

Letter to Joseph J. Freeman, 3, 7 July 1842

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Rev^d J. J Freeman Kuruman 3^d July 1842

Dear Sir

On the 10th of February last I left this station and having proceeded into the Interior of the Bechuana Country remained there during the months March, April, May, and part of June. The whole of that period was characterised by the continued manifestation of the Divine goodness towards me and now with humble gratitude to Him whose Providential care watched over and brought me back in safety, I shall endeavour to state to you the objects for which this journey was undertaken and the manner in which they were followed out. The objects I had in view were the following

That I might by exclusive intercourse with the natives facilitate my labour in the acquisition of the language, that I might for a season be freed from all attention to medicine And that, though still but imperfectly acquainted with their tongue, I might make an effort for the eternal welfare of the tribe or tribes with whom I should sojourn by means of native agents. In order the more effectually to carry into operation the last & principal object I had in contemplation I took with me two natives, members of the church in this place. And with two others connected with the management of the waggon we proceeded in a direction nearly North East of Moteeto. This route brought us near to more of the tribes which lie East and West of it. And consequently we saw no people save a few of the Bakalihari and Bushmen until after twelve days travelling we arrived in the valley of the Bakhatla. There we saw three villages, each of which may be stated to contain a population of 400 souls. The situations of these are very inviting for the valley is both beautiful and large. Not less I think than forty miles in length and from two to four in breadth. And besides abundance of iron-stone, it contains no fewer than seven fountains each of which pours out a copious supply of excellent water

As the people however are the sole manufacturers of the iron and wooden utensils in use among the Bechuanas and in trading pass among all the tribes to the Southward I thought it probable that they may have imbibed some of the prejudices to the gospel which prevail to such a

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a lamentable extent among these, and consequently might not be in such a favourable state for the operations of native teachers as some tribes which live still farther to the North. We therefore only remained a few days with them. Their behaviour to us was however as kind as we could have expected. We found no difficulty in collecting them together, and when we addressed them on salvation by Christ they listened with respectful attention. I earnestly hope the time is not far distant when they shall hear statedly and with believing hearts the glad tidings of mercy

Nearly directly North of the Bakhatla and a little more than one hundred miles distant, lives Bubi, one of the chiefs of the Bakwain (Baquane) and one of the most sensible of his class I have yet seen. To him we next proceeded, and the very freindly reception M^r Edwards and I met with from both him and his people last year, the very favourable character he bears among all the tribes, and the fact that M^r E. found them entirely ignorant of the gospel, induced me to prefer making a commencement for a native teacher with them.

The beginning of the school for the children was as favourable as we could desire. The chief expressed much joy at the thought of having the foreigners as his friends and went himself and collected the children. He supplied me with milk regularly, and when payment was offered he promptly declined. His under chiefs continued to supply my people with food during most of our stay and although the waggon attracted crowds of visitors daily on no occasion did we miss a single article. Not long after our arrival it occurred to me that it would be advantageous if we could lead out for irrigation the fine stream which winds round the foot of the hill on which their town is built. And this because it would both furnish the teacher with an available garden and also help to convince the people that they might by a little industry render themselves independent of those impostors called "Rain Makers". I accordingly explained to the chief and his principal men our mode of irrigation and was glad to find that they were quite delighted with the idea. The chief said he would send as many men as it needed, if I should only shew them how to do the work (two of those he sent ~~were~~ are his principal underchiefs & another ~~was~~ is his own favourite doctor or rain maker.) I had not thought of engaging

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in a work of this nature when I left Kuruman & had none of the necessary implements with me, But seeing it would not do to lose the favourable season when all were eager to work, I commenced with

such as I could invent, Sticks sharpened to a point served for digging a canal between four & five hundred feet in length, three in width, and in some places more than four in depth; the earth was lifted out in handfuls and carried to the dam in karosses[,] wooden bowls and tortoise shells. This information I am quite aware is not strictly connected with the great object for which I have been sent to the heathen, But I mention these particulars because I am by them induced to indulge the hope that they are indicative of a better state of things among this people than what the early missionaries found among the Batlapi, and if so, if all the missionaries who are sent to the Interior are allowed to devote their energies exclusively towards the amelioration of the spiritual condition of the people.

May we not hope that thereby the chariot of the everlasting gospel will go on with accelerated speed ~~until~~ and the whole country soon be enlightened by the glory of the Lord. The Bakwain shewed surprising industry and perseverance in this work, and such I conceive as warrants me to indulge the hope I have stated above, for although the dam was twice swept away by floods, and I was unable, in consequence of getting both legs and arms severely sunburned, to stimulate them by my example, they did not seem in any way discouraged but laboured on to the end. I sincerely regret to add that I have been unable to try the experiment whether this favourable beginning would have continued, for in consequence of great weakness the effect of a violent fever with which the teacher I intended to leave with them was affected, I was obliged to bring him away and no continued efforts for the good of this interesting people are at present being made. At this period it would have given me the greatest satisfaction to have known what are the intentions of the Directors in relation to native agency and this mission But unfortunately no instructions have yet arrived

Having remained with the people of Bubi for nearly a month I proceeded Northward in order to visit the Bamangwato, Bakaa and Makalaka, three tribes having their countries in Lat. 22° S. and stretching from 28° to 30° E.Long.. The last named is the smallest of the three, but it is a section of a people of

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very considerable numbers and who speak a language differing very decidedly from the Sitchuana. More of the Bechuanas I had with me could understand it, But from some of the words which I caught, I am inclined to think it belongs to the same root with their Tongue Their manners too are somewhat different from the Southern tribes, inasmuch as they are not entirely dependant on the rude Kaross for covering, but manufacture cotton cloth for ~~shad~~

shawls &c. And besides the knowledge how to manufacture iron and copper one of the five tribes into which the Makalaka are divided, called the Mashona, fight with guns, instead of the assagai. These they obtain from the Portuguese on the Eastern coast, and from some circumstances which have come to my knowledge, I am inclined to believe they procure them in exchange for slaves. By conversation with many different individuals and these of different grades I ascertained the existence of no fewer ~~tribes~~ than 28 tribes of people hitherto unknown to Europeans, thirteen of these are reported to have another tongue and the remainder speak Stichuana But as reports cannot (however carefully examined) be absolutely depended on I shall turn to those which I myself visited

Our route to the Bamangwato skirted the sandy desert which flanks the Bechuana country to the Westward, and, as the sand proved ~~[-:]~~ very fatiguing for the oxen, ~~so that~~ when within 40 or 50 miles from that people, they were unable to proceed farther, and I had to leave both oxen and waggon and perform my visit on foot. But I had not the least reason to regret having done so, for the chief (Sekomi) was evidently pleased that I had thrown myself on his bounty without the least appearance of distrust. Indeed before I had been 10 minutes in his company and while sitting surrounded by hundreds of his people he began to shew his satisfaction by feeding me with the flesh of the Rhinoceros and some other things which they consider dainties. He then took me to the house of his mother presented me with a large elephants tusk, more food, and, as we became better acquainted, he frequently and emphatically exclaimed "you have come to us just like rain". And "if you had brought your waggon I should have detained you at least a month looking at you" Sekomi has a large number of people under him, in the town alone I numbered 600 houses which is a number considerably larger than I have been able to count

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in any other Bechuana town in the country. But they are all very small and cannot contain many individuals each. The one in which I lived was quite as large as any in the town and three of us could not sleep in it without touching each other, unless we put out our fire The population is sunk into the very lowest state of both mental and moral degradation, so much so indeed it must be difficult or rather impossible for Christians at home to realize anything like an accurate notion of the grossness of the darkness which shrouds their minds. I could not ascertain that they had the least idea of a future state, and though they have some notions which seem to us to be connected with a belief in its existence, I have not

meet one who could put the necessary links together in the chain
 of reasoning so as to become possessed of the definite idea,
 indeed they all confess that they never think of anything connec-
 -ted with death and do not wish the introduction of that subject
 Their conceptions of Deity are of the most vague and contrad-
 -ictory nature, and his name conveys no more to their
 understanding than the idea of superiority. Hence they do
 not hesitate to apply the name of God to their chiefs, and I
 was every day shocked by being addressed by that title, and although h
 it as often furnished me with a text from which to tell
 them of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has
 sent; yet it deeply pained me, and I never felt so fully
 convinced of the lamentable deterioration of my species before
 It is indeed a mournful truth that "man has become like
 the beasts that perish" The country abounds with
 lions and so much are they dreaded by the natives. one
 man never goes out alone. The women have always
 some one to guard them when they go to their gardens &
 they always go in companies to draw water for the sake
 of the protection which numbers give. Nor are these pre-
 -cations unnecessary. For a time I could not believe but
 that they were. But the earnestness with which the chief
 chode with me for going a few hundred yards from the
 town unattended.: And the circumstance that he always
 sent an attendant if at anytime he saw me going out
 afterwards, together with the fact that a woman
 was actually devoured in her garden during my visit
 and that so near the town, I had frequently walked
 far past it, fully convinced me that there are good
 grounds for their fears and precautions It was
 most affecting to hear the cries of the orphan children
 of this woman. During the whole day after her death

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the surrounding rocks and vallies ring and reechoed with their bitter
 cries, I frequently thought as I listened to the land sobs painfully
 indicative of the sorrows of those who have no hope. that if some of
 our churches could have heard their sad wailings, it would have
 awakened the firm resolution to do more for the heathen than they
 have done. In some countries the light which the gospel once
 shed has gone out and darkness has succeeded. But though
 eighteen centuries have elapsed since lif[...] e and immortality [...]
 were brought to light, there is no certainty that these dark region[s]
 were ever before visited for the purpose of making known
 the light and liberty and peace of the glorious gospel. It would
 seem that the myriads who have peopled these regions
 have always passed away into darkness, and no ray from
 heaven ever beamed on their path. And with whom
 does the guilt rest if not with us who compose the church

militant on earth? You will I am sure bear with me in this digression from my narrative for my mind is filled with sadness when I contemplate the prospects of these large masses of immortal souls. I see no hopes for them except in native agents. The more I see of the country, the large extent of surface, with its population scattered, and each tribe separated by a formidable distance from almost every other, I feel the more convinced that it will be impossible if not impolitic for the church to supply them all with Europeans: Native Christians can make known the way of life. There are some in connection with both this and the church at Griqua Town who have done it effectually. Others too are rising up who will soon be capable of teaching, and if their energies are not brought into operation by taking up the field now open before us, ~~in the Interior~~ I don't see where the benevolent spirit which we hope is springing up among the converts of the two missions is to find an outlet. I conceive that even now the two missions by cordial cooperation might at once supply with native teachers all the tribes within the range of our knowledge who are not inimical to claims of the gospel. It would not require more than six from each mission to give two to each friendly tribe. And that this measure or an attempt at it would be advantageous to both churches I need not refer [...] you to the effects which

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increased benevolent exertions have on churches at home, and how often it happens that when churches have not work set before them in the cause of Christ even more than they can actually perform, their benevolence degenerates into selfish quarreling. You will please to observe that I do not advance this proposition without diffidence, for I am sensible my sentiments on account of want of experience are entitled to much less deference than those of others in the same field.

I may perhaps be permitted to relate an incident which seems to indicate that even the darkest minds feel the need of a something to speak peace to their troubled thoughts. On one occasion Sekomi having sat by me in the hut for some time in deep thought, at length addressing me by a pompous title said "I wish you would change my heart. Give me medicine to change it for it is proud, proud and angry, angry always". I lifted up the testament & was about to tell him of the only way in which the heart can be changed but he interrupted me by saying "Nay I wish to have it changed by medicine, to drink it have it changed at once, for it is always very proud and very uneasy, and continually angry with some one" He then

rose and went away. This seemed to me the more remarkable as we had not then spoken to either him or his people on the necessity of a change of heart

Another incident which also happened amongst the Bamangwato gave me some encouragement to hope that even itinerating by native Christians may by the Divine blessing be productive of good. Late one evening as I was asleep on one side of the hut, a young man having a most intelligent expression of countenance came in with a present of food, and said, "I once carried the gun of Sepamore (a member of the church here) when he was in this country hunting And I asked him what he thought about God." (Here he gave me a surprisingly correct ~~of~~ account of the Supreme Being.) "But" added he "What do you say?" Most gladly I confirmed what he had heard and added a little more to his stock by telling him of "Jesus and the Resurrection" This may have been all curiosity But it may please the Holy Spirit to operate by even these small portions of truth, and lead some though unknown to us, into the regions of everlasting glory. And if so our intineracies will not be in vain

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I was much gratified by the hospitality shewn by the Bamangwato to myself and the two natives who accompanied me. We came among them without anything to insure us a good reception, and after living for a fortnight entirely on the bounty of the chief, When we left he sent 30 of his people to guard us and carry the presents he had given to both myself and people, safely to the waggon. Four of these he instructed to proceed with me to Kuruman, and bring him back a faithful report of all the wonderful things I had told him. They are, an under chief of his and three servants I wish and pray that I may be useful to them so that when they return they may tell not only the strange customs of the "Makuas" but also the "wonderful works of God."

I have finished what I had to say about the Bamangwato, But my visit to them was not accomplished in one space of time. I walked to the Bakaa who live about 24 miles East by South of Sekomi. Remained there a few days. proceeded to the Makalaka who lie about 15 miles North by West of the Bakaa and then returned to the Bamangwato. Thence after two days across the sands I reached the waggon in safety

The Bakaa live on a very high range of dark coloured, naked basaltic rocks. These lie close upon the right nearly the whole way from the Bamangwato; and when arrived opposite where the villages are built we turn suddenly round and begin to ascend by a

narrow ravine or rather cleft in the rock down which there rushes a mountain stream. By the path we attain an elevation of three or four hundred feet above the valley we have left. And enter a flat area covered with trees. But here rocks rise up perpendicularly on all sides except at the narrow doorway by which we entered. Directly in front the rocks are nearly 700 feet high and on the top of them we now perceive perched like eagles nests the little huts of the Bakaa. We began to climb up towards them and frequently looked up to see when a crowd of natives should collect to gaze at our arrival. But we were permitted to ascend in silence and when on the top we were ~~permitted~~ allowed although near to the houses to gaze around on the strange scene ~~we~~ now presented to us and no one to disturb our emotions. (Conscience

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was at work amongst the Bakaa, the cause I shall mention below) We found that the curious and deep basin from which we have ascended was but one of a great number all similarly formed. some were as large as Finsbury Circus, others of smaller dimensions. And the rocks as a whole present the most singular appearance I ever beheld. Resembling more than any thing else I know the pews of a church on a gigantic scale. The rocks are rent and split in every direction and their sides are covered by large angular blocks of which have slipped down only a short distance from the places whence they have been detached. In rolling or rather sliding downwards they have impinged on each other and the rocks below in some places where considerable rents run into the body of the rock, and thus form considerable cavities which are used by the Bakaa as retreats in time of danger from their enemies. The one which I entered held nearly all the inhabitants of a village and Mosilikatsi was completely foiled in all his attempts to destroy them. None of his people could enter for the entrance has to be performed crawling on the belly and when once in a dozen men could stand and defend the passage against the ingress of one individual and he so situated. And their attempts to suffocate them were also in vain for the rents are so numerous the Bakaa breathe with freedom notwithstanding the smoke.

The Bakaa have a bad name among all the other tribes and I believe they fully deserve it. for a few years ago they destroyed, by poisoning both water and food the ~~first~~ second white man that ever visited them. He was a trader and when he with two of his people fell victims to the treachery of the Bakaa, a fourth still lingered under the effects of the poison. But they put a leathern thong round

his neck and finished him. They burned the waggons in order to get the iron work of them, and devoured the oxen. As I happened to be the first European who has visited them since this deed of darkness, their conscience, loudly accused them, and when I came into their town, except the chief and two attendants, the whole had fled my presence. These were in the usual place of meeting and in their faces they had evidences of perturbation such as I never saw in black countenances before. Nothing I could do in the way of appearing perfectly at ease, and squatting down beside them, could remove the almost ludicrous

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expression of fear until they had got a dish of porridge cooked. And when they saw me partake of it without distrust, the act seemed to excite their confidence. But being lying down to sleep in consequence of the fatigue of the long walk seemed to have the full effect I desired and they soon came round me in considerable numbers. There seemed to be something horrid in the appearance of these people. But perhaps the impression on my mind may be accounted for by the fact that I saw as ornaments round their necks pieces of gun locks, iron jugs &c. and one had a piece of sail cloth round his head which I felt sure must have been taken from the wagon of the unfortunate Gibson. They however during the few days of my stay with them treated me with kindness, and I had more than ordinary pleasure in telling these murderers of the precious "blood which cleansed from all sin." And I blessed God that he has conferred on one so worthless the distinguished privilege & honour of being the first messenger of mercy that ever trod these regions. It being also the first occasion in which I had ventured to address a number of Bechuanas in their own tongue without reading it renders it to myself one occasion of peculiar interest. I felt more freedom than I had anticipated. But I have an immense amount of labour still before me ere I can call myself a master of Siquana. This journey discloses to me that when I have acquired the Batlapi there is another and perhaps more arduous task to be accomplished in the other dialects, But by the Divine assistance I hope I shall be enabled to conquer. When I left the Bakaa the chief sent his son with a number of his people to see me safe part of the way to the Makalaka. I shall not however say anything more respecting them until I get better acquainted with their actual condition.

On returning to the country of Bubi, I found 16 of the people of Sebegwe (g sounded gutterally) waiting my arrival. He is chief of one half of the Wanketze tribe & lives nearly ten days directly west of Bubi. He was driven

into his present position in the sandy desert by Mosilikats[i] and there he had the address to cut off many detachments of the forces of that marauder while all the other tribes fled before them. By superior generalship he managed to keep possession of his cattle, the others having lost theirs are envious and having leagued together lately, purchased a number of horses & guns in order to deprive Sebegwe

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of what he alone had courage to defend. In order that he might be a more easy prey to them they have been trying for some time to induce him to come out of his present situation to a country near to Bulei, where he can sow corn &c. Sebegwe could not trust the tribes in this direction for he knew that the individuals who had prepared to attack him belong to all the Southern tribes. Even his own brother Sehutsane chief of the other half of the Wanketsge murdered the ambassadors which Sebegwe had sent to conciliate him: The plundering expedition was to have left this quarter during the time I was in the Bakwani country. I therefore felt anxious to inform him of his danger, and thus by doing as I should have wished to be done by perhaps prevent much bloodshed. But I found it quite impossible to proceed into the desert. The sand and want of water are almost insuperable obstacles to the traveller in that direction. Bubi however unknown to me sent off a messenger to Sebegwe to state to him my wish to see him. The result was these people were sent to invite me to an interview in order as Sebegwe stated that "I might speak words of truth to him" He wishes to come o[...] of his present uncomfortable situation in order that his people may grow corn &c. But the machinations of certain individuals in the tribes in this direction has hitherto prevented him. He says he would have come immediately to live with me at Bubi's had I intended to remain, But not knowing the intentions of the Directors with respect to the Interior I could not invite him to remove. So great is the impression in favour of our superior power amongst all the people in the Interior. Each tribe imagines if one European lived with them, they would be quite safe. They think those who I conquered Mosilik[...] are invincible, and dont distinguish as yet the difference between us and the Boors. I believe Sebegwe knows what missionaries are & perhaps that was the reason he had confidence in my veracity. He has been visited by M^r Moffat when not so far North as at present. I am happy to be able to add that the Lord has turned the counsels of those who were bent upon plundering Sebegwe into foolishness. Many from the neighbouring tribes have sent for horses and guns as far as to Colesberg but all their plans have a few days ago fallen to the ground. It is also pleasant to add that through the whole although frequently enticed the believers to

a man have stood true to their principles and refused
to have any thing to do with the counsels of the wicked
all is now peace within our borders

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With respect to the prospects for missions in the Interior I think they prospects are encouraging. There is no desire to have us, but there is security for both life & property with any of all the tribes we know, and scope for our labours provided we enter the field. Here on the outskirts we might remain without the probability of being disturbed But we should not have scope so wide as in thousands of villages in England. We must I conceive go forward and go forward far too in order to get at the heathenism of this country. With respect to Mosilikatsi ~~who~~ he is so much dreaded by the natives here that if we listen to their accounts, we should expect him to come down upon Kuruman whenever he liked & carry all before him, I have only to say that if one travelled at the rate of 20 miles per day for the space of a full month, in a north east direction he might expect to find him but not ~~some~~ sooner. When I went to the Bakwains the natives here positively assured me that he was a little way only to the north of them. But I found from the Bam-angwato that he is at least 14 days North East of them & on the banks of a collection of water called Mokhoror or the Lake of the Botletli. And he has been completely humbled by the Boors This latter people too are too far to the East of the tribes with whom we have to do (and do not come farther West in their claims than the country around Mosiga) to be any source of any uneasiness to us in the prosecution of our labour

7th July I beg leave thankfully to acknowledge the receipt of your kind favour of the 18th February last, which has just come to hand. I look anxiously for your next as I hope it will contain something definite respecting the Interior I beg leave to remain affectionately yours
David Livingston

Care of Rev^d D^r Phillip Cape Town

Rev^d J. J. Freeman
Mission House
3 sheets London

Kuruman, July 3, 1842
D. Livingston
L. C. 4 Jany 1843
State of the
Countries North
of Lattakoo