

The Abrahamic Religions:

An Introduction to World Religions

Abrahamic Religious Lives in
Ethiopia

Session Week 12

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Aim and Learning Outcomes – Week 12 Session

Aims

- This session aims to explore *Abrahamic Religious Lives in Ethiopia*

Learning Outcomes

- Students identify the main aspects
 - *Abrahamic Religious Lives in Ethiopia*

Abrahamic Religious Lives in Ethiopia

- Ethiopia has close historical ties to all three of the world's major Abrahamic religions.
- Ethiopia is indicated with an attractive civilization, unique history, rich tradition, ancient culture and religious life. The Psalmist David also says: “Ethiopia will quickly stretch out her hands to God” (Psalms 68:31 NKJV).
- Christianity and Islam met first in Ethiopia where Judaic influence had already spread from ancient times.
- Jews, Christians, and Muslims have conceptualized each other from that early incipience, bearing in mind that none of these religions are represented by only one set of attitudes. Each of them will be woven into the discussion of these triangular interreligious relations.

Judaism Tradition - Ethiopia

- Before Christianity, the Old Testament practice already existed in the country.
- Ethiopia has traditions linked to Moses, King Solomon, the Ark of the Covenant, and in particular the Queen of Sheba. Their Orthodox Church has a significant substratum of ancient Israelite religious practices and vocabulary [Ullendorf 1988].
- And until recently the country supported a substantial community known as the Beta Israel (pejoratively *Falasha*), whose religion and traditions linked them to the First Temple built by King Solomon.
- Judaism developed in Ethiopia around a strong sense that, even though Ethiopian Christians believed that Ethiopia itself was the new and the true Israel, their Israel was the old and original one, and that they lived in exile.
- Christians conceived the Jews of Ethiopia as *Falasha*, intruders, and believed that Jews in general were exiled.
- The Jewish state of Israel and modern Ethiopia developed their relations along a common sense of siege in facing Islamic and Arab neighbours also.
- Israelis today consider the immigration of Ethiopia's Jews as the last chapter in a Zionist narrative of transformation from an exiled people into a sovereign nation.
- About 20,000 live in the country.

Christianity - Ethiopia

- The Biblical story has clearly shown that Christianity has arrived in Ethiopia early in the first century (34 A.D.) (Acts 8:26-36).
- Christianity spread through the Axum dynasty of Ethiopia in the 4th century CE.
- The Christianity (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church – EOTC) has many connections with the Old Testament tradition and ancient Judaism. The form of Christianity has clearly an Hebraic character.
 - The country's ancient language Ge'ez also has a Semitic character.
 - Another Old Testament connection is the observance of Sabbath. The Sabbath is still observed in EOTC as well as Sunday. However, Holy Sunday is more observed because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - Circumcision on the eighth day is also one of the Hebraic connections. It does not mean that the EOTC is unaware of the Pauline teaching of baptism as a substitute for circumcision.
 - The EOTC is definitely aware of the New Covenant rule and the people are not practicing circumcision as the Jews, but it is ritual.
 - The veneration for the Tabernacle of the Law of Lord (the Ark of the Covenant) is one of significance sign of Hebraic connections.
- The Ethiopians are deeply religious people and especially the Orthodox Tewahedo Church (about 55%), 10 % protestants.

Islam - Ethiopia

- By the 7th century, however, Islam had surpassed Christianity and had separated Ethiopia from its Christian African neighbours.
- Islam in Ethiopia dates back to the founding of the religion; in 615, when a group of Muslims were counseled by Muhammad to escape persecution in Mecca and travel to Ethiopia which was ruled by a Christian king.
- Islam developed its early conceptualization of Christianity following the “first hegira”, when the early Islamic community of Mecca – during the very early years of the Prophet – sought refuge at the court of the Christian king of Ethiopia. It was then that Islamic egacies of both tolerance and intolerance toward Christians, as well as Muslims’ ideas of how to live in exile under non - Islamic governments, were first moulded.
- Moreover, Bilal ibn Ribah, the first Muezzin, the person chosen to call the faithful to prayer, and one of the foremost companions of Muhammad, was from Abyssinia. Also, the largest single ethnic group of non-Arab Companions of Muhammad was that of the Ethiopians.
- Population (Islam – Ethiopia) 33%

Reference

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- Varner, Gary R. (2012) Ethiopia: A Cultural History Of An Ancient Land (lulu)
- Bausi, Alessandro (2012) Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Ethiopian (The Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300-1500) (Ashgate Variorum)
- Trimingham, J. Spencer (2004) Islam in Ethiopia (Routledge)
- Baron (1983) Social and Religious History of the Jews: v. 18: Late Middle Ages and Era of European Expansion (1200-1650):the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Ethiopia, India, and China (Columbia University Press)

Next Session

- We continue to address '*the Significance of Religious Lives and Religious People: Reading Religious Autobiographies*'.