

## Herero

The Herero people are related to the Bantu people and speak a Bantu language. They live primarily in Namibia and Botswana in southwest Africa and number about 175,000. They are believed to have migrated from the Lake Tanganyika area in the east during the 18th century.

### Location

Approximately 150,000 Herero live in Namibia and about 20,000 in Botswana. The Herero make up approximately 7% of Namibia's population. The Herero have also scattered throughout southern Angola. Oral history has it that the Herero people group left the great lakes region of eastern Africa in the 1500s. They spent the next two centuries migrating to southwestern Africa where they settled in central Namibia. Things were relatively peaceful for the Herero for the next 150 years or so except for the occasional skirmish with the tribes from the south who were pushed north by South Africans who desired their grazing lands. The Herero are herders and the plains of central Namibia are perfect for grazing the cows that are foundational to their culture.



### Culture

**Inheritance:** The Herero of Namibia and Botswana are unique among southern Africa's indigenous people in that they inherit different things from the mother's and father's families. Residence, religion, and authority are taken from the father's line, while the inheritance of wealth is passed through the mother's clan.

**Livelihood:** Traditionally, the Herero were nomadic pastoralists. Following contact with Europeans in the mid-19th century, many have become subsistence farmers, growing grains and raising sheep, cattle, and fowl.

**Marriage:** Apparently, not much significance is attached to marriage in the Herero group. No personal relationship exists between a man and his wife. They each keep their own wealth and property. Each man has several wives, although a married woman is not allowed to have additional husbands. Despite the legalities, many women do have relationships with other men.

**Dress:** The striking Herero women's dress is derived from the Victorian era. German missionaries encouraged the women to wear clothes according to the fashion in Europe at the time.

**Religion:** The traditional religion is a form of ancestor worship, but many Herero mix it with forms of Christianity. There are many opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ in Namibia, but the Herero must be challenged about their superstitions and fears.

The majority of the Herero call themselves Christians. But the Herero church, the *Oruvano*, combines Christian dogma with ancestor worship and magical practices. For example, the Herero have a holy, ritual fire that symbolizes life, prosperity, and fertility to them. They believe in a Supreme Being, called *Omukuru*, or the Great One.

### Government

The Herero are divided into autonomous political units under local headmen. Local residential groups are formed around extended families based on patrilineal descent. Matrilineal kinsmen, however, frequently live in the area.

### History

After Namibia (formerly called South West Africa) was awarded to Germany in 1884, the Germans quickly established their presence along the coast and inland and set up treaties with the Herero. In 1904, because of broken treaties over grazing land, the Herero began an uprising among the German colonizers and won several key victories. In retaliation, German troops massacred 75 per cent of the Herero population. Much of the Herero land was divided into big ranches for cattle.



Herero survivors scattered throughout Namibia, and a substantial number fled to Botswana. After Namibia's independence in 1990, many Herero expressed their desire to return to their traditional homeland. With the departure of German rule around World War I, the Herero ventured back into central Namibia only to encounter the ruling South Africans. With them came apartheid--the forced segregation of racial communities. In 1959, the South African police came to the non-white location to move the people further out of Windhoek so that Whites could settle in their place. Then a costly rebellion was launched, but it was a significant day in the history of Namibia! It was the beginning of the long struggle for independence which was finally realized in March of 1990.

### SIM Involvement

SIM has been involved with the Herero since the 1970s in the rural areas. The focus was on youth, and that produced a vibrant and growing church in the city of Windhoek as the young people moved to the urban areas. The church began in the home of an SIM missionary and is now thriving and independent.

The Herero planted a church in a town approximately 240 kms to the north! We would like to find church planters to mentor the new church. We would also like to place one year (or longer) short-term teachers in schools in different parts of Hereroland.

### Scripture Availability

Between 1875 and 1912, the New Testament and other Bible portions were translated into the Herero (Bantu) language. In 1987, the entire Bible was printed and distributed.

## Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.

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