



8 ❧ Rebecca, Jacob, and a son named Samuel

Rebecca Gavunji was abandoned twice when she was very young. She was born in 1923 in the village of Lubu Kakese. Her mother died after the birth. Members of her mother's family did not want to assume responsibility for the baby and decided to place her in the coffin with her deceased mother so that she would be buried along with her.

Mennonite missionaries, accompanied by Pastor Joseph Nsongamadi¹ were passing through the village exactly at that time and found the people mourning. Learning about the circumstances, they asked the members of that family to give them the child. The family relinquished the child to the missionaries for their care at the mission station.

Several years later, the missionaries needed to go on leave to the United States, and the little girl was returned to her grandfather's care in the village. One day the wife of Rebecca's grandfather took her along with her into the countryside, where the little girl's leg was injured. The woman abandoned her and returned to the village. A good-hearted mother passing by found the child crying, with a large wound on her leg. This good Samaritan tied up the wound and helped the child get back to the village. From there she was taken to the mis-

photos—Rebecca Gavunji and Jacob Gasala

¹ See "Please send us that lady with the book" (chapter 4).

sion and restored to the care of the missionaries, who had returned by then. Rebecca was six years old.

Finally it was decided to send the girl to Ndjoko Punda to the orphanage. It was at the Ndjoko Punda orphanage that she began to work in the capacity of “room girl” or nurse’s aide. She was baptized in Mukedi in 1934 and married Jacob Gasala in 1935. She became, in Mukedi, a midwife and then director of the maternity clinic from 1949 to 1972. The maternity clinic of Mukedi, which still exists, is named for her, the Mama Gavunji Maternity Clinic.

Her husband, Jacob Gasala Kasongo, was born in Mukedi, also orphaned at an early age, and brought by missionaries to the Ndjoko Punda orphanage. There he became expert at raising chickens. The missionaries even used his name in a reader that contained a sentence, “Kasongo is feeding the chickens.” Jacob was a model of good conduct for all the youth. The missionaries also trained him in carpentry, and put him through the mission’s full education cycle. He became a teacher, founded a new congregation, and became assistant director of a collection of nine primary schools. In recognition of his accomplishments he was decorated with a bronze medal by the Belgian government in 1956.

Meanwhile, he also exercised his skills in carpentry. Curiously, the value of the articles Jacob made always rose. Along with his gift for raising chickens—he was a great purveyor of poultry and eggs to the missionaries—this activity brought him prosperity and reminded people of the Old Testament Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebecca and father of Joseph.

Jacob Gasala and Rebecca Gavunji also had a notable son, Samuel Kakesa, who became the first Congolese legal representative of the Mennonite Church in 1965.² The couple lived to see their son honored in this way. Rebecca Gavunji passed away in 1977, and Jacob Gasala died in 1984.

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² See “An open Bible at rebel headquarters” (chapter 30).