

*REV. A. MERENSKY AND THE BAPEDI PEOPLE OF
SEKHUKHUNE*

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When King Sekwati met the missionaries in 1860, it was one of the best moments of his life. He could not predict that at a certain point in time, his nation would be torn apart because of their religion and Christianity. The turning point can be classified under the following headings:

Wars and stability,
Culture and tradition,
Colonialism, and
Impatience

Sekhukhune became heir after the death of Sekwati his father. Mampuru his half brother opposed him to his Kingship. Even the nations that were once loyal and depending on the great King Sekwati, challenged Sekhukhune for their independence. The Christians on the other hand with their new religion added more to the confusion of the new King. The internal problems weakened the once powerful and united Kingdom of the Bapedi.

The Bapedi people had their own system of beliefs. Their beliefs had been handed down to them from their fore-fathers by word of mouth from generation to generation. The sudden change brought forward by Christians, was new and unaccepted to them. They hated their own names, which are easy for them to pronounce. Christian names like Johannes, Andries, Merensky or Christians are new to them. To them there is only one King, and that is Sekhukhune. To them there is no other God than their gods, who are their ancestors. And if these Christians' God is going to take the place of Sekhukhune, then King Sekhukhune will fight for recognition and his place.

The Boers in the Transvaal wanted to annex the whole of Transvaal. The Missionaries were the only white people working in peace amongst the Bapedi people. They were also the only people who were able to talk to the Transvaal or Lydenburg government up to the highest level. Merensky was able to bring closer the two governments. The real

aim of the Missionaries was easily shifted, indirectly or directly the Missionaries used forked tongues: Jesus who want people to love Him and obey his commandments and the Transvaal government who wanted people to respect their laws.

Because of the given facts, time was against them. Sekhukhune was impatient, he wanted to unite his nation. He could not tolerate those who wanted to destabilize the country for their own benefits. He would rather use anything necessary before him to remove them. On the other hand was the Transvaal government that could not wait any longer. They could easily lose the Transvaal under the British Empire. Sekhukhune's leadership will not last much longer. It is matter of time before the whole Transvaal is annexed. But Christians in Sekhukhuneland as converts will be forced to cross the flooding river of Steelpoort to Botshabelo near Middelburg.

The impact of this misunderstanding between Christians and the Bapedi divided the people of Sekhukhune's ideology. The Christians from Sekhukhune came closer to the whites and even fought on the side of the Transvaal government. Sekhukhune and the Bapedi people who are loyal to him were called the heathens. To be a Christian will mean to be leaving all that you have inherited from your forefathers and be educated by all that comes with the Missionaries. Your father or brother is your enemy if he doesn't want to change his way of life.

This was the seed that the missionaries were planting. But their seed eventually fell on good soil and thorny soil.