

Pray for the San. **A response from believers in Uitenhage**

Introduction

This is by no means an effort to establish a cause for any ethnic group or an attempt to give a complete overview of their history. It is merely a brief overview on the existence and influence of the San as the "first peoples" on this side of the continent. It also aims to evoke a response from those of us who were exposed to their history as we begin to understand the spiritual significance of them as the fathers of the land. The following is a very brief overview of their history in SA and in the Uitenhage area followed by an attempt to understand the spiritual dynamics involved, together with some practical guidelines.

A Very Short History of the San in SA

It is generally accepted by historians that the Bushmen, commonly referred to as the San, were the first inhabitants of Southern Africa, long before any other tribes. The San were pre-eminently hunter-gatherers in contrast to the Khoi (Hottentots) who were pastoralists, a tribe closely related to but still very distinguishable in their way of living, from the San. When Jan van Riebeeck landed in the Cape, history recorded a close encounter with the Khoi that initially led to a confrontation but later to a more favourable relationship in which goods and animals were traded. This was in contrast to the first contact with the San, further a field which proved to be very hostile and unfortunately remained that way, so much so that it eventually led to the complete demise of the San in SA. A book written on the history of Uitenhage summarizes it as follows. "If the Hottentot accepted his position as bondman to the Dutch, not so the Bushman - the Ishmael of SA. He followed the Dutch trekkers wherever he went, but always as an enemy. Socially therefore, the Boer had nothing to do with the Bushmen, and he has consequently disappeared entirely from the greater part of this country. His lasting influence on the pioneer consequently, has been practically nil." This once again is in contrast with the Khoi who integrated many of the customs of the Trek Boer culture into their own and vice versa. In spite of the negative perceptions that originated from the initial contact with the San a more intimate look at their culture proved them to be highly intellectual and sophisticated race in the way they related to their natural environment. They managed to adapt and survive in the most hostile climates for thousands of years, something no other tribe ever managed to do. They had developed a unique language and intricate social systems which outsiders took many many years to understand. Sadly, it must have been one of the reasons why no one, up to more or less fifty years ago, struggled to engage with them in any meaningful relationship. For hundreds of years they have been seen as vermin and "animals" which prompted their enemies, both Black and White to wipe them off the face of the earth.

The Extermination of the San – A Sad Story

From the first encounter between the San and other tribes to the last one the contact was hostile. Even between the Khoi and the San. Peaceful encounters were far and few between. The hostility towards the San intensified during the 1700's into what must have been the saddest time in their history. This part of their history is documented as follows in a chapter by Nigel Penn in a book compiled by Pippa Skotnes: "Colonial attitudes towards the San came to a head in the crisis years of the 1770's, the same years in which the characteristic structures and features of the commando system were perfected. In this regard 1774 is important, for it is the year of the General Commando, a large-scale colonial attempt to destroy San resistance by means of a co-ordinated, three pronged attack throughout the length and breadth of the frontier zone. The three sections of the General Commando left between August and September in 1774. The first section to leave was under the command of Nicolaas van der Merwe. It left the Bokkeveld with

27 Europeans and 38 Khoikhoi on 16 August. The commando searched the Middle and Klein Roggeveld but went as far east as the Sak River. It returned to the Bokkeveld on 7 November, having destroyed 17 kraals, killed 142 people and captured 89. Only one commando member was killed, dying many days after being hit by a poisoned arrow. The second section, under the leadership of Gerrit van Wyk, assembled at the Vis River in the Roggeveld on 2 September and proceeded to search the region to the north and the north-east of the Sak River, that is, Bushmanland. This commando consisted of at least 31 Europeans and a slightly greater number of Khoikhoi. They killed 96 San and captured 21. None of this commando's members were killed although a "bastard" had come close to death when an arrow pierced his hat. The third section, under, Opperman, left to crush resistance in the Sneeuberg, Camdeboo, Nieuweveld and Koup. It killed 265 San and captured 129. Some of the commando members, including Opperman himself were wounded but none fatally." (From: Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen, Pippa Skotnes, 1998)

It can be clearly seen from this piece of historical writing that the San were not spared an inch and those that survived the onslaught were exposed to slavery and brutality that led many of them to perish later on and many others to flee at the first opportunity. During 1777 the Company (Government of the day) sanctioned the extermination of the San by a formal resolution. It was not the end of hostilities as it continued unabated.

Other writings also document these attacks against the San: "From the commando reports of the District of Graaff-Reinet it would appear that during the period from 1786 to 1795 almost 2500 San were killed and 654 were captured, according to the historian H.J. van Aswegen. The numbers are probably underestimated, as not all commandos reported regularly to the landdrost. Van Aswegen stated that commandos were also sent out regularly in the other districts and, taking the Graaf-Reinett statistics as a basis, it is clear that thousands of San must have perished during these attacks. San women and especially children were also forced to work as laborers on the farms. Their position was comparable with that of the slaves in the colony. According to reports there was a continuing widespread traffic in San children by 1817. (From: Uitenhage, The Garden Town. Otto Terblanche. 2004)

One of the greatest advocates of the cause of the San, Laurens van der Post, summarizes their situation as follows: ""The significance of all this of course, did not escape the attention of his enemies. I repeat, their justification for exterminating him was always that he was no better than an animal. Whenever they captured him they called the process of bending him to their will "taming" him, just as if he were really a wild animal". (The Lost World of the Kalahari- Laurens van der Post. 1958.)

The History of the San in Uitenhage

The fact that the San also, long before any one else, occupied large parts of the Eastern Cape is also an historical fact. This also included the area of Uitenhage. Their history in this part of the world is not well documented apart from a few historical pieces found in unpublished articles. Uitenhage is bordered by one of the most remote and inaccessible areas in SA named the Groendal Wildernis Area. This area gave easy refuge to the San during their occupancy as no one else ever dared to venture into the area. The history of the San in this area is recorded as follows by Otto Terblanche: "Historically the Wilderness Area was the refuge of the Khoi-San people, wedged between the indigenous tribes of the Eastern Cape and the European settlers moving up from the West. Evidence of their presence in the area is well documented, in the form of hundreds of paintings on the walls of the innumerable caves and shelters within the area. (From: Uitenhage 200, The Garden Town. Otto Terblanche. 2004)

A sad part of their history is recorded in the following information pamphlet of the information office at Groendal: "Groendal State Forest has a long and very interesting history. It was discovered during the period between 1843 to 1880 that the Bushmen's last stronghold was between the Gamtoos and the Kei Rivers. They were trapped between the Whites to the West and the Xhosas to the East. This area offered sanctuaries in the inaccessible kloofs and vertical rock faces of the Winterhoek Mountains, behind the site of the present Groendal Dam. Raids by Bushmen on the farms give rise to reprisals. The Bushmen drove many cattle into the Groot Winterhoek Mountains. Theft from transport wagons which traveled from Port Elizabeth and Graaf-Reinett were common. The regular outspan place at the Swartkops River near Uitenhage was often the scene of thefts by Bushmen. A sixteen-year-old boy, "baby" Doubell, was watching his father's cattle one day near the Uitenhage fountains when the Bushmen stole the cattle and herded them into the Groot Winterhoek Mountains (Groendal). Young Doubell followed the Bushmen into Blinde Kloof (also known as Droe kloof). The search led to the branch of Blinde Kloof, known as Skelm Kloof. Doubell saw his father's cattle in the bushy ravine below, which was cut off on one side by a stone wall. Doubell returned to Uitenhage and a Boer commando retrieved the cattle. Most of the Bushmen were shot and their graves can still be seen on the farm Hill Place near the Wilderness Area."

Bordering Groendal Wildernis area is Elands River Valley, named after the large numbers of Eland that were roaming the area when the first settlers moved in. This must also have been the "home" of a large numbers of San due to the many rock paintings and Stone Age tools found in the area. The significance of the Eland antelope for the San, the availability of other game, water and shelter in the many kloofs further provides proof of the fact that the San favored the area. It is surmised they only moved into Groendal once they started to encounter the Settlers from the West and the Xhosa tribes from the East.

The Significance of the Spiritual Roots of the San

The spiritual beliefs of the San are well documented in many writings and their unique worldview closely relates to hallucinatory imagery that resulted from their spiritual rituals. They had a very close relationship with the land they lived on and nature in general and it therefore formed an intricate part of their beliefs and worship. It is well known that they had a very strong relationship with the spirit world and that shamans played a very prominent role in their rituals in all the tribes. Many historians observing these rituals, recorded how shamans will go into a trance during all night dancing and singing and that they presumably during these events, communicated with the spirit world. This often continued for a number of days. Through these occult practices the San obtained the power to influence their own destiny and to significantly influence the lives of others. One good example of this is the relationship that developed between them and the Mpondomise tribe who lived in the Tsolo area of the Eastern Cape. The Tsolo area is significant as it has produced, according to Frans Prins, a researcher, some of the best historical documentation and oral data on interaction between black farmers and the San during historical times. The San became well known amongst the Mpondimise as great rainmakers. How this relationship originated is a long and interesting story that warrants greater coverage on another occasion. It was the custom for local Black chiefs during times of drought to summon the San rainmakers to perform their rain making rituals with great effect that often resulted in rain. These rituals are vividly described by Frans Prins in his article and include reference to dealings with water spirits (ancestors) by the San. The San rainmakers were so highly valued by the local Black tribes at that time that they still incorporate their beliefs and practices in the training of diviners in the divining school of Sipani Togu which still operates today in one of the caves that were inhabited by the San. Historical facts like these prompt one not to regard the spiritual life of the San too lightly. It also brings one to believe that like all ethnic groups under the sun, the San is not exempt from redemption from the hand of darkness.

We must say that we do not fully understand the spiritual dynamics that resulted from the close interaction between the San, the land and the spirit world and the significance of them being the first peoples. What we know is that it is significant and if the remnant of the San that mainly lives in Botswana, Namibia and Angola can be redeemed from darkness and be restored to their God given intent and purpose it will have a significant influence on the continent. Worldwide there is a strong move in the Church to appoint first peoples as the gate keepers with spiritual governmental authority on their respective continents. This is not a superior position in comparison with other believers but it has nevertheless a very distinctive purpose.

Our Response

- Firstly, we feel that as White Afrikaners we have to repent of the bloodshed of, and injustices to, the San by our forefathers. This has been done before in other places but not in our community.
- Secondly, we have to ascertain that any curse that was laid by the San on any particular ethnic group, area or land as a result of these injustices, be broken through prayer.
- Thirdly to play a role in the biblical restoration, healing and a release from a negative past of the remnant of the San as well as all peoples who are descended from the San.
- To see the complete spiritual, emotional, physical and spiritual healing and release of the First Peoples of Southern Africa and to witness the restoration of their prophetic destiny as the gatekeepers, stewards and rightful place in the body of Christ and as the spiritual governmental authority on this continent.

Possible Actions in Uitenhage

- To visit the area in the Groendal Wildernis Area where it was suggested that the last San was killed. To perform an act of repentance and to fulfill an act of proclamation.
- To visit the Elands River Valley and to pray at the western and eastern entrances/exists to the valley.
- To be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to any act of repentance, proclamation and reconciliation in the area.

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