



LESOTHO SENDS MISSIONARIES: PT 2

Elia Maphike: He attacked the Bapedi, then brought them the Gospel

First encounters with the Bapedi

Efforts to bring the Gospel to the Bapedi grew out of relations between the Basotho and Bapedi as their culture and language have close similarities. Formal dealings began as early as 1838 when Matumulane, a Bapedi chief, was sent by his king to meet with Moshoeshoe. Matumulane, along with many followers, ended up staying for 2 months that year, and another similar period the following year, in order to learn more about the work of the missionaries. Thomas Arbousset spent many hours speaking with Matumulane and his people, and because of their close relations, a shared desire developed for a mission to be opened among the Bapedi. Arbousset wrote:

...a mission to the Baperis [Bapedi] would be most important, and, perhaps, indeed it would succeed better than all those which have already been tried to the west of the country... This we know for certain, that [King] Sekuati and Seamoga [his brother] are well disposed towards the reception of the messengers of salvation, for they have earnestly entreated us for them, and it was not without deep regret that we found ourselves unable to give [an] other answer than this, 'There is a lack of labourers'.

First attempted mission to the Bapedi (1847)

The first mission trip to the Transvaal (and the Bapedi) was carried out by emerging leaders in the local church, Eli Maphike and Nehemiah Sello, together with two others. They planned to be gone for one full year, which demonstrated the depth of their commitment and the intended scope of this venture. The team of evangelists went well equipped with packets of educational and religious materials, as well as scientific instruments to make records of their journey. The team evangelized and worked among communities of the Bataung, Lihajo, Batlokoa, Bapo and Bapedi.

One of the leaders of this team, Elia Maphike, was part of the 1843 encounter with the visitors where the mission to the Bapedi was discussed. Maphike's grandfather was a chief of the Bakhatla - a people closely related to the Bapedi. Maphike settled with Moshoeshoe's brother, Posholi, and accompanied him in pillaging a group of Bapedi, in what turned out to be an unsuccessful mission in 1839. As Maphike became more influenced by the Gospel message, he began to regret his earlier actions against the Bapedi. And so one of those who initially attacked the Bapedi, now renounced pillage and instead became one who sought to connect with the Bapedi in a very different manner and bring them the Gospel of Peace.

Unfortunately, before Maphike's team could reach their intended destination, Boer farmers, descendants of the Dutch immigrants from the 1600s onwards, forced the group to turn back. There was a distrust of educated Christian Africans in the Boer community at that time, although the Boers were themselves Christian by upbringing. Because of this, Maphike's team only spent about 3 and a half months away from Lesotho on this trip, far less than originally planned. However, this did not stop God's plan of using Basotho to reach the Bapedi...

By the late 1840s, hundreds of Bapedi men came down through Lesotho annually on their way to the Cape in search of work. They would need permits from Moshoeshoe to cross into the Cape, and he would often request help with making bricks before they crossed through. The bricks would be for the building of a new church in the town of Morija. This is how a good portion of the 130, 000 bricks for the building were made! Through this interaction at Morija, many Bapedi were exposed to the Gospel, as well as to literacy. So, whether or not other mission trips were made to the north by Basotho during the 1850s, many Bapedi were being evangelized within Lesotho itself!