

Where Are We?

Finally we can say it has been a long and hard journey from 1864 to now. Many good and bad things have happened. Botshabelo the place of refuge has been turned into a place of tourism. The Seminary and the Church building became a Museum called Fort Merensky. Its people or former residents are placed at Motetema near Groblersdal. As mentioned many good and bad things happened to the people of Botshabelo; I would like to start with the good things that took place at Botshabelo up until now.

Good things coming from Botshabelo

We must remember that when Rev Merensky and his converts ran away from the land of Sekhukhune, many thought that the Church of God will die, that the word of God will no longer be heard in the whole land of Sekhukhune. But because of the hard work of the early Missionaries and their Christian converts by 1900 already the word of God was preached again in the heart land of Sekhukhune.

The important thing about it is that, all this happened whilst Sekhukhune the Chief of the Bapedi and Merensky the missionary were still alive. They all lived to see their dreams becoming a reality. Unfortunately for the Bapedi King, the dream became a nightmare. He was willing to wipe the white man and his new culture out of his father's land. What he feared most did happen in 1891 when the Transvaal under Bapedi control was annexed. It was a dream come true for Rev Merensky to find his movement now open to go where he wants without fear of any black rulers in the Eastern Transvaal.

It was a dream come true for the converts like Martinus Sebushane, who once said to Sekhukhune,

*“you are chasing us out from your
land today but the word of God
will come back to this land.”*

Although Sebushane formed his own Lutheran Bapedi Church because of misunderstanding between him and Rev Merensky, at the end, he and his followers took the word of God from Botshabelo to the heathen nation in Sekhukhune land. Today the Bapedi Lutheran Church is still one of the important churches in Sekhukhune land.

Other people from Botshabelo who helped in spreading the word of God to Sekhukhune land are the two Chiefs. That is, Dinkwanyane of the Bapedi and Chief Rammupudu of the Bakopa tribe.

Johannes Dinkwanyane the Bapedi chief also left Botshabelo because of cultural differences between him and Rev Merensky. He walked out with his followers to a place called Mofolofolo near Lydenburg. The place was still under King Sekhukhune. He pleaded with Missionaries, especially Rev Merensky that, he is not going to abandon Christian beliefs and that they must come and help him and his followers. So Dinkwanyane was able to bring Christianity to the people in Sekhukhune land, more so as he was a Chief in his own right.

The second Chief was Rammupudu of the Bakopa. He left Botshabelo and his followers after the Missionaries and the Republic of the Transvaal gave him permission. He wanted to go to his father's land to rebuild his nation. The Chief made it clear that as a Christian he was prepared to live a Christian life.

What it meant is that, the Missionaries and the people from Botshabelo under difficult conditions managed to spread the word of God throughout the land of King Sekhukhune. They didn't Christianise them only, but they also managed to use the education they received from Botshabelo to the whole land of Sekhukhune. A hymn written by Rev Simelane in Sepedi, but translated into English, has this to say about Botshabelo. The Hymn was composed for the Centenary celebration of Botshabelo in 1965.

Botshabelo 1865 – 1965

Generations after generations that want education,

In the east, in the North –

are taught here at Botshabelo.

In the West, in the South -

are taught here at Botshabelo.

We commemorate the past 100 years.

We remember the Christians who

Left their homes, their friends,

Who left all the Wealth due to

their faith in God.

Here, God is worshipped.

Here, there is a fountain of knowledge.

It is at Botshabelo where the sun rose –

for education –

for religion –

for civilization –

which are lamps of light.

The first ministers of the word

were taught here;

They then returned to their people

and taught them.

The seed that was sown here

spread all over the land

amongst the Black people.

Let Jehovah be praised for he is merciful.

Let "He – who – lives – forever" be thanked

For His mercy.

Black students at Botshabelo learn the importance of being African, unlike their fathers who changed their names to Europeans. They instead named themselves with African names that have a Christian meaning. That is, names like:

<i><u>SEPEDI</u></i>	<i>ENGLISH</i>	<i>CHRISTIAN MEANING</i>
Thapelo	Prayer	
Malebo	Thanks	(To God)
Tshupo	Hope	(In salvation)
Mahlatse	Luck	(from God)
Rebiditswe	We have been called	(by God)
Refilwe	We have been given	(God's grace)
Rekgethilwe	We have been chosen	(by God)
Tumelo	Belief	(in God)
Tumisang	Give praise	(to God)
Rekwele	We have heard	(the Gospel)
Lebogang	Give thanks	(to God)

The kind of education offered at Botshabelo gave the Christians hope and courage. The people found themselves blessed because Botshabelo can provide what other people can't have. They have a free land for them and their domestic animals. They have beautiful schools for their children and a beautiful church where they can worship God without danger. Furthermore Botshabelo is located near the Town where their husbands can go to seek jobs.

But all these came to nothing at the end. The White man didn't want people who are not White to stay near or at the land proclaimed to be a White man's land. There were three groups of blacks living at Botshabelo with different languages. The Bapedi, the AmaSwazi and the AmaNdebele of Mgibe tribe. Each must return to his/her homeland: The Bapedi to Lebowa Homeland under Chief Minister M.M. Matlala who governed before Dr C.N. Phatudi. The AmaSwazi to kaNgwane under Chief Minister E. Mabuza and the AmaNdebele to KwaNdebele under Chief Minister S.S. Skhosana. Because of the

Botshabelo Seminary and the kinds of education offered, the Government felt that people from Botshabelo must be rewarded at their different Homelands with the kinds of education they received at Botshabelo. Three different Training Colleges were built for each ethnic group. The other reason was to make them forget Botshabelo as their motherland.

1. Mgwenya Teacher's Training College (1975)

The AmaSwazi from Botshabelo to KaNgwane homeland, were welcomed by the building of the New Modern Teachers' Training College. All the SiSwati-speaking students at Botshabelo were taken to this college. The idea was to separate students according to their mother tongue. The college was named Mgwenya Training College. It started operating in January 1975.

2. Ndebele Teacher's Training College (1980)

The AmaNdebele became the last group of students to leave Botshabelo to their Homeland, which was also the last Bantustan in South Africa to be established. The Department of Education and Training built yet another new modern Teacher – Training College for the AmaNdebele ethnic group in their homeland, KwaNdebele at their former Capital City at Siyabuswa near Marble Hall. All the Ndebele –speaking students at Botshabelo were transferred to this College. The College started to operate in January 1980. Their Chief Mgibe from Botshabelo was placed at Tweefontein “D” where he is still the Chief of his tribe, though many of his subjects were scattered all over the Homeland, particularly Siyabuswa.

3. Rehlahlilwe Training College (1971)

The Bapedi speaking people from Botshabelo were the first ethnic group to be moved to their Homeland in Lebowa. The department built a new modern Teacher-Training College

at Motetema near Groblersdal. All the students speaking Sepedi were transferred to this college in 1971. The college was named Rehlahlilwe, which means, “We have been led.” The department was forced to build even the Primary and the Secondary Schools for the residents who came from Botshabelo. The Primary like the Teacher’s College was given a name that will remind them of the work done by the Missionaries at Botshabelo: “Ikageng” was the name. The people felt they had been led, so they must lead themselves on. “Ikageng” means “build yourselves”, because they now mixed with people from “Masakaneng” a location near Groblersdal which was also forcibly removed to “Motetema”. Its people had a different background of religion and the people from Botshabelo felt that they must build themselves up against the culture and tradition of their new neighbours. The name also reflects the motto of the Botshabelo Seminary, Ntlhahle ke hlahle”, “Lead me so that I may lead”.

Bad things from Botshabelo

The bad thing was that Botshabelo closed up after the Ndebele students were moved to the New Training College in KwaNdebele Homeland. The Department of Education and Training arranged for an official closing function to mark the end of Botshabelo as an educational centre. The function was held on the 5th October 1979.

The main speakers were as follows:

- ❖ The secretary for the Department of Education and Training.
- ❖ The Mayor of Middelburg.
- ❖ Rev W. Kramer (on behalf of Berlin Mission)
- ❖ Dr M.J. Madiba (on behalf of ELCSA)
- ❖ Mr Justice Tsungu (on behalf of all former students of the Botshabelo seminary)

The selling of Botshabelo mission station

In October 1953 the South African Government passed the Bantu Education Act, by which it was planned to take over from the Churches all education of the Blacks, especially teachers training institutions like Botshabelo. However the churches were given an opportunity of running the school as a private school without the subsidies for teachers' salaries and maintenance of the institution. But because of the First World War and the Second World War that had crippled the German Government, the Berlin Mission Society felt that they cannot raise money to run or maintain the Institution at Botshabelo, other than Evangelisation. For Botshabelo needs capital for new dormitories and living quarters, new and better classrooms, a laboratory, a library, a domestic science centre, a craftwork centre and even teachers salaries.

Rev P.G. Pakendorf in 1955 mentioned two other advantages that would benefit the Botshabelo Seminary if it falls directly under the Department of Education and Training.

- ❖ Those teachers would enjoy pension benefits in their retirement.
- ❖ That it will bring an end to disagreement between denominations.

The real concern facing the Berlin Mission was the fact that religious education would not receive the necessary attention. However Rev Pakendorf wrote as follows:

“Let all inspectors know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. They must thus press that the word of God be taught in schools, and they must watch over their servants, the teachers, so that they must not be tired of doing this work.”

Rev Pakendorf also pleaded with parents and godparents to take care of Sunday schools and to regard the teaching of children as their responsibility. To parents and evangelists he said.

“Let those Sunday services for children be conducted by you everywhere, where it is possible. Don't say it is the work of teachers” (Mminele 82 : 241)

Finally on the 19th of March 1956 the Seminary was leased to the Department, with the contract signed between:

The Rev E.H.M. Jackal and Rev W.K. Leue in their capacity as representatives of the Berliner Mission work in respect of the Botshabelo Institution and the government of the Union of South Africa represented by the Secretary of Natives Affairs. Finally the Institution was sold in 1970. But the agreement to lease was as follows:

The Government was to pay the church

\$ 800 (+- R1 600 rental for the building)

\$ 50 (+- R100 for the land used)

\$ 100 (+- R200 for the furniture)

or

To purchase all listed furniture for the

Sum of \$ 3000 – 00 (+- R6000-00)

The two parties, that are the Church and the State, agreed on the following payment by the State.

- ❖ *Rental for school-building*
- ❖ *Rental for hostels*
- ❖ *Rental for use of electric light supply*
- ❖ *Rental for use of water supply*
- ❖ *Rental for use of teachers' houses*
- ❖ *Use of grounds for agriculture and sport*
- ❖ *Use of equipment in schools and in hostels*

On The 6th August 1970 the Berliner Missionsgesellschaft at a cost of R191 830-00 sold the Botshabelo Mission Area to the Middelburg municipality.

The Berlin Mission Society was represented by Revs. Walter Ernst Johannsmeier and Hermann August Heinrich Schroeder.

The area included the farms Leeupoortjie, no. 267 hectares of 318, 8278. Groenfontein, no. 266 hectares of 532, 9328 and Toevlug, no. 269 hectares of 2428, 4178.

Because of the historical importance of Botshabelo area, the municipality of Middelburg in liaison with The Simon van der Stel Foundation and the Transvaal Provincial Administration's library and museum services decided to make the remains of the Old Mission Station into an open-air museum for a tourist's attraction.

The Trio agreed that all the buildings were to be restored. The old cemetery would also be restored, and the bodies of Missionaries of the Berlin Mission that lay buried all over the Transvaal were, if need be, to be reburied.

BOTSHABELO TO MOTETEMA

It was because of the South African apartheid laws that Botshabelo Seminary to was to be closed. But not all people who were in government were for the idea of the selling or closing of Botshabelo as a place of worship and replaced by the Museum, others were not

happy about these laws. Sadly pity was given more to the buildings than the residents who were forcefully removed from Botshabelo.

That can be proven by the words uttered by the mayor of Middelburg in his address at the closing function on the 5th October 1979.

The Church, next door will be restored and as you can see we are already busy changing the garden around the church to its original appearance. The church will continue to be used for the holding of services. The outdoor oven and wagon-shed will also be repaired. The Old Merensky parsonage will house a Mission Museum. It will contain information and exhibitions in connection with the Mission history and important figures out of the teaching history of Botshabelo. Wagon building and bookbinding at Botshabelo will also again be revived. (Mminele 82: 246)

Absolutely nothing the Berlin Mission could do to stop or influence the South African government in its idea of resettlement of African people: I mean particularly the Christian converts of Botshabelo whom I believe worked hard to form themselves into a Christian Nation. The Berlin Mission's work was pleased to find that Botshabelo as a Seminary will not be destroyed, but it will be restored to keep their history alive. The letter written by the Mission-Director, the Rev Owe Holm, also can see that.

"May I express again the gratitude of our Mission for the willingness of the Simon van der Stel Foundation to consider Botshabelo to become such an outstanding place in the Transvaal area."

The Berlin Mission Society would have been harmed if the Institution built by their own money was to be demolished. The Berlin Mission not did take note of the fact that many houses and belongings of the Botshabelo residents are going to be destroyed for peanuts. It never reached their minds that these Christians of Botshabelo, their forefathers

lost everything they have from Sekhukhune's reign of terror. Not only did they lose goods or property but lives were lost. So Botshabelo the place of refuge was built on a bond of blood, because of their love of the living God.

According to some Christians from Botshabelo King Sekhukhune was evil, while the White Government that intended to destroy many people's lives and placed them where they have no intention of staying there was holy. But Sekhukhune was not that bad. He was able to allow his subjects to become Christians and on the other hand the Missionaries failed him by giving Mampuru his half brother and an enemy to his throne, a shelter at the neighborhood of the Kgalatlou Mission Station. The Berlin missionaries went to the extent of making appeals on Mampuru's behalf. Sekhukhune was on the right track, he only lacked the support of the Missionaries, because he went as far as declaring Sunday to be a day of rest. Hence Merensky had this to write:

"After the protection of God, it has been the arm of King Sekhukhune which has shielded the Christians from the greatest harm."

But when the South African Government planned to remove the residents of Botshabelo from the land of their birth, the Berlin Mission was quick to respond in their favour.

"We should take the first step and not wait until the Department comes with their proposals. We must co-operate with the Department so that they will realize that we are in favour of the new policy. The sooner the better."

There was nothing that the black Christians of Botshabelo could do. They put their trust and loyalty to the Missionaries from the time of Merensky and Sekhukhune. They have shown their loyalty even in times of wars against their fellow black brothers from Sekhukhune's warriors. The Missionaries as people who introduced the living God to them was always right. The Government that supported them and gave land next to them was always right and must be trusted. But the point is, they are black and they must go to black territory or land.

Mr. Marokane of Motetema, one of the people who were forcefully removed from Botshabelo and was one of the members of the "Back to Botshabelo Campaign or Committee" remembered that:

"It was on Wednesday the 10th of January 1971 when the Government lorries came to collect us to a new place called Motetema next to Groblersdal. Most of us knew nothing about Groblersdal or Motetema.

We were told before that the place is beautiful and it has water and electricity. So there will be no need for us to take along our livestock because we are going to a township. We used to do farming and agriculture at Botshabelo. Then I thought to myself what kind of life are we going to live. As Africans we believe in farming and we calculated our wealth through cattle and other domestic animals. The most painful thing was that, white farmers from the neighbourhood came to buy or take our livestock at the cheapest price."

It will be very difficult for some of the Botshabelo Christian people to ever pick up. I mean a century ago their forefathers lost everything to Sekhukhune and these generations of today lost everything again to the South African Government in 1972. Three decades later they want to go back to Botshabelo, to start farming again. The question is, will the new Government remember all the losses they endured?

Koko Louisa Rantlha, a retired teacher and a chairperson of the Committee in charge of resettling the Community explained the day when their families, furniture and pets were packed onto lorries and driven to Motetema, a township in the Groblersdal district.

How they entered their new home in poverty, sadness and anger

The Government gave them only three months notice and no compensation was given for demolishing of their houses. She remembered when their cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats and fowls were sold in a hurry for nothing. They were crying as they left their mealie-fields.

Johanna Motlatle (by 2003) a 74-year-old woman said, *“Everything was black”* referring to the day she and her family were moved. The memory still angers her. She continued by saying, *“How would you feel sitting next to a dog on a lorry, with your wardrobe at your back and children on top of it.”*

One wonders on which side is he? I am referring to Dr Klaus Merensky, a Pretoria engineer and a direct descendant of the founder of the Botshabelo Mission Station. He is in the Committee of “Save Botshabelo Action” chaired by a local businessman Arthur Barlow.

The Chairperson of the commission, Mr. Barlow said, *“Blacks would acquire the mission station and the historical Anglo-Boer War Fort, located on a hill behind the Mission Church over his dead body”*.

Sometimes one had to agree with the report written in the "City Press" dated 11 May 2003.

"When White Missionaries first set foot in Africa, according to conventional African wisdom, the White man owned the Bible and the Black man a land. When the black man had acquired the Bible, the White man owned the land."

The quotation directly referred to the people of Botshabelo who had just reclaimed back Botshabelo, the place of refuge.

On September 2000, The Berlin Missionswerk gave the following statement:

- ❖ *After 1950, we did not resist enough on behalf of and for the benefit of the inhabitants against the pressure of the apartheid government to agree to sell mission land or to accept expropriation for the sake of forced removals.*
- ❖ *We were convinced of the advantages of the financial benefit from the sale of the land or from the compensation and took the financial security of the mission, the church and the salaries of the White church workers more into consideration than the human rights of the congregants.*

We confess:

- ❖ *We failed to protect the Christians living on Mission land sufficiently.*
- ❖ *We did not take into consideration the possibility of an end to apartheid and of the eventual return and future claims of those who were forcibly removed.*

Life in Motetema

They arrived on 10 January 1971 at their new homes. They found the four-roomed houses built and they were placed on the Southern side and the Masakaneng residents occupied the Northern side. Unlike Botshabelo, Motetema was different it had many denominations. They were used to one denomination, that is, the Lutheran Church, it was easy for them to control their children by using the influence of the Church policy. For an example: If a young lady or girl becomes pregnant before marriage, the church elders were able to excommunicate her until she underwent the Confirmation class before she could be active again in the church activities. That also implied to all members of the congregation who were found violating the church policy. Motetema became a free land and a land of many choices. One could choose to join another congregation or even to stay at home like heathens do.

The other problem they found themselves in was a problem of isolation. They used to be one group or community at Botshabelo, using one school under the influence of their church. At Motetema the local primary “Mafato School” was not under the influence of the church, so they wanted their own primary school for their children. Ikageng Primary School was built particularly for them. Mr Lerutla became the first principal of this school. He was from Botshabelo.

The two primary schools in a small township like Motetema created a division to the local community. Those who are from Masakaneng took their children to Mafato Primary School and those from Botshabelo to Ikageng Primary School. Like the name of the school says “Build yourselves” (Ikangeng), people never built themselves at school only but even their social lives. When coming to their festivals like marriages, birthday parties or funerals, they would come together as one, helping one another or even to comfort each other. They know themselves as one nation, they have been together at Botshabelo from the time of their birth, and now that they are at a foreign land, like Motetema, to them unity is more important than before.

Things started to be better now, because their children who were born at Motetema and the children of the Masakaneng people also born at Motetema took Motetema as their Motherland, and entering into marriages between them brought the whole community together as one big family.

Today the Lutheran Church look back at Reverend Merensky and the Christian converts from Sekhukhune land in pride. It was because of their hard work and dedication to their God that the church today can boast Botshabelo as a Seminary, which has contributed to the country and the church about the big names it has produced. (*see Annexures for big names*). The Christians of today also give thanks to the Berlin Mission Society for the great contribution they have made to the promotion and development of the Sepedi or Northern Sotho as a first language at Botshabelo. S.P.P. Mminele had this to say about the activities of the Berlin Missionaries on this matter:

We Africans have profited by the Berlin Lutheran Mission in many ways. To mention a few, see what stress this Mission has laid on the teaching of Bantu languages, how it has made an accurate and careful study of them and helped to make them written languages. This Mission has helped in laying the foundation of Bantu literature.”

There are many things that have happened from 1864 to 1971 when Botshabelo was transferred to Motetema, which were not written down. These are only written for the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa to follow their track record.

Finally Motetema people were given their land back, that is the Minister of Land Affairs, Mrs Thoko Didiza in 2003, handed over Botshabelo to them. Mrs Helen Makwetla the 74 year old lady and one of the members in the committee of “Bring back Botshabelo Campaign.” has this to say:

We are just like Moses and the Israelites.

*We are going home to the land of milk and
honey. God held his umbrella over us. On
the other hand, it will be as if we are dreaming*

We will be so happy.”

The community is now waiting for the day when they will be at Botshabelo as residents, particularly as most of them are elder people, and then they could get into full negotiations with the Middelburg Municipality on how Botshabelo Museum is run.