

Mission Atlas Project

AFRICA

Eritrea

SNAPSHOTS

Basic Overview:

Country Name: *Eritrea* (The local long form for this country is *Hagere Ertra*, while the local short form is *Ertra*.)

Founded in: 24 May 1993 (It is on this date that Eritrea celebrates independence from Ethiopia.)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

Population: 4,561,599 (38 persons per sq km/97 per sq mi)

<http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia/761576168/Eritrea.html>



Government Type: transitional government (Currently, Eritrea is in a period of transition within their government following their independence from Ethiopia in 1993. The country is seeking a free, multi-party democracy; however, renewed war with Ethiopia has frustrated efforts to fully implement this governmental system under the constitution ratified in 1997)

[\(WorldMark Encyclopedia to the Nations: Africa, p.180\)](#)

Geography/Location in the World: Eritrea is located in northeastern Africa, more popularly known as the Horn of Africa (15 00 N, 39 00 E). It borders the Red Sea to the north and the countries of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to the west, south, and east respectively. It is slightly larger than Pennsylvania in size, with a total area of 121,320 sq km.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

Number of People Groups: 21

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php> & <http://www.peoplegroups.org/>

Picture of Flag:



Religion Snapshot

Major Religion and % of Population: Eritrea is almost equally divided between Muslims and Christians.

- Nearly 50% are Muslim,
- 43% are Orthodox Christians,
- 3% are Roman Catholics,
- 2% are Protestants,
- even smaller percentages of Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Bahá'í', and others reportedly practice in Eritrea.

[\(The WorldMark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Africa, p.178\)](#)

Government Interaction with Religion: According to reports by the US State Department in 2003, there has been a deterioration of respect for religious freedom in Eritrea. Currently, only the Orthodox Church, Catholics, Muslims and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea are officially sanctioned to meet and worship. Members of other unsanctioned religious groups, including other Christian groups, report that they have been detained, harassed, and even tortured for practicing their religion. The Eritrean government questions the reliability of these allegations, but states that the government does prohibit unregistered religious groups from meeting together.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3343635.stm>

COUNTRY PROFILE

Country

Eritrea (The local long form for this country is Hagere Ertra, while the local short form is Ertra)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

Demographics

The population of Eritrea, as of July 2005, was reported as 4,561,599 people.

- 44.8% consisted of people between birth and the age of fourteen,
- 51.9% were ages fifteen to sixty-four,
- the remaining population, those over sixty-four, was 3.3%.
- These statistics show a general life expectancy being around fifty-two years of age, about the same for both males and females. The ratio is nearly one male per one female at all stages of life.
- The population growth was reported at 2.51% in 2005.

It is estimated that 80% of Eritrea's population lives in rural areas. The rest of the population live in or around the major cities which includes the capital, *Asmara*, and the seaports of *Massawa* and *Åseb*, and the cities of *Keren*, *Nak'fa*, *Åk'ordat*, and *Teseney*. These statistics are continuing to change over the years as hundreds of thousands of people, previously displaced by the war or famine, return home.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761576168/Eritrea.html

Language

There are twelve official living languages in Eritrea.

- The *Tigrinya* and *Arabic* languages, spoken by half the population, are the ones used most frequently for commercial and official transactions.
- Another language, known as *Tigre*, is spoken by 40% of the population.
- Other languages, such as *Afar*, *Saho*, *Beja*, *Bilen*, *Nara*, and *Kunama*, are collectively spoken by less than 10% of the population.
- Both English and Italian are also widely understood, while English is used on both the second and university education levels.

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Eritrea (<http://www.nationbynation.com/Eritria/Population.html>) (<http://www.nitesoft.com/eccm/languages.htm>)

Society/Culture

Eritrea has a very diverse population that reflects many different languages and cultures

- The government officially recognizes nine major ethnic groups in Eritrea. The Tigray and Tigre speakers are the two largest ethnic groups, constituting 80% of the population. The Afar, Bilen, Beja, Kunama, Nara, Saudi Arabs, and Saho represent the other seven recognized groups.
- Despite ethnic diversity, there is surprisingly little major conflict between the different groups due to their unification during the three decades of war with Ethiopia.

Another factor that unites many of these different groups is religion.

- Approximately half of the population is composed of Tigrinya-speaking Christians,
- The other half consists of several ethnic and linguistic groups of Muslims.
- Of the nine major recognized ethnic groups, two of them are considered Christian. These two groups are the Tigray and the Bilen people and they practice orthodoxy.
- The remaining groups practice a mixture of Islam and their own tribal religions.

It is estimated that approximately 80% of the population lives in rural areas, engaging the land in agriculture or serving as caretakers for their herds of livestock. Most of these people are considered nomadic, because they frequently relocate in search of more fertile soil for farming and better pastures for their livestock. Many people within Eritrea were also forced to relocate due to the war with Ethiopia. Even today, many of these people are still considered displaced and are in the process of returning home.

Despite these frequent and forced relocations, the Eritrean people remain strong in both societal ties and cultural heritage orientation. All ethnic groups, without exception, enjoy dancing, particularly when there is an occasion such as a birth, marriage, or a cultural or religious festival, which gives them reason to do so. They play the *krar* and the *wata* during these dances, which are very similar to instruments found in Ethiopia. Each ethnic group has its own musical beats, dances, and tunes, which serves as a distinguishing characteristic between the different people of Eritrea.

The people of Eritrea also share with Ethiopia their love for the same types of traditional foods. For breakfast, it is not uncommon to eat *silsi*, a fried tomato covered in pepper and onion sauce, or *legamat*, a deep-fried dough. The people of Eritrea are also proud of the *tsebhi*, their region's unique and spicy sauce. This is often served with *capretto*, or roasted goat. There are also many vegetarian dishes known as *nai tsom*. The popular drinks include *Asmara gin*, the local beer known as *Melotti*, and *mies*, which is wine made from honey.

Eritrea is still in a time of major transition, both politically and economically, as they strive to rebuild their country that was devastated by the war. During this time of governmental transition, the political leaders are not allowing the practice of any unsanctioned religions. Currently, only the Orthodox Church, Catholics, Muslims, and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea are officially sanctioned to meet and worship. Members of other unsanctioned religious groups, including other Christian groups, report that they have been detained, harassed, and even tortured for practicing their religion. Eritrea claims to allow religious freedom, but in more recent years, there has been a deterioration of this freedom.

The major holidays observed in Eritrea are New Years Day (1 January), Independence Day (24 May), Martyrs' Day (20 June), Anniversary of the Start of the Armed Struggle (1 September). Also observed are the movable religious holidays of 'Id al-Fitr, 'Id al-

Adha, 'Id Milad al-Nabi, and the movable Orthodox Christian holidays of Fasika and Meskel.

(<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Eritrea.pdf>)

(http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761576168/Eritrea.html)(<http://e-dub.20megsfree.com/custom.html>)

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3343635.stm>)

(The WorldMark Encyclopedia of the Nations: Africa, Tenth Ed, p. 177)

Government

Since its independence in May 1993, Eritrea has been operating under a provisional government set up by the *Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. This interim administration was created to govern the people for four years. It established the National Assembly, which is will serve as the basis of the new government until a constitution is prepared and the first elections can take place.

In 1996, the Constitutional Commission, set up by the National Assembly, submitted its draft document of the Eritrean constitution for public debate. In the draft, the Commission calls for a free, multiparty democracy. The constitution was ratified in 1997 and a deadline in May 1998 was set for the election of the new government. Renewed war with Ethiopia, however, has delayed the implementation of this new constitution.

The present government structure in Eritrea is operating with legislative, executive, and judicial branches, although elections for these offices are now several years overdue. The *People's Front for Democracy and Justice* (PFDJ), the only active political party for the country, is currently filling all of the positions within these three branches. Beneath these branches, are six sub-divisions, governing the six local administrative divisions within the country.

On an international level, Eritrea is a member in both the African Union (AU) and the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). It continues to have close relations with the United States and several other European nations who have become important aid donors.

According to reports by the US State Department in 2003, there has been a deterioration of respect for religious freedom in Eritrea.

(WorldMark Encyclopedia to the Nations: Africa, p.180)

(<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>)

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3343635.stm>)

Economy

Eritrea has faced many economic hardships since establishing its independence from Ethiopia in 1993. The worst of these hardships came in 1998 with the Ethiopian-Eritrea War which lasted two years. With over \$600 million of property damage and loss in

Eritrea's most productive region, GDP growth fell to zero in 1999 and to -12.1% in 2000. Food production also fell by 62% during this time.

Since the war, Eritrea's government has kept a firm handle on the economy to complete the country's development agenda. With difficulties such as erratic rainfall, illiteracy, and unemployment, Eritrea's progress has been slow, but conditions are improving.

In 2004, the GDP rose to \$700 million.

- Of the GDP, 12% came from agriculture, which includes the production of millet, wheat, barley, flax, cotton, papayas, citrus fruits, bananas, beans and lentils, potatoes, vegetables, fish, dairy products, meat, and skins.
- 25% of the GDP came through the industry of alcoholic beverages, leather goods, textiles, chemicals, construction materials, salt, paper, and matches.
- The remainder of the GDP came through trade. Located along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, Eritrea exports skins, salt, meat, live sheep and cattle to the Middle East, Europe, and neighboring countries. From some of the same countries, Eritrea imports food, military materiel, fuel, machinery, and transportation equipment.

Due to Eritrea's instability, both in climate and neighboring relations with Ethiopia, it is often in a state of emergency and in need of outside aid. With deforestation, soil erosion, overgrazing, frequent droughts, locust swarms, and a loss of infrastructure from civil war, Eritrea often lacks in basic necessities such as food and water. The US is currently Eritrea's largest donor for food aid.

Other health care concerns, such as malaria, an increasing Aids epidemic, bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever are prevalent in some areas.

In a USAID Integrated Strategy Plan, focus is placed on basic health care, creating jobs through business development in rural areas, and increasing public participation in the country's development. Work in each of these areas is rapidly improving the lives of the Eritrean people.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2854.htm>

<http://www.usaid.gov/er/humanit/humanit.htm>

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

<http://www.usaid.gov/er/>

Literacy

In 2003, 58.6% of the total population in Eritrea was considered to be literate. In a further breakdown of percentages, 69.9% of males and 47.6% of females tested to be literate.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

Land/Geography

Eritrea is located in northeastern Africa, also known as the Horn of Africa. (15 00 N, 39 00 E) It borders the Red Sea to the north, and the countries of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to the west, south and east respectively. It is slightly larger than Pennsylvania in size, with a total area of 121,320 sq km. Of the 121, 320 sq km of land, there is no sq km of water, making its location on the coast vital for the survival of the people of this area.

Along Eritrea's coast is a dry, desert strip that runs by the Red Sea. The southernmost province of the coastline, *Denkalia*, is reportedly the hottest spot in the world with highs around 140 degrees Fahrenheit. To the west, are the cooler and wetter central highlands, with elevations reaching 6000-8000ft (1,830 to 2,440 m). Beyond the central highlands is a hilly terrain to the northwest and flat to gently rolling hills in the southwest. With the exception of the coastal desert, heavy rainfall occurs in all parts of Eritrea during the months of June, July, and August.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

(WorldMark Encyclopedia to the Nations: Africa, p.177)

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761576168/Eritrea.html

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>

(WorldMark Encyclopedia to the Nations: Africa, p.177)

HISTORY

Due to Eritrea's location along the Red Sea, it has a long history of being dominated by colonial rule. In 1890, Italy expanded its rule along the coast of the Red Sea to include Eritrea. For the first time in history, the people of Eritrea united across traditional political divisions and social structures, which began setting the stage for their war for independence.

In 1941, during World War II, the British defeated the Italians and gained control of Eritrea. For the next few years, Eritrea was placed under the British Military Administration until Italy relinquished its legal right to Eritrea and other colonies in a treaty in 1947. After lengthy negotiations concerning how to dispose of Italy's former colonies, the United Nations passed a resolution in 1952 that made Eritrea an autonomous territory federated with Ethiopia, its neighbor to the south.

After ten years of struggle with Ethiopia, Eritrea formed the Eritrean Liberation Front and began its armed struggle for independence. In 1962, Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia, despite all of the cries for independence by the Eritrean people. This annexation later led to a bitter war for independence from Ethiopia, lasting thirty years, which left Eritrea in complete ruins. It is estimated that between 1978 and 1991, Eritrea lost more than 60,000 fighters, 40,000 civilians, while hundreds of thousands of others were forced into exile.

In May 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front captured the remaining Ethiopian outposts in Eritrea. In April of 1993, under an internationally supervised referendum, 98.5% of the Eritrean people voted for their independence. These results were quickly certified by the UN on May 24, 1993, when Eritrea became Africa's 52nd independent

state. Now an independent country, Eritrea is still struggling in many ways and is in no way distant from conflict with Ethiopia, but they have their freedom.

(WorldMark Encyclopedia to the Nations: Africa, p.180)

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Christianity first began reaching what is now present day Eritrea during the fourth century. Syrian missionaries came from the north and they brought with them the Monophysite doctrine, or the belief that Christ is fully God, but is not fully human. This belief spread rapidly throughout the Axumite Empire as the kings readily embraced the doctrine. The subsequent growth of this Empire extended both the power and influence of the Monophysite doctrine.

In 615 AD, the arrival of Osman Bin Afan, one of the four disciples of Muhammad, led to the spread of Islam within the Axumite Empire. He took shelter in Tigray after he was forced to flee Syria. He remained there under the protection of the Axum kings and spread the doctrine of Islam among the people.

A few hundred years later, in 1530, Islam became more widely practiced after the Christian highlands of Eritrea were laid to waste by Ahmad bin Ibrahim and his Islamic forces. Christians that did not convert were killed while the rest were forced to practice Islam.

A change of events came about when the Portuguese landed in Massawa in 1541 and assisted the Eritreans in driving out the Islamic forces. The following time of peace led, once again, to the rise of Christianity in the area.

Catholicism was first introduced to Eritrea in 1600 by the Jesuit Fathers. It did not fully take hold until the nineteenth century when Italy came into power over Eritrea and served to further the introduction of the Catholic doctrine.

Protestantism first reached Eritrea in 1886 when the Swedish Evangelical Mission began a strong translation and education ministry in Massawa, Gehleb, and Asmara. This group translated the New Testament, Psalms, Isaiah, some Old Testament stories, a devotional book, and a cultural book into Tigre. They also translated the Bible into the Tigrinya language. The new indigenous churches planted by the Swedish Evangelical Mission consisted of one to two thousand believers.

Other groups, such as the American Faith Mission and the BV Swedish Mission, began working in Eritrea. The American Faith Mission had a very successful church planting and educational ministry.

After World War II, the Orthodox Presbyterian Outreach began working among the Tigre, Tigrinya, Saho, and other Arabic speaking people in Eritrea. Following this group, was the Serving in Mission group, which began work in 1952.

Around the same time, The Red Sea Mission began working among the Afar along the coast. The Middle East General Mission also did outreach to the Muslims using Arabic. They also began a hospital in Hykota and produced a Tigre and Kunama language syllabus.

Other small groups, such as the Evangelical Church, Lutheran Church, Full Gospel, Faith Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Kale Heywet (SIM), and other denominations also appeared during this time.

Mission work was abruptly halted in 1975 when a missions worker was kidnapped and continued warfare made work nearly impossible. Even today, the Tigre, Bilen, Saho, Nara, Kunama, Rashaida, Beja, and Afar are predominantly Muslim and are virtually unreached with the gospel.

In Eritrea's Christian history, they have been exposed to Protestant, Anglican, and Independent missionaries, totaling ten agencies from four countries. As of the year 2000, there were a total of ten Protestant denominations, three Independent, and one Catholic, Orthodox, and Marginal.

Within the Protestant denomination, there are six different churches represented. These are the Evangelical Church of Eritrea (Lutheran), the Lutheran Church in Eritrea, Full Gospel, Faith Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, and Kale Heywet (SIM) churches.

Outside Protestantism, there is the Orthodox denomination, which includes the Eritrean Orthodox church. There is also the Marginal denomination, which includes the Jehovah's Witnesses.

As far as percentages are concerned, 40% of the nearly 50% that are Christian practice in the Orthodox Church. The remainders of the Christians are Protestant (1.35%), Independent (.16%), Catholic (3.77%), Marginal (.04%), or Unaffiliated (1.13%).

According to reports by the US State Department in 2003, there has been a deterioration of respect for religious freedom in Eritrea. Currently, only the Orthodox Church, Catholics, Muslims and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea are officially sanctioned to meet and worship. Members of other unsanctioned religious groups, including other Christian groups, report that they have been detained, harassed, and even tortured for practicing their religion. The Eritrean government questions the reliability of these allegations, but states that the government does prohibit unregistered religious groups from meeting together.

(<http://home.planet.nl/~hans.mebrat/eritrea-religions.htm>)

(<http://www.sim.org/country.asp?fun=1&CID=25>) (<http://www.sim.org/country.asp?fun=1&CID=25>)

("Operation World," p. 240) (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3343635.stm>)

RELIGIONS

In Eritrea, Islam and Christianity are the two main religions, each group representing nearly half of the total population. The Eritrean government is very careful to balance these two religions. Beyond these, just fewer than 3% of Eritrean people practice a different religion. These other religions are comprised of very small communities of Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, the Bahá'í' faith, and others.

In May 2002, only the Islamic, Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical Lutheran churches were officially recognized by the government in Eritrea as being sanctioned to worship. All other religions are not permitted to worship unless they first register to do so. Failure to register and be recognized by the government means that the groups who still continue to practice their religion may suffer persecution.

Non-Christian (around 52%---“[Operation World](#)”)

ISLAM—approximately half of the population in Eritrea are Muslims who practice Sunni Islam. This is the largest division of Islam, encompassing 80-90% of all Muslims worldwide. Sunni Islam is discussed below, but first it is important to note that many people groups within Eritrea still continue to practice some of their old tribal beliefs, such as animism, simultaneously with Islam. Such practices result in something known as Folk Islam.

Sunni Islam the one of the two main branches of Islam. Followers believe in that the Qur'an is the final authority and that there is no further revelation. They also believe that human beings can have a relationship with the Divine without intermediaries; however, religious scholars, mystic shaykhs, and others often end up serving as an intermediary for the people anyway. In society, Sunnis prefer to reach agreements by consensus and do not recognize special sacred wisdom in their leaders. This is practice is due, in part, to their belief that any good Muslim can be a leader. They also accept the first four caliphs, or leaders, as rightful successors of Muhammad

ANIMISM --is the belief of the existence of a very active spirit world that inhabits natural objects and afflicts mankind. Much time and energy is put into appeasing these spirits to alleviate fear of harm from them. This can be seen by the wearing of protective jewels, the calling of spiritual community leaders to perform services to ward off the spirits, or even the worshiping of the spirits through festivals, rituals, etc. A few parts of the culture of some Eritrean groups show a strong belief in the spirit world.

BUDDHISM—only very small communities of people within Eritrea practice Buddhism. They follow the teachings of Buddha and believe that enlightenment can only be achieved through right conduct, wisdom, and meditation, which can release a person from desire, suffering, and rebirth. They believe that until one can reach enlightenment, their life is consumed with ridding oneself of desires so that personal suffering will cease.

HINDUISM—only very small communities of people within Eritrea practice Hinduism. Hinduism has its origin in India and is very diverse in its philosophy and cultural practice. It is characterized by a belief in reincarnation and a supreme being, which has many forms and natures.

JUDAISM—is a monotheistic religion of the Jews. Within Judaism, the spiritual and ethical principles are embodied in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud.

BAHAI'—Bahá'í Faith theology follows three unities: the ones of God, the oneness of his prophets, and the oneness of humanity.

Cults and Sects (.04%---“Operation World”)

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES—practice evangelism by preaching the imminent approach of the millennium. This denomination also strongly opposes war and other forms of organized governmental authority. The Jehovah's Witness Church in Eritera claims more than 19 congregations and around 1000 members.

The marginal groups are reporting a growth rate of + 9.9 %.

Protestant/Evangelical/Pentecostals (1.35%---“Operation World”)

Christians, including Orthodox, in Eritrea are primarily among the Tigrinya, Bilen, and Kunama peoples who live in proximity along the border with Ethiopia.

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS—is a denomination that is noted for its observance of the Sabbath on Saturday. It also believes that Jesus' second coming and the end of the world are near.

THE LUTHERN CHURCH IN ERITERA reports over 21 congregations and almost 4000 members.

THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF ERITERA that follows a basically Lutheran path boasts 52 congregations with over 7500 members

THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCH has over 20 congregations and 1600 members

THE FAITH CHURCH OF CHRIST reports 16 congregations and 100 members

THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD churches number more than 20 congregations and 2000 members

THE KALE HEYWET CHURCH that is affiliated with the SIM has over 15 congregations with 1400 members. This group planted over 11 new churches in five years and has sent missionaries to non-Christian and nominal Christian areas of the country

Churches termed Protestant in Eritrea are growing at a rate of + 7.7 %.

Independent Churches in Eritrea are growing at a rate of +14.9 %.

(<http://www.answers.com/topic/eritrea>)

(“Operation World,” 240)

ORTHODOX CHURCHES (40.98 % **Operation World**”)

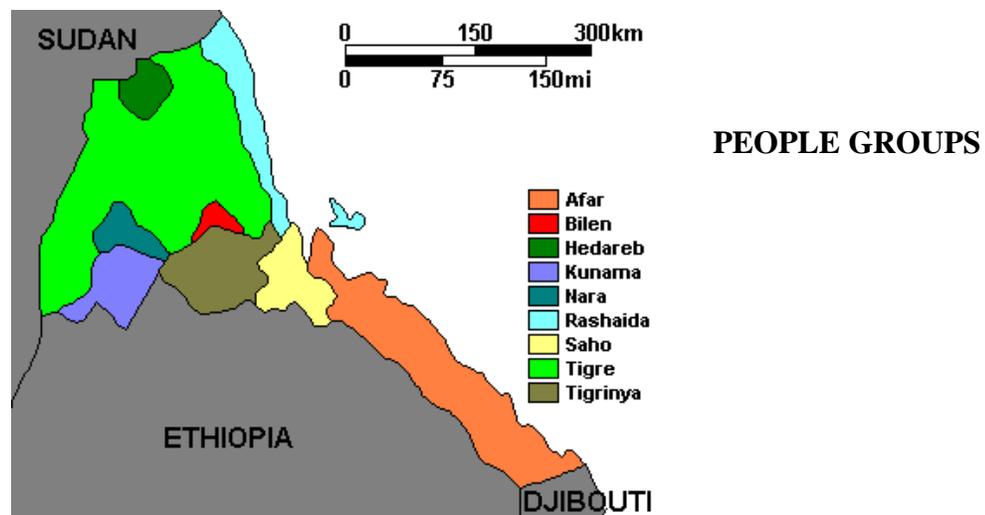
The Eritrean Orthodox Church—is the main Christian denomination in Eritrea claiming as high as 40.98 % of the people in 800 congregations. This percentage would mean over 1,500,000 adherents in this Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church reports an annual growth rate of + 4.4 %.

This church is the local Oriental Orthodox church, and is sometimes described as a Coptic Church. It is often considered Coptic because this church was formerly subject to the Tawahido Church in Ethiopia, within the hierarchy, before it was subject to the Coptic pope. Even today, the Eritrean Orthodox Church is still in full communion with the Coptic Church in Egypt. In 1998, the Archbishopric of Asmara was elevated to the position of patriarchate of Eritrea, within the Coptic Church.

A biblical revival movement has arisen within the Orthodox Church. This movement known as *Medhanie Alam*, is having significant impact.

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Roman Catholic Church practices the faith, doctrine, and system of the Roman Catholic Church. The RCC claims as many as 85,000 members, 145,000 adherents, and over 110 congregations



11517
Afar (300,000)

The *Afar* people live along the coastal waters of the Red Sea in the southern portion of Eritrea. People of this same tribe also live in the neighboring African countries of Djibouti, Somalia, and Ethiopia. They are a very strong and proud people, who believe that prestige comes from killing ones enemies.

The Afar of Eritrea are divided into two subgroups, the *Asaemara* and the *Adaemara*. The *Asaemara*, also known as the “red ones,” are considered the stronger of the two groups and are noted for their power and prestige. They dwell along the coast and many of them are fishermen, while others are nomadic, herding sheep, goats, cattle, and camels.

The *Adaemara*, or the “white ones,” live in one of the most rugged places in the world—the *Danakil Desert*. Within this desert is the Danakil Depression, an area some 200 feet below sea level, with active volcanoes, plains of salt pans, and daily temperatures reaching 125 degrees Fahrenheit. The *Adaemara*, who are not engaged in herding, mine salt from this depression in the dry season. The average rainfall of less than seven inches, produces a dryness that provides the *Adaemara* with fruitful work.

Both of these two sub-groups are considered nomadic, frequently herding their livestock to care for them in the harsh desert conditions. Consequently, the Afar live in oval-shaped huts, known as *ari*, which are made of palm mats which can be easily moved.

In this culture, the men are typically responsible for tending to the camels and donkeys and for taking down the camp when it is time to move. The women care for the sheep, cows, and goats, as well as look over the entire camp. In a culture where wealth is measured by the size of your herds, the Afar deal with often difficult living conditions to care for their livestock.

The Afar’s diet consists of mostly meat and milk. Milk is a very important social “offering” in this culture. When a guest is served warm milk in a home, they know that the host is implying that he will provide protection for the guest. If a guest is ever killed

while under the protection of the host, the guest's death must be avenged as if the guest were a member of the clan.

Marriages for the Afar are typically monogamous, although Muslim men are permitted to have up to four wives. Young girls may marry at the age of ten, and a marriage to a first cousin, particularly a man to his father's sister's daughter, is preferred.

Much of the Afar culture is heavily influenced by the Islamic religion. They do not eat pork or drink alcohol and, when they can afford to do so, they make a pilgrimage to Mecca, the most sacred spot for members of the Islamic religion.

In addition to their Islamic practices, the Afar also hold to many of their pre-Islamic beliefs, which are more animistic. The Afar believe that certain trees and groves have sacred powers. They believe that the spirits of the dead are very powerful, thus they celebrate the "feast of the dead," or Rabena, each year. They also give annual offerings to the sea to ensure the safety of their villages.

Although a very powerful people, the Afar have great needs besides their spiritual condition alone. Due to frequent famines and droughts, the Afar often lack the basic necessities of food and water. One of their greatest needs is for a clean, consistent water source for their people and their herds.

There are ministry tools available to the Afar people. In the Afar language, Bible portions, the New Testament, Jesus Film, Christian Radio, and gospel recordings are available.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

11518

Agaw, Western (10,000)

There is very little information written on the Agaw people. Although they have a rich and influential history and culture, this people group has slowly integrated with other people groups and cultures. They now are considered to be very similar to the Amhara and Tigre people. The Agaw people live Eritrea, as well as central and northern Ethiopia.

Some experts believe the Agaw people to be the original inhabitants of Ethiopia. It is noted that they are mostly bilingual, speaking both Amharic and a Semantic language. Due to the fact that they speak an Afro-Asiatic language in a Cushitic culture, it is suggested that their ancestors must have lived in this area thousands of years before the arrival of the Semitic languages.

Further historical evidence suggests that the Agaw were Christianized after the Semitic Coptic Christian Auximites conquered them in the ninth of tenth century. This led to the rise of the Zagwe dynasty, led by a Christian Agaw family, who took control over Ethiopia.

It was through this line that Ethiopia saw the rise of its own unique Christianity. In 1270, the role of the Agaw people diminished when the Solomonids regained control of the Ethiopian dynasty. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Jewish Falasha, or “black Jews,” descended from the Agaw.

Very few ministry tools are available for the Agaw Western in their language of Qimant. There are some Bible portions as well as some gospel audio recordings.

(Olson, James S. *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*, Greenwood Press, 1996. p.13)

(<http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Agaw>)

(Africana. *The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 1999 by Basic Civitas Books, p. 51)

(Yukan, Mohamad Z. *Almanac of African Peoples and Nations*, 1999, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey)

(<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=ahg>)

33677

Beja (103,398)

The Beja people are descendants of Noah’s son, Cush, and have inhabited the deserts of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea for more than 4000 years. They are the largest non-Arabic group living between the Nile River and the Red Sea. They occupy a 20,000 square mile stretch of land along the border of Sudan in northwestern Eritrea. Within the last decade, thousands of Beja have fled Eritrea into Sudan to escape the droughts and famines that routinely come to that area of the country.

The Beja are nomadic shepherds who regularly traverse the plains in search of better grazing lands for their herds of cattle and camels. The care of their animals is so important to the Beja people that it is even reflected in their songs and folklore. In fact, the Beja’s view of the “good life” is to live in green, well-watered pastures that can support their large herds.

These nomadic people live in portable tents that the women of this culture weave together out of goat hair. Their diet consists of dairy products, particularly camel’s milk, and meat. Only the wealthiest of Beja will have more than one wife, for it is customary in their culture for the male to present the bride’s family with a large gift of livestock, clothing, etc. After a marriage, one of the main goals of an Agaw couple is to have many male children and acquire many female camels.

The Beja in Eritrea are divided into two tribes, the Ababda and the Beni Amer. The Beja are then further divided into clans whereby the line of descent is traced through the males. Clans vary in size from one to twelve families. These clans dwell together and share the same pastures and watering sites that may only be used by outside clans with permission. Any conflict that arises between clans is settled by Beja-law, while the normal daily affairs at home are settled by the head of the household.

The Beja people are described as being an aggressive people. They are very hospitable towards neighboring clans, but they are not very friendly to foreigners. They are a small,

strong, wiry people with oval shaped faces and long noses. They also have an enormous crown of knotted hair on their heads which has earned them the nickname of “Fuzzie Wuzzies”.

It is interesting to note that the Beni Amer, one of the two tribes, belong to a confederation of nomadic groups which unite under a single political unit. The social system within this unit is highly unusual because it resembles a caste system. The Beja in Ethiopia are strongly discouraged by the government to have this type of system.

The Beja have been following Islam since they mixed with other Arab tribes thousands of years ago. It is said that their conversion was largely motivated by their desire to retaliate against the Turkish rulers of their past. They consider themselves Muslim, but they practice a religion more properly known as “folk Islam,” because of its integration with traditional superstitious beliefs.

The Beja believe in many spirits including the jinnis, or spirits capable of taking on animal forms. These spirits, they believe, cause sickness, accident, and madness. Black magic is also widely practiced in pagan ceremonies, which includes animal sacrifices. The men of this culture are believed to have the power to curse others by giving them an “evil eye.”

There are currently no ministry tools available in Bedawi, the heart language of the Beja.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=101211&rog3=ER>

11523 Bilen (90,000)

The Bilen, also known as the Bogos, is an ethnic group of Hamitic descent that occupies the highlands of central Eritrea. They are divided into two main tribes, the Bet Tarke and Bet Takwe.

Within this community, there are two distinct classes, the Shumaglieh (elders) and the Tigni (clients). The Tigni serve the Shumagleih, but can not be bought or sold. Their life, according to Bilen society, is worth ninety-three cows, while the elder’s life is valued at one hundred and fifty-eight cattle.

Besides the distinction between these two classes, there is also a sharp distinction between the value of males and females. The Belin women have no rights, inherit nothing, and are classed with the hyena, the most despised animal. A woman is not even allowed to utter her husband’s or father-in-law’s name.

Currently, only some Bible portions and gospel audio recordings are available in Bilen.

http://91.1911encyclopedia.org/B/BO/BOGOS_BILENS_.htm
<http://www1.encyclislam.brill.nl/data/EncIslam/C1/COM-0201.html>

(http://91.1911encyclopedia.org/B/BO/BOGOS_BILENS_.htm)

(<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=byn>)

11519

Hadrami (100,000)

The Hadrami, also known as the Tihama Arabs, are originally from the western coast of the Arab peninsula. This strip of land, known as Timaha, is very different from the Yemini highlands. The people that live there have notably darker skin. This is due to Ethiopian and Somali traces in the ancestry.

There are currently no ministry tools available for the Hadrami, in their language of Arabic, Hadrami Spoken.

(<http://www.cpamedia.com/history/tihama/>)

(<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=ayh>)

11529

Kunama (140,000)

The Kunama people are located in southwestern Eritrea, as well as in Ethiopia and parts of Sudan. They are considered one of the oldest people groups of this area. Their culture is very unique and is rich with both song and dance. Many of the Kunama are sedentary cultivators while others are herders.

They live in a matriarchal society whereby the prominent roles are played by women. This means a child is only considered to be Kunama if the mother is Kunama. There is also a great reverence for all the elders of the tribe, who make the important decisions. This “democratic” system adds to a great sense of community among the Kunama people.

Kunama culture has three main rights of passage. These are at birth, circumcision, and the passage into adulthood.

All Kunama used to practice a form of monotheism in their traditional indigenous religion. Today, however, many Kunama have turned to Islam, while others practice Christianity, specifically Roman Catholicism.

In the Kunama language, there are currently Bible portions, the New Testament, gospel audio recordings, and Christian radio broadcasting available for the Kunama people.

(<http://www.eritreanbeauty.com/k.html>)

(<http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/asylum/ric/documentation/ERI03003.htm>)

(<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=kun>)

42701

Mensa (45,000)

The Mensa are a semi-nomadic tribe in Eritrea. They were Christians while they were under Abyssinian rule, but they now practice Islam.

It is unknown whether there are any ministry tools available for the Mensa people.

http://22.1911encyclopedia.org/M/ME/MENSA_AND_MAREA.htm

11530

Nara (63,000)

The Nara belong to a Sudanic people group known as the Prenilotes. Ancient records exist for the Nara which traces their history back to the borders of the Alwa Kingdom of the Nile Valley. They migrated eastward into southwestern Ethiopia and also live just north of the Gash River in southwestern Eritrea.

The Nara have strong builds and are not as tall as other neighboring groups. In the past, the Nara were raided for slave labor by other tribes.

The Nara language belongs to the East Sudanic branch of the Nilo-Saharan language family. Within the four main tribal divisions, there are very different dialects; therefore the Tigre language is used for intercommunication between villages.

The basis of the Nara economy is agriculture. In fact, the Nara were the ones who first introduced farming to this area of Africa. They grow sorghum, wheat, barely, vegetables, fruits, tobacco, and kat, which is a stimulant. They also weave, trade, hunt, breed animals, and make ropes, baskets, and stools from the forest products to help increase their income.

Within the Nara culture, they practice polygamy, meaning that the men have multiple wives. The bride-price for the Nara women is high, costing a man some of his cattle and other valuables.

A typical Nara community consists of either a single compact village or a cluster of settlements that is away from the main trails and is in an area that can be quickly defended. It is typical for each polygamous family to have their own compound where each married woman lives in her own separate hut. These huts are made from rods, twigs, and clay, with roofs extending all the way to the ground, making their dwellings look like beehives.

The Nara women are treated with honor, which is not true of many of the neighboring tribes. Often, the Nara are unveiled and have many liberties. The men are noted for wearing bright pieces of cloth, similar to togas, and turbans. They also smoke tobacco, chew the stimulant kat, and drink liquor.

The Nara were forced to convert to Islam during the late 19th century. They now almost exclusively practice Islam, however, it appears that Islam has failed to deeply take root

and become internalized within the people because their old religion is still very active among them.

Most villages will have a mosque that looks much like the typical Nara home. These villages will also have Imams who teach the Koran to the people. The Nara, however, know very little about the Koran, do not speak Arabic, are not rigid in prayers of fasting, and make very few pilgrimages to Mecca. Only those who are very religious hold to the teachings of Islam.

This lack of dedication to Islam and the falling away from their old religion perhaps will make the Nara more open to the gospel. However, work with this people will still be a challenge because very few Christian resources in their language exist.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=107088&rog3=ER>

42706

Palestinian Arab (31,000)

The Palestinian Arabs are one of many groups that are classified as Levant Arabs. There are several hundred thousand Levant Arabs in the world, the majority of them residing in the Arabian Desert area, from Israel to Kuwait and eastward into Iran. Small groups of them can also be found in Northern Africa.

Most Palestinian Arabs are seriously committed to their practices of Islam; however, there is also a considerable group of committed Christians among them as well. Within Islam, there are two main branches, the Shiites and Shafites, which the Palestinian Arabs practice in this region. These people speak Mashrigi, an Arabic language, as well as various local dialects.

Palestinian Arabs can be found living in both the fertile regions and the less arid foothills in Eritrea. They live in villages, yet, they are very tribal in nature. They are ruled by sheiks, or Arab chiefs who are considered the experts in Islam. Their villages are set up in such a way that they can be easily defended. They also control all the goods and people who pass through them.

The homes are usually elaborately decorated “town houses,” equipped with artistic brickwork around the windows, carpet in the house, and mattresses and cushions lining the walls to lean up against while sitting. It is customary to leave your shoes at the door before entering the house.

Palestinian Arabs are very social people. Time with friends and relatives over daily coffee is very typical. Besides coffee, their diet consists of wheat bread and porridge made with boiled meat.

Among Arabs, there are many different classes which are usually determined by the type of clothing worn. Palestinian Arab tribesmen can be easily distinguished from others. The women wear veils at all times while the men wear daggers.

The majority of Palestinian Arab marriages are monogamous even though Muslim teaching permits them to have up to four wives. In more recent times, there has been an increase in “love” marriages as opposed to the traditional arranged ones.

The vast majority of Palestinian Arabs follow the teachings of Islam. This means that there is considerable emphasis on the five basic “pillars.” These pillars specify that a Muslim must affirm that “there is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet,” pray five times a day facing the direction of Mecca, give generously, fast during Ramadan (the ninth month of the Muslim year), and go on at least one pilgrimage to Mecca.

Besides the Muslim teachings, Islamic laws also greatly influence the lives of the Palestinian Arabs. Their Islamic communities are patrilineal, meaning that inheritances are passed down through the males. However, females are also valued for their ability to bear children. In Muslim society, children are considered to be the families’ greatest asset. Preservation of their people is also very important, as seen with laws only allowing marriages to take place inside their own group.

Only Bible portions and gospel audio recordings are available for the Palestinian Arabs in Arabic, South Levantine Spoken.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

11532 **Saho (144,000)**

The Saho comprise of a small portion, only 3-5%, of Eritrea’s total population. They are a nomadic people, with their entire lives centering on the care of their herds. They dwell along the coastal areas along the Red Sea.

They are strictly an oral culture, with less than 1% of their population being literate. This means that they pass down their culture, religion, and customs through the telling of stories.

The heart of the Saho is bound in practicing animism, or the worship of the intermediate spirits. They believe these spirits live in rocks, trees, and all other objects and that these spirits can bring harm to their lives if they do not appease them. The Saho’s concept of God is impersonal. They do not believe that they can know Him or reach Him because He is far away.

During the time when Islam was making great advances into the African kingdoms, the Saho’s religion became intermingled with Muslim practices. They may adhere to some Muslim beliefs, but they are animistic at their core.

Only Bible portions and a few gospel audio recordings are available in Saho.

<http://www.peopleteams.org/saho/>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=ssy>

42707

Saudi Arab/Rashaida (34,000)

The vast majority of the Saudi Arabian population is composed of the Hijazi Arabs, or the Saudi Arabs as they are more commonly known. They live predominately along the coast of the Red Sea as well as in the major urban centers and they speak Hijazi Arabic.

The Saudi Arabian culture was first developed in the Arabian Desert by the tribes who lived there. Migration has since taken place, spreading into the Middle East and Northern Africa, leading to the expansion of the Arab world.

Agriculture has always been a major part of Saudi Arabian life. Their strategic location along the coast has enabled them to be very active in trading with other countries.

The marriages of the Saudi Arabs are typically endogamous, meaning that they take place within a small social circle. Inheritance is patrilineal, or passed down from fathers to sons.

Saudi Arabian clothing is designed for the harsh desert climate. It is typically made of lightweight, light-colored fabric, and is loose-fitting to allow for air circulation.

In the seventh century, the founding of Islam dramatically changed the course of Saudi life. Today, most Saudi Arabs practice Islam and see themselves as the preservers of the true Islamic faith. This forms many potential barriers and difficulties for the Saudi Arabians to come to Christ.

There are currently no ministry tools available for the Saudi Arabs in their heart language of Arabic, Hijazi Spoken.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

42708

Somali (52,000)

The majority of the Somali people reside within Somalia, although there are groups that live in neighboring countries, including Eritrea. The name Somali, is derived from the words “so maal,” which literally translates to mean “go milk a beast for yourself.” Although this sounds rather harsh, it is an expression of hospitality.

The Somali began following the practices of Islam around the mid-1500s due to the influence of the Arab traders who settled along the coastline.

Among the Somali, there are four main clans, the largest two being the Somaal and Sab people. The Somaal are primarily nomadic shepherds, while the Sab are farmers or

craftsmen. The Somali have very sharp divisions along these clan lines. There are often fights between clans which result in many deaths.

Within each clan is a nuclear family system consisting of a husband, wife, and children. The typical family will own some goats, sheep, and camels. The more camels a man has, the greater his prestige. A large quantity of food is also a status symbol among the clans. For this reason, the Somali hold periodic banquets for their relatives and friends. At these banquets, the frequency in which they occur, the number of people invited, and the quality and quantity of food determines a family's prestige.

The nomadic Somalis live in easily portable huts that are made of wooden branches and grass mats. The more settled farmers live in permanent round huts that are six to nine feet high. The diet of the nomads consists of milk, meat, and wild fruits, while the farmers enjoy a more rich diet including maize, beans, rice, eggs, poultry, bananas, dates, mangoes, and tea.

To deal with the heat of this area, the Somali wear clothes draped over their bodies like togas. These clothes are typically very bright in color.

99% of the Somali are Shafiite Muslims. Their beliefs and traditions incorporate many of the practices of pagans. The Somali chant and take narcotics to experience an "ecstasy" in their worship. They observe standard Islamic prayers, however, women are never required to wear a veil. The villagers turn to the wadaad, or religious expert, for blessings and other help.

The Somali believe that there is a supreme male "sky god." They also believe in the spirit world. They perform rituals and make animal sacrifices to appease their gods. The activities of missionaries in this area have not yet yielded much harvest.

There are Bible portions, the Complete Bible, Jesus Film, Christian radio broadcasting, and gospel audio recordings available in Somali.

http://www.ksafe.com/profiles/p_code/437.html
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=som>

11520

Sudanese Arab (75,000)

The Sudanese Arabs live primarily in northern and central Sudan, their place of origin, and in Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Libya, Yemen, and Eritrea. This specific Sudanese tribe is a branch off of the first "pure" Arabs, known as "Bedouins." The Bedouins were tribal nomads who were famous for their love of both poetry and war. The Sudanese are considered a heterogeneous group, now having a mixture of diverse cultures.

The Sudanese Arabs speak a dialect of Arabic known as Sudani, or Khartoum Arabic. The ability to speak Arabic is one of the unifying aspects among the Arab people. Following the teaching of Islam also serves to unite them. Over the course of many

centuries, it was the Arab Muslims that traveled across the Middle East and Northern Africa, spreading Islam to all who would accept it.

The Sudanese Arabs have intermarried with other African tribes in Sudan, which has given them a darker skin tone and more Negroid features. Most of them live in small rural villages where they grow grains, vegetables, cotton, and raise livestock for both food and for trade. Some of them are also employed as carpenters, tailors, religious leaders or barbers. They live in mud-brick homes which are all build very close together, representing the close family and community ties in their culture.

Most of the Sudanese Arabs continue in the nomadic lifestyle, while some have moved into towns or cities to increase their education and economic prosperity. Those who are nomadic base their income on stock breeding and trade.

Regardless of whether they live in the cities or villages, a common cultural heritage unites them all. They still value and practice the Bedouin customs by following strict codes of honor, loyalty, hostility, and hospitality. Even though their ancient culture is of great importance, this has not hindered the Sudanese Arabs ability to assimilate into a changing society.

Within the Arab culture, children are considered to be a family's greatest asset. Children have the responsibility to provide security for their parents as they grow older. Boys in this culture are pampered more than girls. They are taught by their fathers how to obey and respect older males, while girls are taught the value of obedience to their husbands. As teenagers, they are not allowed to have any contact with the opposite sex until after marriage.

For religious practices, the men of the community gather in the local mosque for prayer five times a day, while women meet in homes and have their own religious services led by female religious leaders. Women are rarely permitted to go inside the mosques except for special occasions.

Sudanese Arabs are strong Muslims, as seen by their devoted faith displayed in every aspect of their daily lives. They strictly follow the Koran on matters such as the number of wives a husband can have (4), regulations regarding inheritance, taxation, wartime, submission to authority, and the roles of family members.

Few Sudanese have responded to the gospel. There are Christian resources available to them, as well as portions of the Bible and Christian broadcasts available in their own language. A few groups of mission agencies are also working among them.

Currently, there are Bible portions, the New Testament, evangelism resources, Jesus Film, Christian radio broadcasting, and gospel audio recordings in Arabic, Sudanese Spoken, and the language of the Sudanese Arabs.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

11533

Tigray/Tigrinya (1,500,000)

The Tigrinya, or Tigray, based on the language they speak, live in the southern highlands of Eritrea and in the Tigray province of Ethiopia. This is a large group of people, totaling around six million between the two counties. They are descendants of the early Semitic people who settled in Africa around 1000 B.C. Their traditions points to them being the descendants of the Sabaeen people who trace their roots back to Menelik I, who was the child born to King Solomon and the queen of Sheba.

The majority of the Tigray are farmers and are considered to be a very industrious and determined people. Their main crop is tef, and indigenous grain, which they use to make a crepe-like bread. During the famine that struck Ethiopia in 1985, it was the Tigray that received international attention because Ethiopia refused them aid from the American workers. Ethiopia was reportedly trying to break the strong will of the Tigray people.

The Tigrinya, as they are known in Eritrea, are the same both culturally and linguistically as the Tigray in Ethiopia. They mostly live in rural areas, although some Tigrinya live in the urban center of Asmara in Eritrea.

Only 20% of Tigrinya adults can read. They are oral, relying strictly on Tigrinya, which means “language of the Tigray people.” Tigrinya is descended from the Semitic language known as Ge’ez, which is now extinct. The Coptic Church uses the Bible in this language, however, priests rarely understand it.

The church plays a large role in the lives of the Tigrinya. Major celebrations are held at the church during the year. Most of the Tigrinya people consider themselves Coptic Orthodox, with perhaps only a little over 500 people are considered to be evangelical. There are also some Muslim among the Tigrinya.

The faith of the Coptic Church infiltrates every part of their culture. The church is defined as being Christian, but the majority of their practices are not Biblical. The Orthodox canon includes books unique to the Tigrinya tradition, and is considered to be true, as is the Bible. The church discourages the reading of scriptures by the common man. Recently, the Bible has been translated into their heart language, but due to illiteracy and a lack of Bibles in circulation, the Tigrinya still do not have much exposure to the Word of God.

The church services are conducted in Ge’ez, much like the Catholic Church used to conduct services in Latin. It is considered to be a “holy language,” but it is not understood by the general population. The priests who speak Ge’ez have merely memorized their parts for the church service.

It is not uncommon to see religious paraphernalia being sold in and around the church. These items are sold with candles and pictures of Mary and the saints. Orthodox beliefs are very rigid and law-oriented and include worship rituals, fasting, prescribed prayers,

and devotion to saints and angels. Children are baptized at birth, the boys after forty days and the girls after eighty, indicating that the males have greater value.

The Tigrinya have a rich heritage of both music and dance. Coffee is also a very important part of their culture. During the “coffee ceremony,” coffee beans are roasted, ground, and served in small cups. The smoke from the roasted beans is thought to be a blessing to all those dining.

Families units in this culture are very strong, because they all have to work together to survive. Women are responsible for preparing the meals, while children carry the water. Water sources are many times more that a kilometer away from a home.

Marriages among the Tigrinya are monogamous and arranged by contract. Dowry is also given to the couple by the bride’s family. Newlyweds spend time in each family’s home before establishing their own at a location of their choosing. Their home will be built mostly from rock, dirt, and timber poles. Inheritance in this culture is not strictly patrilineal; rather, it follows both family lines.

There are currently Bible portions, the complete Bible, Jesus Film, Christian radio broadcasting, and gospel audio recordings available in Tigrigna.

[\(http://www.orvillejenkins.com/profiles/\)](http://www.orvillejenkins.com/profiles/) (<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=tir>)

42709

Tigre (1,000,000)

The Tigre are nomadic shepherds of northwestern Eritrea and Sudan. The majority of them live in Sudan and occasionally relocate to Eritrea in search of better lands for grazing. They are descendents of the Egyptians and resemble them physically with their tall frames and brown skin. They also can be distinguished from other tribes by the hereditary slaves they possess.

During the 1800s, most of the Tigre converted to Islam due to the influence of Muslim Arab missionaries.

The Tigre can be grouped into three categories, based on occupation and way of life. There are the nomadic Tigre, who raise cattle, goats, sheep, and camels to sell at the markets. They usually live in round huts covered with mats of woven goat or camel hair. These Tigre do not live in villages, rather they live on the countryside with their herds.

The Semi-nomadic Tigre spend half their time in villages, usually composed of two to three huts, and the rest of their time tending to livestock in the plains. They also live in rounded huts and tend to livestock, typically cattle and goats.

The settled Tigre are those who live in villages and work as farmers, raising corn, sorghum, wheat, and barley. Their homes are round with cone-shaped roofs and walls made of palm mats. Farmers also raise livestock too and use their oxen as pack animals.

The typical Tigre diet consists of dairy products, grain, fruits, and some meat. Frequent indulgences of tobacco, coffee, and beer are not uncommon.

The men in this society care for the livestock, while the women carry water, build huts, and care for the children. The Tigre women also wear jewelry, specifically silver bracelets and pearls. They also make their own clothing. The Tigre average seven children per family, therefore, they are often dependent on government aid for survival.

Most of the Tigre practice folk Islam, although they would claim to be Sunni Muslims. There is significant blending of both Islam and their traditional beliefs. Some of their traditional beliefs include animal sacrifice to cover their sins and rain making rituals. They also believe in evil spirits who can cause accidents, illnesses, and death. The Tigre also depend heavily on the shaman, or priests, to ward off these spirits. It is not uncommon for a shaman to enter a trance and exorcise demons and perform other services.

Concerning marriage ceremonies, many Tigre follow the wedding customs of Islam, while others continue to follow traditional customs. Tigre society traces descent through the males, making it patrilineal.

There are Bible portions, the complete Bible, Jesus Film, and gospel audio recordings available in Tigre.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

42710

Yemeni Arab (18,000)

Yemeni Arabs, also known as Taizzi-Adeni, dwell along the coastal waters of the Red Sea in the center of Eritrea. They live in villages, yet, they are very tribal in nature. They have a total of over 1,700 tribes that are ruled by sheiks, or Arab chiefs who are considered to be experts in Islam. Their villages are set up in such a way that they can be easily defended. They also control all the goods and people who pass through.

The Yemeni Arab community breaks down into four classes of people. The first of these is the Sayyid, or the wealthy, who trace their descent back to the grandson of Muhammad. There is also the Qatani, or tribesmen, and the Shafi'ite who are townsmen employed as merchants, artisans, and craftsmen. Finally, there are the Akhdam, who are the slaves in society.

The homes themselves are usually elaborately decorated "town houses," equipped with artistic brickwork around the windows, carpet in the house, and mattresses and cushions

lining the walls to lean up against while sitting. It is customary to leave your shoes at the door before entering the house.

Yemeni Arabs are very social people. Time with friends and relatives over daily coffee is very typical. Besides coffee, their diet consists of wheat bread and porridge made with boiled meat.

Among Arabs, there are many different classes which are usually determined by the type of clothing worn. Yemeni Arab tribesmen can be easily distinguished from others. The women wear veils at all times while the men wear daggers.

The majority of Yemeni Arab marriages are monogamous even though Muslim teaching permits them to have up to four wives. In more recent times, there has been an increase in “love” marriages as opposed to the traditional arranged ones.

The vast majority of Yemeni Arabs follow the teachings of Islam. In fact, about half of them consider themselves to be Zaydis Muslims, while 40% are Shafi’ites, and 5% are Ismaili.

Besides the Muslim teachings, Islamic laws also greatly influence the lives of the Yemeni Arabs. Their Islamic communities are patrilineal, meaning that inheritances are passed down through the males. Females are also valued for their ability to bear children. In Muslim society, children are considered to be the families’ greatest asset. Preservation of their people is also very important, as seen with laws only allowing marriages to take place inside their own group.

There are currently one gospel audio recordings available in the Arabic, Taizzi-Adeni Spoken language.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

00000 **Amhara (25,000)**

The majority of Amhara live in the Ethiopian highlands and on into Eritrea. They are semi-nomadic people, whose ancestry is most likely linked to tribes from what is now modern day Yemen.

Life for the Amhara is not easy. The men spend the majority of the day farming, while the women work at the home and children tend to the flocks. Nothing in this society is wasted. Even dried dung from the farm animals is used as the primary cooking fuel.

The staple food for the Amhara is the injera bo wot, which is made from grain, called teff, and a pepper sauce made from beans or meat. The entire process for making these foods is very difficult and time-consuming.

The girls of this society normally marry around age fourteen. The groom is typically three to five years older than the girl. Marriages are negotiated by the families, followed by a civil ceremony to seal the contract. The women are paid housekeeper's wages and are not eligible for any inheritance. The children of the marriage, however, are qualified for the inheritance.

Most of the Amahara are Christian and follow the strict teachings of the Orthodox Church. They believe that to be Amhara is to be Christian. They base most of their beliefs in practices that are not grounded in scripture. They practice baptism as an entrance into the church and as a means of salvation. Boys are baptized on the fortieth day after birth, while girls are baptized eighty days after birth.

The church also places extreme significance upon fasting. It is a great source of pride for the Orthodox Church because it distinguishes them from other churches and religions. The faithful in the church fast 250 days per year, while a "good" Christian is expected to fast a minimum of 180 days per year.

There are currently Bible portions, the complete Bible, evangelism resources, Jesus Film, God's Story Video, Christian radio broadcasting, scripture audio recordings, gospel audio recordings, and books/printed matter all in the Amharic language.

<http://strategyleader.org/profiles/amhara.html>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=amh>

00000

English (unknown population)

There are still communities of English people that live within Eritrea as a result of Eritrea's colonization by Italy, followed by Great Britain's defeat of Italy in World War II in 1941.

There are many ministry tools available in English.

00000

Hausa (unknown population)

The Hausa are a people originally from northern Nigeria. In Nigerian society, the Hausa typically hold very high social positions and are known for wide-range trading. Typical Hausa life is consumed with family life and the struggle to make ends meet. Their communities are very hierarchical and family approval is held in very high regards.

The Hausa have many festivals and dances. At any given festival, it is common for the participants to send kola nuts to other members of the community as an invitation to attend the event. At the festival, there will be music and many people will perform magic tricks to entertain the onlookers. This is a form of entertainment, but it is also very important to the Hausa because it helps them to build stronger relationships with those in other communities.

There are currently Bible portions, the complete Bible, evangelism resources, Jesus Film, God's Story Video, Christian radio broadcasting, scripture audio recordings, and gospel audio recordings available in Hausa.

<http://www.sim.org/PG.asp?pgid=2&fun=1>
(<http://www.joshuaproject.net/languages.php?rol3=hau>)

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Italian (2,100)

There are still communities of Italians that live within Eritrea as a result of Eritrea's colonization by Italy in 1890.

There are many ministry tools available for Italians.

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Yerwa Kanuri (unknown population)

The Kanuri people group consists of many sub-tribes, including the Yerwa. They are the dominate tribe in northeastern Nigeria and have other smaller communities in Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Sudan, and Eritrea.

The Kanuri were the rulers during the powerful Borno Empire in western Africa. They lost their power when the British invaded in the early 1900s. The Kanuri still have a sense of pride and have great influence on many neighboring tribes. In fact, their language, religion, and other parts of their culture has been adopted by their neighbors.

The Kanuri are very tall in stature and have very dark skin. They have a dignified look and still continue to be in positions of power and leadership. They often speak other languages other than Kanuri, such as Hausa, Arabic, or other area languages.

Most Kanuri are farmers in the wetter seasons. They grow mainly millet, as well as sorghum, corn, and peanuts. They also raise sheep, goats, and some horses, which are the symbol of prestige in their culture. If the Kanuri are not farmers, they are often employed as craftsmen and merchants. Those of a high social status, who live in the cities, are employed in governmental jobs, public service, etc. Those who work as blacksmiths and well-diggers have a very low status.

Kanuri villages are walled-in compounds consisting of mud or grass houses with cone-shaped roofs. These towns also serve as both the local markets and administrative centers. Inside the wall are also schools and mosques.

The household, as opposed to the family itself, brings prestige to the family head. The greater number in a household, the greater the prestige. Oftentimes, young men are "loaned" to other households to help with field labor and provide additional support. In

return, the head of the household will clothe, feed, and pay the bride price for the young man. After marriage, the man will begin his own household.

Marriages typically take place while men are in their early twenties. Polygamy is very common with a man having up to four wives. A Kanuri man desires that his first wife be a virgin, however, the bride price will be very high. It is more common for men to marry divorced women since the divorce rate is incredibly high, with eight out of ten marriages ending in divorce.

Since the eleventh century, the Kanuri have been following the practices of Islam. Men, particularly fathers, are seen as the supreme authority. Women are seen as being inferior and are often treated as such.

During Islamic ceremonies, the Kanuri dress consists of robe-like garments that protect them against the consistent heat. They also wear turbans or brightly colored caps.

Although the Kanuri are strict followers of Islam, they still practice some ancient superstitions, such as the wearing of charms. They believe these different charms provide protection against the spirits of the dead as well as ensure a good pregnancy for a mother.

There are currently Bible portions, the New Testament, Jesus Film, God's Story Video, Christian radio broadcasting, scripture audio recordings, and gospel audio recordings available in the Kanuri, Central language.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php>

PopEntID for the People Groups section was taken from:

<http://www.peoplegroups.org/MapSearch.aspx?country=Eritrea>

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Evangelical Christians must should seek means for engaging in loving acts of mercy in the Name of Jesus.

The people of Eritrea are a hurting people. They have long experienced war, hunger, thirst, and pain. They are a people desperate to know of the love of Christ. Governmental barriers to such work are very prevalent in Eritrea. This means that missionaries will need a platform from which to work, as well as fresh, inventive ideas as they examine the history and culture of the people and search for bridges to share the gospel. One of the most effective ways to sharing the gospel in this culture will be a living gospel of action in line with words of truth. A physical gospel will be integral to penetrating the hearts of the people.

Living alongside these people in the sometimes harsh conditions of this region and helping them meet their own needs is one avenue with which to share the gospel. These people physically hunger and thirst. The love of Christ must first be shown by meeting these needs before words of truth can truly become alive to them. By beginning a water project that provides both clean, safe drinking water and reliable water sources would be very beneficial for these people.

2. Evangelical Christians should seek ways to support and work along side of the Evangelical Churches that are growing in Eritrea.

One vast need in this area is leadership training. Evangelicals should offer help to the Christians in this land. Some of these church groups are growing at rates between 7.7 % and 14.9%

3. Evangelical Christians should support efforts to reach many of the less-evangelized groups such as the *Tigre*, the *Jabarti*, the *Afrar*, the *Saho*, the *Beja*, the *Nara*, and the *Arab Rashiada*.
4. Evangelical Christians should seek ways to communicate true Christianity in the face of the expressions of the Faith in the Orthodox churches.

The people of Eritrea need instruction in the differences between orthodoxy and genuine following of Christ. This need is accentuated by the way that the Christian Orthodox faith is practiced in Eritrea, which leaves little room for real Christianity at all. The Orthodox faith has worked very well in their society. They most probably find a great sense of security through the doing of tangible works as merit towards salvation, because in their world there has been little, if any, security. The “Christians” of this land need to hear of the grace of God and the assurance of salvation just as do the other people in the population. The vast difference between Evangelical Faith and Orthodox Church life must be established before conversions into the grace of God will take place. With half the population adhering to Orthodox Christianity, most will not understand genuine Christianity unless the difference is communicated through righteous Christian living and sharing from the Word of God.

5. Evangelical Christians should consider the methodologies associated with chronological storying.

Storying promises to be an effective tool in this oral culture. Many people in Eritrea follow nomadic lives and spend the majority of their days tending their flocks. It is very possible that the many stories in their culture have been so maintained because of the great deal of time the people spend together with their herds, perhaps doing nothing more than telling stories. To have a mission worker craft a storying set, alongside Christian national partners, would be a great ministry opportunity. The story of the Good Shepherd should receive a great hearing among these people who could feel and comprehend His joy over finding

a lost sheep. The biblical stories relate to their livelihood and their identity in society.

6. Evangelical Christians should provide medical aid to the people of Eritrea.

Health care constitutes a great need in Eritrea. A rising HIV rate, along with bacterial diarrhea, typhoid, hepatitis A, and malaria are all great health concerns of the people. With more than 80% of the people living in rural areas, the vast majority of the population does not have access to adequate health care. They also have a great need for health education concerning topics from general hygiene to the prevention of the spread of AIDS. Having been under previous European rule, most Eritreans would probably be accepting of and would respond positively to most aspects of health care.

7. Evangelical Christians should seek means to provide the Bible and Bible portions to the people of Eritrea. This provision may well include literacy training.

Most Christians in Eritrea have little or no access to the Bible and no way to read it even if it were given to them. English classes for the people who are not or have not been in school can be a great tool in preparing hearts to hear the gospel message as well as providing a legitimate platform for mission workers. In areas where the people are predominately Christian, teaching them to read from the Word of God will open their eyes to the truths that they have never been told, as well as reveal the lies that they are living. Providing many indigenous Christians who can read from their Bible, in their language to their own people, will do nothing but foster the reproducibility of the Message across grave cultural barriers.

To combat the problem of a lack of literacy, the great need for more or better Christian radio broadcasts for the people clamors for an answer. Missionary efforts could most likely be unable to have much to do with the radio broadcast, but they could help cast the vision to reach many for Christ through the air waves.

Closely linked to these needs for biblical content, a great need exists for translation projects among many of the people groups. Many of the groups have no Christian resources at all available in their language. Any way that a missionary could help assist in translation would facilitate this process.

8. Evangelical Christians should develop a viable approach to the Islamic peoples of Eritrea.

Many Muslims show a great antagonism to the gospel in Eritrea. Muslims who convert can lose their family, honor, job, or even lives. Christians must keep this in mind when evangelizing. Christian missionaries need to be prepared to confront the forces of evil as well as be willing to endure the hardships that will inevitably come to the Christians of this area. New converts will require training in how to face these difficulties in righteousness.

Among the Muslim faith, there is great importance placed upon the hierarchy of the family, namely the submission of those subservient to the head of the home. There is also a strong emphasis placed on segregated worship for men and women. Not only are these two points of culture important for knowledge of cultural norms, but it also can be an open door, say for a missionary couple, to display a Christian version of love and servitude. Missionaries also need to be aware of the importance of men ministering to men and women to women among the Muslims.

Christian efforts in Eritera must seek out methods that open the possibilities for these peoples to accept Christ. The methods suggested by Phil Parshall (New Patterns for Discipling Muslims) and (The Camel Method).

9. Evangelical Christians should seek means to contribute to the people of Eritera through development ministries.

The Eritrean people need to develop new and better business ventures. They also need help in agricultural and animal husbandry areas. Missions could supply seeds and fertilizer, introduce more adequate strains of animals, and provide better veterinary care. These ministries allow the people to more adequately provide for their need of food and income. These acts would be a manifestation of love to these people who more intimately know hate. Through mission efforts of this nature, doors will be open to share about God the Provider, and Jesus the Living Water, with Whom you will never spiritually hunger and thirst again.

10. Evangelical Christians should seek to meet the vast needs of orphans in Eritera.

The orphanages in Eritrea are in very bad condition. Many children have been displaced due to the war. A missionary could have a very effective ministry if they assist in staffing, beginning, or developing orphanages.

11. Evangelical Christians should seek to aid the peoples of Eritera in recovery from the devastations of war

Thousands of people who have been displaced by the war are still returning home. Community development programs to help these people begin their life again would be very beneficial to society as a whole.

Construction projects constitute a vast need in the country.

12. Evangelical Christians should share the message of hope and peace in Christ with the peoples of Eritera.

Most of these people live in fear. This can be seen from their worship, to the very way that they construct their homes. A Message of security in the midst of great turmoil and hardship is going to speak volumes to the people. For these people to see a life of peace in the midst of situations that would evoke fear in most do nothing but speak volumes to the people.

A quick side note, one of the main productions from Eritrea is salt. Christians are to be salt and light to lost world. That analogy will carry great strength among the Christian Eritreans. That is something to bear in mind.

Pictures

Pictures are located in Shortcut to Maps/MapsII/Valerie/ERITREA/People Pictures.

Links

News:

<http://allafrica.com/eritrea/> - top news stories

<http://dehai.org/> - news mailing list archive.

<http://news9.asmarino.com/> - independent news portal out of Asmara.

Government:

<http://www.shabait.com/staging/index.html> - Eritrea's Ministry of Information homepage.

http://eritrea.embassyhomepage.com/eritrean_visa_eritrea_embassy_london.htm - Eritrea's Embassy in London homepage.

Overviews:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1070813.stm - BBC News' country profile for Eritrea.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html> - CIA Factbook's overview for Eritrea.

Directory Information:

<http://search.looksmart.com/p/browse/us1/us317836/us317916/us559898/us559899/us10065672/us559920/>

<http://dmoz.org/Regional/Africa/Eritrea/>

<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/eritrea.html>

http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Country_Specific/Eritrea.html

<http://dir.yahoo.com/Regional/Countries/Eritrea/>

Tourism:

http://www.answers.com/main/ntquery;jsessionid=275tu2savgucd?method=4&dsid=2222&dekey=Wikitra vel&gwp=8&curtab=2222_1&sbid=lc01a&linktext=Wikitavel

Other:

<http://www.shaebia.org/artman/publish/index.html> - PFDJ's official party website.

<http://www.erisound.com/> - 24/7 Eritrean Music.

<http://www.answers.com/topic/eritrea> - miscellaneous information on Eritrea.

<http://98.1911encyclopedia.org/E/ER/ERITREA.htm> - overview of Eritrea.