



LESOTHO SENDS MISSIONARIES - PART 4

A mission of "Africans to Africans" under Mabile

The Seqiti War nearly destroyed the kingdom of Moshoeshoe. During early 1866, almost all of the PEMS (French) missionaries were expelled from Lesotho by troops in the nearest state in South Africa, with the missionaries being viewed as Basotho patriots and therefore enemies of the state. During their absence, a revival took place in Lesotho under the leadership of Basotho Christians. The pioneering work of Maphike and Seele was indicative of the growing maturity of the church in Lesotho, whose numbers had increased from 1000 in 1843 to about 2,200 in 1864 (and this figure would double during the following decade). Maphike and Seele no doubt influenced the following generation of Basotho Christians who took the Gospel to the north east part of South Africa and then to parts of Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Once the war was over and Lesotho was protected from further encroachment from South African states by the British, effective in 1868, a new action plan emerged regarding establishing a new mission in which Basotho would play a leading part. Adolphe Mabile had taken over as missionary at Morija in 1861, and like his predecessor Arbousset, he was constantly thinking about reaching those outside of the borders of Lesotho. He was thinking in terms of a mission of "Africans to Africans" as a means of completing the cycle where an evangelized people take on the responsibility of taking the Word to others. The ideal opportunity arose when two new ministers from Switzerland, Paul Berthoud and Ernest Creux, were sent out to Lesotho.

After a year of orientation, language study and deputation work in the local parishes, Mabile went with Berthoud to explore the northern part of South Africa, together with three evangelists - Asser Sehabane and Eliakim Matlanyane, both originally from Morija Parish, and a Mopedi man named Josias Pheko who had been living and schooling in Lesotho. Wives, children and cattle drivers were included on this trip, which left by ox-wagon and horse from Morija in 1873. Their intention was to seek a place to build up the church among the Bapedi of Sekhukhune.

To demonstrate the seriousness of this venture, a notice appeared in the local Lesotho newspaper requesting all Christians to set aside time on the first Wednesday of each month in order to pray for the mission to the Bapedi people. Much prayer was going to be needed as they were about to enter a very complex situation!

Sekhukhune had already expelled the German missionaries from his territory a few years earlier, as well as many of his people who had become Christians. He was not prepared to allow white people into his land after a certain point, because he felt they were hungry for his land and searching for minerals - often an excuse used by Europeans at the time to seize African land by force. These and other on-going tensions lead to Mabile's party being expelled before they even had the opportunity to meet him face to face. Mabile was disappointed at this setback but determined not to return home without some solid results to show for his effort.

Mabile and company proceeded further north, leaving Josias Pheko along the way to work among his own people on the northern border of Sekhukhune's realm. The rest of the party continued on another 130km north until they reached the mission field of a Dutch Reformed missionary, Stephanus Hofmeyer, where they received a warm welcome and a new mission field to work among people now known as the Tsonga.