

Session 1



Here we are



‘ This God made us in all our diversity from one original person, allowing each culture to have its own time to develop, giving each its own place to live and thrive in its distinct ways. ’ (GW) Acts 17:26

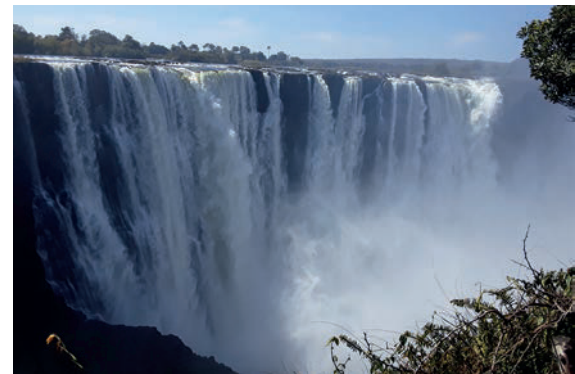
Unlike the island of Great Britain, Zimbabwe (officially called The Republic of Zimbabwe) is a land-locked country (it has no coastline) in southern Africa. It shares borders with Mozambique, Botswana, Zambia and South Africa.

Discuss What difference do you think it makes to a country not to have a coastline? Or, like the UK, to be surrounded by sea?

In African terms, it is quite a small country (the 26th largest country in Africa), However, it covers 390,757 square kilometres, which is nearly twice as big as Great Britain (209,331 square kilometres) and three times as big as England (132,938 square kilometres).

The population of Zimbabwe is just over 16million, and about ten per cent of them live in the capital city, Harare.

Zimbabwe is located between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers and is home to some of the most spectacular waterfalls – including the Victoria Falls, the largest curtain of falling water in the world, based on its width of 1,708 metres and height of over 98 metres. 650 million litres of water every minute drop over the cliff. Almost all of Zimbabwe lies over 300 metres above sea level.



The first people in the country were the Bantu-speaking Iron Age farmers in about 300CE – although there is evidence that Stone Age people inhabited the area up to 500,000 years ago. Nowadays there are three main languages: Shona, Ndebele and English – although there are actually another 13 official languages (Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Khoisan, Nambya, Ndau, Shangani, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa.)

Discuss Why do you think there are so many official languages? What issues do you think this might cause and how might you overcome them? Can you find out how to greet people in any of the languages spoken in Zimbabwe?



Zimbabwe's main industries are related to mining (platinum, iron ore, gold, diamonds and coal), agriculture, energy and tourism.

The country is known for its wealth of precious resources. In the Bible, King Solomon received a shipment of gold, silver, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, apes and peacocks every three years from the port of Ophir. Although many places have claimed to be the ancient port of Ophir, some scholars suggest that it is in Zimbabwe. You can read about King Solomon's wealth and what he received from Ophir in 1 Kings 9:28-10:22.

Zimbabwe is home to the 'Big Five', so called by the hunters who came from abroad to Africa to hunt down these animals as trophies. These animals are now also threatened by climate change and loss of habitat and are the target of conservation projects, though some people argue that the money raised by the sale of hunting licenses is important to fund these projects. The big five are the African elephant, the Cape buffalo, the black rhino, the African lion and the African leopard. The Sable Antelope (left) is the national animal.



Some of the most famous landmarks in Zimbabwe are the 'Balancing Rocks'.

Activity

'Balancing rocks' is an activity that some people use to aid their mental wellbeing in the UK. Can you try and balance pebbles into a structure that doesn't look as though it should stay upright?

Zimbabwe used to be called Southern Rhodesia (and later Rhodesia) and was a British colony ruled by a minority white government in which the indigenous black African people were treated as though they were less important than white people. You can read about colonisation and its effects here: www.bit.ly/3rqRNvD

Cecil John Rhodes was one of the British imperialists who colonised the area now called Zimbabwe and there is a lot of controversy about him. There is a statue of him outside one of the Oxford University colleges and there has been a campaign to have it removed. This news report from CMN will explain a little about why: www.bit.ly/3PR5tcy. What is your opinion? He donated a lot of money to the university – is it right that they have a statue of him there?

Rhodesia declared independence from the UK in 1974 – but the country was still ruled by a white minority government which was not internationally recognised. It finally gained independence from white minority rule in 1980 after a civil war that cost 30,000 lives, and renamed itself Zimbabwe. The name is derived from the Shona phrase "Dzimba dza mabwe", which means "great houses of stone". It refers to the stone structures of Great Zimbabwe or Dzimbahwe, which were included in the World Heritage List in 1986.

Robert Mugabe was elected President and he ruled with an increasingly iron fist for 30 years until he was forced out of power following a coup in 2017.



The Zimbabwe flag includes a black stripe that represents the ethnic majority, red for the blood shed during liberation, green for agriculture, yellow for mineral wealth and white for peace and progress. There is also a red star for socialism and a depiction of the Zimbabwe bird that appeared on carvings in Great Zimbabwe.

About 50% of the population in the country profess to be Syncretics (part Christian, part indigenous beliefs), 25% are Christians and the rest follow indigenous beliefs. There is no official state religion (such as the Church of England).

Research

What is meant by indigenous beliefs and what are the indigenous beliefs in Zimbabwe? Do you ever mix other beliefs (e.g. superstitions) with your Christian faith?

Zimbabwe is a very 'young' country – with nearly 50% of the population being under 20 years old. Life expectancy is much lower than in Great Britain, with men living until 62 and women living until 65 (on average).

Discuss Can you imagine living somewhere where half the population is under 20 and very few people live beyond their mid sixties? How would the UK be different if that were the case here?

