

Email

Dear Friend,

When we recently prayed for Nomads in Africa, we had a day of prayer for the Afar people. However not all Afar are nomads. Some work as fishermen, others work mining salt, while others now live in towns. They primarily live in three countries in Northeast Africa: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

Workers among this unreached people group provided information to a Frontiers worker. Together with her own research, she put together a Prayer Guide for the Afar people, which we have drawn on for this week of prayer for the Afar. We would like to credit the information used to the Afar team and to thank all contributors.

May God mightily bless and encourage you as you pray and intercede.

For His Glory in the Nations,

Carolyn

Prayer Coordinator

## Monday 4th March

### Introduction to the Afar

The Afar is one of the smaller unreached people groups of East Africa. Around 2.5 million strong, they account for 5% of the Eritrean, 1.7% of the Ethiopian and 33% of the Djiboutian populations. They mainly live in ruggedly rural environments to which many outsiders do not have access. They occasionally visit regional cities for supplies or move there temporarily for employment or education.



You can watch a short 2-minute video about the Afar people [here](#)

Traditionally they have lived as nomads, totally dependent on their animals. This way of life is being threatened, as available grazing land decreases, exacerbated by poor rainfall for the last few years leading to a lack of food for their animals. Disease among their animals is rife and parasites cause significant losses. Unfortunately, the Afar have little or no access to veterinary services, although government efforts are increasing.

Afar also work as fishermen along the Red Sea. As the sun sets, they can be seen in their boats going out to work. They attach a fluorescent light to a car battery, shining it out over the water to attract fish. Others paddle surf boards out into the water and cast a hand line with a baited hook and then sit and wait. The fish may carry them far out until it tires and the fishermen can then take it back to sell in the local market.

Still others work in the salt lake, Lac Assal in Djibouti and in an area in Ethiopia, called the Danakil Depression, which consists of a vast plain of salt pans and active volcanoes. These are areas of rare natural beauty with blazing hot temperatures, often over 50 degrees Celsius. Men mine the purest salt both in flavour and shape. It is loaded onto camels and then taken to the nearest town. It can take two to three days to get there. It is then sold for distribution worldwide.

Not many Afar towns exist. Some Afar live in apartment buildings in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa, where they work in government jobs such as on the Afar broadcasts of the Ethiopian radio station. Bati, on the edge of Afar territory, sees an influx of Afar every hot season. Tadjourah in Djibouti is one of the largest predominantly-Afar urban areas.

- Pray the Afar nomads will come to know that they can totally depend on Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who is the way, the truth and the life.
- Let's ask God, the fisher of men, to bring in a mighty catch among the local fishermen, who in turn will become true fishermen for Christ.
- As the Afar mine the salt, pray they would have an awareness of the greatness of God in His creation.
- Pray that God, who sees and knows each Afar, will guide workers to find them in urban areas.

*"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6*

## **Tuesday 5th March**

### **Afar family and men**

At the highest level of leadership is the Caliph, appointed by the Muslim community or Ummah. A sultan leads each of the four sultanates (kingdoms) of Afar; Aussa and Biru in Ethiopia and Tadjourah and Rahaito in Djibouti. Sheiks in turn lead smaller units and various religious men maintain respect and order according to the ideals of the Qur'an.



The Afar is divided into two main classes: the asaimara ('reds') who are the dominant class politically, and the adoimara ('whites') who are working class.

Family life and structure is central to the Afar people. Children grow up learning the interweaving network of father's lineage (keddo or clan) and mother's family (abiino) addressing each relative accordingly. Families and clans provide security and guidance for their members and guard their honour by arranging marriages to cousins.

Afar tradition and knowledge is handed on from generation to generation. Lengthy songs and poems recount battles, migrations, genealogies and conquests, while missila (proverbs) tell key character

lessons. Important cultural values hide within ixigixigga (riddles). Play-songs and word games teach children about their world and pass down core elements of Afar identity.

- Pray for Afar leaders to be God-fearing and carry out their responsibilities with wisdom, justice and mercy.
- Let's pray for entire clans to discover the love of the Father and place their confidence in Him.
- Let's pray for more Scripture in Afar to be passed down the generations in songs, riddles and proverbs.

### Wednesday 6th March

#### Afar women

Afar girls are raised to obey their fathers, older brothers and husbands. In rural areas, they are still married off to older men. Women faithfully manage their household, balancing the cooking, cleaning and washing. They also nurture the children, manage the household money and care for old or sick relatives. If the men do not have a job, they also try and find employment.



They also fetch the water. If the local well has dried up, they may have to walk up to 2 miles to the riverbed and climb down a hand-dug hole to get muddy water. A lot of time can be spent obtaining water for their families and animals.

Afar respect their elders. A disapproving mother may stop the marriage her husband has arranged for their child. To this day the Afar women perpetuate the practice of female circumcision, using razor blades and thorns to preserve girls for marriage. This causes lifelong problems for women, especially in childbirth.

Many girls as young as 12 live in fear of being kidnapped and married into a life they are not ready for. Once married the wedding will be followed by morotoms, known as the '40th day' after childbirth, funerals and inaugurations.

- Ask the Lord to soften the hearts of women burdened by hardship and pain, that they may know the eternal love and comfort of the Father.
- Pray for Afar girls and women to know they are beautifully and wonderfully made and known to the One who created them.
- Pray for workers to find women of peace who are open to the Good News.

## Thursday 7th March

### Afar children

An Afar childhood is simple yet difficult. Children are delivered by traditional midwives, nursed and wrapped in their mothers' old dresses. Young children play near home, cared for by any female relatives that share the same compound. Tyres, footballs and handmade dolls are used for playing games.



Between the ages of 5 and 10, children, especially girls, begin to take on household responsibilities. They care for the younger children, carry water, cook meals, sweep the ground and collect firewood.

More go to school nowadays, especially boys. Special programmes fund incentives for girls to attend school and development organisations partner with local government to supply teachers and materials. However, migration patterns keep some children away from school for half the year. Lessons are taught in the official languages of the three countries they live in. In Ethiopia, schools largely operate in Amharic; in Eritrea, Arabic or Tigrinya and in Djibouti, French. The language of the Afar people remains Afar and so it may take years for children to understand their teachers. Teachers may take weeks to secure transportation to remote schools and endure long periods of irregular payment, so motivation among teachers is low and turnover is high.

At around aged 12, boys are taken outside the camps for a day-long circumcision ritual. When they cry out the names from the camel herd, the camels become theirs. Later they will lead their camels on long grazing treks and occasionally join a party to avenge a clansman's death. Like the men, they will often spend many long, hot afternoons chewing Khat, a little green addictive leaf. This is a constant drain on their finances and health.

- Ask God to bring Afar children into contact with Bible stories which introduce them to Jesus at a young age.
- Pray God will position believing school teachers in Afar territories and help them to persevere in hardship.
- Pray that boys and all Afar would lose their hunger for Khat and rather hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

## Friday 8th March

### Afar Beliefs and the Good News

For centuries, Afar have followed Islam, and before that, local practices. They school their sons and daughters in Qur'anic Arabic, veil their daughters and marry up to four wives. They observe Ramadan and if possible go to Mecca for pilgrimage. They pray five times a day at mosques or in makeshift, set-apart spaces when, as nomads, they are on the move.

However, beneath the strict Muslim exterior, an absolute fear of jinn or evil spirits persists. The Afar rely on a host of traditions to expel these jinn from people or spaces. Spiritual and health issues

closely intertwine as natural herbalists, healers and midwives preserve traditional beliefs about healthy living. When sickness or hardship persist, Afar call upon mediums or sorceresses to chant or dispel the spirits.

Many have never heard about Jesus who died for them. But for the first time in Afar history, they are hearing the truth. God has led believers to give Afar the chance to hear of His love for them. A local leader in the desert said, once he had encountered the Old Testament, the stories he'd learned of Abraham, Joseph and Moses made sense for the first time in his life. A year later he decided to follow Jesus!

One Afar man explained how he had had dreams and visions of Jesus. He said: "I was sitting in my courtyard under my favourite acacia tree and saw a barefoot man coming towards me. I wondered how he could walk on that burning midday sand. When he came closer, I asked him who he was. He replied, "Jesus."

Later I had another dream. I saw my family sitting round a man. I approached them and identified the man as Jesus. He looked at me and said, "tell them about me."

My friend also had a dream about Jesus. He saw many people sitting under a tree, but one man was sitting in the tree above them. He walked up to the tree and climbed it too. When he was level with the man, he saw that it was Jesus."

- Let's ask God to cast out all fear and draw the Afar to trust in Him.
- Pray for many more Afar to have dreams and visions and realise who Jesus is and what He has done for them.
- Pray for God to prepare Afar hearts to receive the Good News and be transformed for His glory.

## **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Advancing the Kingdom among the Afar**

Numerous people have worked on a translation of the Afar Bible since the 1970's. The whole Afar Bible is now available in 4 volumes; the Pentateuch, Prophets and Kings, Poetic writings and the New Testament. Work is in progress to produce a one-volume edition with cross-references, making it easier to read. Oral recordings help to make the Word more accessible to those who can't read.

Today gospel workers partner with and train Afar believers. During a training session, an Afar believer said, "Can we be the ones who take this message to the Somali?" The Afar have historically been adamant enemies of the Somali, yet praise God, their heart is softening towards them.

Some Muslim background believers from neighbouring countries work with rural Afar and daily face harsh conditions with real spiritual opposition and little encouragement or evidence of fruit. But God is placing them strategically to shine His light among the Afar.

- Pray for wisdom for those continuing to work on the written and oral versions of the Afar Bible and for the necessary finances to print the whole Bible. Let's ask for it to be widely distributed and for many Afar to treasure the Word.

- Ask God to raise an Afar church with a heart for outreach to their communities and to the nations, beginning with their neighbouring enemies and extending to other peoples in the region and beyond.
- Pray for workers to be strong and to persevere and ask God to fill their hearts with His Word which will naturally overflow into conversations. Pray they will always give an account of their hope to those they meet.

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20*