

# Afar of Ethiopia

Population: 1,577,000  
Language: Afar  
Religion: Sunni Islam;  
% Christian: 0.01%  
Evangelical: 0.01%  
Bible available:  
Portions (1975 - 1986,  
New Testament 1994, no  
complete Bible  
Ministry Resources:  
audio recordings, radio  
broadcasts, Jesus Film,  
Magdalena

The Afar claim to be descendants of Noah's son, Ham. Afar means first or best. In Arabic they are called Danak, but that is an offensive term to them. They are a proud people who emphasize a man's strength and bravery. Prestige comes from killing one's enemies. Feuds are common within and between tribes.

There are two subgroups: the Asaemara who are more prestigious and powerful nobles and the Adaemara who are the commoners living in the desert area, which is one of the most rugged regions in the world and one of the hottest places on earth, with temperatures as high as 125 degrees F & less than 7 inches of rainfall per year.

Most of the Afar are nomads who herd sheep, goats, cattle and camels. A man's wealth is measured by the size of his herds. Those who are not herdsmen work at prying loose slabs of solid salt in the Danakil Depression during the dry season. Some work for the government in the city. Most Afar are illiterate.

Afar marriages are usually monogamous. Girls may marry as young as ten. Marriages between first cousins are preferred.

Their diet consists mainly of meat and milk. Milk is also offered to guests and implies protection. The Afar live in camps surrounded by thorn barricades. Their oval-shaped huts, called ari, are made of palm mats.

They are suspicious of outsiders. They associate Christianity with Ethiopian and colonial governments of the past.

**Religious Beliefs:** The Afar were heavily influenced by Islam and it is still held in great esteem. However, many pre-Islamic beliefs and customs are also prevalent. They honor their Sky God. They believe certain trees and groves have sacred powers. Religious rites include anointing their bodies with ghee (a type of butter). Spirits of the dead are believed to be very powerful and each year they celebrate a "feast of the dead" called Rabena. They also give annual offerings to the sea to ensure safety for their villages. Many people wear protective leather amulets that contain herbs and verses from the Koran.

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### What are their needs?

- The Afar have a very turbulent history, with bloody tribal wars.
- Scarcity of water and grazing land is a common cause of conflict.
- There is a great need for pure water sources for the people and their herds.
- There have been famines and droughts in recent years; many suffer from malnutrition and the diseases it causes.
- Divorce is common.
- They have few hospitals; the Afar have the highest maternal fatality rate in the world. One-third of babies die before age five.



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### Prayer Points

- The Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into Ethiopia.
- God to anoint the gospel as it goes forth via radio to this tribe.
- Pray for the Ethiopian churches in the diaspora & in Ethiopia to mobilize their people & resources to reach the Afar for Christ.
- God to provide pure water sources for the Afar and their herds living in the Danaki Desert.
- The Lord to raise prayer teams who will begin breaking up the soil through worship and intercession.
- God to bring forth a triumphant Afar church for the glory of His name.

Information from Global Prayer Digest and The Joshua Project at [www.joshuaproject.net](http://www.joshuaproject.net)

"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?  
And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?  
And how are they to hear without someone preaching?  
And how are they to preach unless they are sent?  
As it is written 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"  
Romans 10: 14 - 15

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For information on adopting the Afar of Ethiopia

[www.hornofafrica.org](http://www.hornofafrica.org)

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