



Gurage

by Carolyn Ford, Ethiopia

Three distinct groups of Gurage (*goo rah gay*) people live in Ethiopia. One group, called the *Sebat Bet* (Seven House) Gurage, live in a beautiful, mountainous area and number over a million. Their language is Semitic, like Hebrew and Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia).

Current SIM Ministry

SIM has worked among the rural Gurage (*goo rah gay*) of Ethiopia since 1975 doing basic evangelism and church planting, Bible translation, and radio broadcasting.

Due to pressure from Communist agitators, SIM moved to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital in 1977, to continue translation work on the Gurage New Testament with translator Deggefu (see upper left photo). The Bible Society Consultant approved the completed translation by November 1979. Then it had to be typeset, one character at a time using the old metal type, by a man who did not speak Gurage. The translation took 2 1/2 years to complete; the typesetting took another 2 1/2 years. SIM did not obtain permission to publish the Gurage New Testament in Ethiopia, so they sent it to Korea for publication in 1982. In July 1983, 10,000 copies of the Gurage New Testament arrived at an Ethiopian port and were seized and held there. They said, "You didn't have permission to print it, and you don't have permission to bring it into the country."

Since 13,000 New Testaments had actually been printed, the remaining 3,000 were shipped toward the end of 1986. God graciously, miraculously, brought those into the country safely in 1986. In January, 1988, the other 10,000 were released.

SIM also produces a gospel radio program in the Gurage language which is very popular and has been used by God to bring many to faith in Christ (see photo upper right). In 2003 Tenkir and Tamene, who work for the Gurage and Amharic language services of SIM-Radio, put together a series of 75 creative 15-minute programs in the two languages (using dramas, interviews and a "news magazine" format) which have now been broadcast. They are eager to continue this outreach, as the response from listeners through letters has been encouraging. Perhaps one day the number of Gurage believers will be uncountable!

Scripture Availability

The Gurage believers were delighted to receive the New Testaments in their own language and began asking for a translation of the Old Testament as well. That has now been completed and hopefully will be published sometime in 2005. Between 1975 and 1990, the number of Gurage Christians grew from about 50 to more than 13,000.

Location and Language

Three distinct groups of Gurage people live in Ethiopia. Their languages are not always mutually intelligible. One group, called the *Sebat Bet* (Seven House) Gurage, number over a million. Their language is Semitic, like Hebrew and Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia), but due to the influence of surrounding Cushitic languages, it has 10 vowels instead of the usual 7. They live in a mountainous area about 150 miles southwest of Addis Ababa.

Culture

Religion: Well known for their hard work and skill as traders, many of the men own shops in Addis Ababa and other cities, returning to their home area only for a few days each October to celebrate *Meskel* (for Orthodox Christians--commemorating finding "the true cross") or *Arefa* (for Muslims), the most important Gurage holidays. While over 50% claim allegiance to Christianity and another 40% to Islam, many also participate in traditional religious practices such as offerings to a diety called "Waq" and hanging fetishes in their houses to ward off evil spirits.

Food: *Inset* (false banana) is the staple food, grown by almost every household. Barley, potatoes and kale grow in the highlands, and wheat and tef (a millet-like grain native to Ethiopia) in the lower altitudes.

Houses: Gurage houses are famous for their neatness and symmetry. They are circular structures held together without the use of nails with wooden spokes protruding from a center pole to support the thatched roof. Locally-made pottery hangs around the inside wall in neat rows. Near the center is a fireplace used for cooking and heating the house. Often a small section on one side of the house is equipped for livestock (cows, sheep or goats, and perhaps a horse), which are kept in the house during the night.

Hospitality: The people take pride in their hospitality and often serve coffee (boiled in a large clay pot and traditionally flavored with salt and butter) and roasted grain to 30 or more guests at a time. This provides socialization for neighbors and refreshment for passers-by.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.