa. She knew God would take care of him in Scotland. There was no difference.

And so Tiyo went to Scotland. He went to school in Scotland. He remembered what his mother had taught him about Jesus Christ. Tiyo became a Christian. Nosutu's prayers were answered.

When Tiyo came home to South Africa he began preaching and writing hymns in the Xhosa language. He and another missionary had a mission station. Here they could tell the Xhosa people about the Lord Jesus. But South Africa was still torn by war. The mission station was burned down in the war. Tiyo had to escape. This was a hard time for Xhosa Christians.

Tiyo went to Scotland again. He studied hard to be a better preacher. He got married. His new wife was a young Scottish lady, Janet. Her family was poor. She was a brave Christian. She was ready to go with Tiyo to South Africa to help him.

Tiyo preached in Scotland. The people had never heard an African preach before. The first time he preached in Scotland the building was crowded. A little boy was sitting on the pulpit steps. Tiyo's hand was resting on the edge of the pulpit. The boy had never seen an African before. He was very curious. The congregation sang a Psalm. The boy stretched up. He ran his finger across Tiyo's black hand. He wanted to find out if the colour would rub off! It did not. The boy licked his finger and tried again. The boy looked up and found Tiyo looking into his eyes. Tiyo was trying not to laugh!

In Scotland Tiyo and his Scottish wife were loved. When he took her home with him to South Africa things were different. They were stared at. People were rude. "He is black and she is white," they said. "They should not be married!" Tiyo and Janet were patient. They knew everyone is the same in God's eyes.

A terrible disaster happened in South Africa. A false prophetess began telling the Xhosa people lies. She said that the white settlers would be swept into the sea. She said the spirits of the Xhosa ancestors would do this. She said they would only do it if the Xhosa people did something awful. What was that thing? They must burn their crops. They must kill all their cattle. She even said the date when the ancestors would do this. Did the Xhosa people listen to these lies? Yes! They killed their cattle. They destroyed their crops. Then they waited. The date came. Nothing happened. Now the Xhosa people had no crops. They had no cattle. There was nothing for them to eat. They began to starve.

The starving people came to Tiyo and Janet. They tried to help them. They could not help everyone. They did not have so much food. They did what they could.

Later Tiyo and a helper built a little mud-walled church. There were services in English for settlers. There were services in Xhosa too. Tiyo thought about the lying prophecy. Would it make people think? Would they turn to Jesus Christ for help? At first they did not. But then gradually people began to be saved. More and more Xhosa people came to the little church. They were seeking to find the Saviour. At last there were about 150 people in the little church.

But now Tiyo was becoming ill. There were bad pains in his side and chest. Off he rode to King William's Town. There was a doctor there.

“What is wrong with me?” Tiyo asked him. “I have pains in my side. I have pains in my chest.”

The doctor was sad. “You have tuberculosis,” he told Tiyo. There was no cure for tuberculosis then. The illness would make Tiyo weak. In the end it would kill him.

Time was short now. Tiyo's life was running out. What did he do? He translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Xhosa. He knew it would help Xhosa people to understand about Jesus Christ.

Tiyo was still preaching. All sorts of people wanted to hear him in all sorts of places. The Xhosa people listened to him. The settlers listened too. He preached in many different churches and chapels. Although he was weak he travelled far and wide. People began to stop being rude to Tiyo and Janet about their marriage now.

Tiyo also wrote hymns. He wrote one of Africa's most famous Xhosa hymns, “Lizalis' idinga lakho, Thixo Nkosi yenyano!” (Fulfil thy promise, Faithful God!). It is still sung all over South Africa today.

Tiyo knew that God had made black Africans just as he had made white people. He was sure that his people could do well. Tiyo said his people should become educated. They should use modern agricultural techniques. They should wear, modern clothing. These were good things brought by white people. White people also brought bad things. Tiyo wanted his people to avoid those bad things. Above all he wanted them to become Christians.

Tiyo died as he had lived preaching the gospel. He had gone to establish a new preaching place. The weather got cold and wet. Tiyo caught a fever and died.

Brave Janet Soga then went to live with her old mother-in-law Nosutu. She did this to make sure the children all learned to speak Xhosa well. She then took them to Scotland to study. The boys came back to South Africa. Several of them were missionaries like their father. That was what Janet Soga wanted best of all.

