

Ethiopia Report
 Psalm 86
 ABC 5/2/21

(S) It is good to be back with you this morning. I missed you the last 3 Sundays. Let me begin by saying, *Thank You!* Your prayers, support, & allowing & enabling me to do this are appreciated more than I can express. I'm convinced I get more out of my time there than the students do. I greatly appreciate Dwayne & Dan bringing you God's Word in my absence. & it's always a joy to know ABC functions well without me. (S)

For some reason, God keeps sending me back to Ethiopia. Last year I was planning on going to Nepal with Joel but when that fell through he asked me to return to Ethiopia. This year I was scheduled to go to Zambia. When that got shut down due to Covid it was back to Ethiopia I went.

(S) This was my 5th trip to Ethiopia in the past 6 years. & I have to say, my heart continues to grow fonder for Ethiopia & the Christians there. (S) Last year I never got to report back to you as Covid shut everything down, including our time teaching in Ethiopia. I wasn't sure this year was going to happen for me either. What do I mean? I needed a negative Covid taken within 120 hours of landing in Ethiopia. This meant I needed the test on Monday & the results by Wednesday before I flew out. The local drug store testing centers told me it would be 3-5 days to get the results, which wouldn't have worked. I went online & found a place guaranteeing results in 24 hours. I filled out the forms & made an appointment online for Monday morning at 8 am. When I arrived, there was no such place. It had been shut down but their web-page was still scheduling appointments. Needless to say, I began to panic. Muriel got on the phone & worked her magic & I was tested Monday afternoon & had the results back Tuesday morning. I was good to go. Ethiopia is spiking. For reference, OR & WA, with a population of less than 12 million has had a little less than 600k Covid cases. Ethiopia, 120 million, has had 256k Covid cases. (S)

1. History If you're anything like me, your knowledge of Ethiopia is lacking. **A. Biblical** What about your biblical knowledge of Ethiopia? Ethiopia is 1st mentioned in Gen 2:13: & **the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia** (KJV) or as the NASB has it, **it flows around the whole land of Cush.** (S) This seems to refer to the upper Nile region, south of

Egypt, the area of the horn of Africa, today's Sudan & Ethiopia. I found out this year, Ethiopians think the garden of Eden was in northern Ethiopia, amongst the rivers there. While the Bible doesn't state it, according to Ethiopian tradition, **(S)** Queen Sheba came back to Ethiopia pregnant with Solomon's baby & that line of descendants were the rulers of the country for hundreds of years. From Acts 8 we know that the gospel came to Ethiopia very early. The disciples had taken Jesus' words to heart (Acts 1:8) & had been His witnesses in **Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria**, & it appears that Ethiopia was the 1st of the **even to the remotest part of the earth** as Philip explained the gospel from Isaiah to the **court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her treasure** (Acts 8:27). He put his faith in Jesus, was baptized, & returned to Ethiopia rejoicing &, I'm sure, sharing the gospel with others. Needless to say, the Ethiopians are very proud of their biblical history.

B. Secular The Greek name *Ethiopia* is from 2 Greek words meaning *burn* & *face*. Ethiopia has a population of around 120 million & is the most populous landlocked country in the world & has the 2nd largest population in Africa, behind Nigeria. **(S)** 80% of the population lives in rural areas & only 65% eat the minimum standard of calories per day. 42% of kids under 5 are underweight. It's a very poor country & yet both the African Union & the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa have their headquarters in Addis. Within Ethiopia is a large highland area of mountains & plateaus divided by the Great Rift Valley. Elevation varies between 14,928 ft & 410 ft below sea level. **(S)** Because of the great diversity of terrain, there's also a wide range of climate & animals, including 856 different types of birds. **(S)** This year I was able to see a few of them. **(S)** It has deserts along the eastern border & tropical forests in the south as well as mountain ranges in the northern & southwestern parts. **(S)** Most of its cities are at elevations of over 6,000 feet. **(S)** Ethiopia also has the town with the highest average annual temperature in the world, 93.2 degrees (Dallol). It's the hottest place on Earth in terms of year-round average temperatures. **(S)** Ethiopia is about the size of Texas & is one of the few African nations not to be colonized by a European colonial power, although Italy occupied them from 1936-1941. **(S)** Emperor Haile Selassie became a world-wide figure after delivering an address to the League of Nations & becoming *Time Magazine's* Man

of the Year for 1935. For most of its history Ethiopia was ruled by a monarchy but in 1974 the monarchy was overthrown by a communist military government backed by the Soviet Union. The communists were in power until they were ousted in 1991.

Ethiopia has suffered greatly due to droughts & famines & is still one of the poorest countries in the world. (S) Average annual income is \$740. Over 15% of the population struggle to survive on less than \$1/day. (S) A few years ago in Addis, the capital city, more than 50% lived in slums. (S) The government has been building huge apartment/condo complexes to help alleviate this problem. Agriculture makes up the vast majority of the labor force but it's mostly by small-scale farmers who struggle to make a living. (S) Although once known as the Bread Basket of Africa its largest export today is coffee. (S) Recently floriculture has taken off with exports of flowers & plants around the world. (S) It's a young country with a median age of 19.5. Compare that to the US which is 38.1.

Ethiopia has over 80 different ethnic groups & languages. Most everyone speaks Amharic with many also speaking other languages. There has recently been some unrest in northern Ethiopia in the Tigray region bordering (eh.ruh.tree.uh) Eritrea & has often been in the news. They have an election coming up later this month which will determine who leads the country in the future.

C. Interesting Facts They have 13 months in their year, but one of them only has 5-6 days. The rest have 30. It is currently the year 2013. Theories differ why their calendar is different. Some say it's based on the announcement of Jesus' birth (Lk 1:26-38). Others say it's based on when the Ethiopian Eunuch arrived with the gospel. (S) Also, their time is based on sunrise & sunset. Their day begins at 6 a.m. as opposed to our midnight. So while my watch may say it was 9 a.m. their clocks would say 3 o'clock. (S) This leads to some confusion at times.

Over 80% of the water in the Nile River comes from the mountains & rivers of Ethiopia. A new dam is nearing completion which Egypt & Sudan are trying to stop.

Ethiopia was known as Abyssinia for many years.

(S) Traditional Ethiopian food uses no pork or shellfish of any kind as they are forbidden in the Orthodox, Jewish, & Islamic faiths. No bacon for breakfast.

2. Why Ethiopia So why do I go to Ethiopia & what did I do there? Out of 7.3 billion people on the planet, 6.3 billion live in Africa, Asia, Latin America, & Oceania. (S) 75% of current Christians are non-western, living in one of these areas. But in these areas 80% of pastors have no formal biblical training. To put that into perspective, in the US there is 1 trained pastor for every 250 people. Around the world there is 1 trained pastor for every 450,000 people. (S) Teaching & training pastors & church leaders worldwide is greatly needed. As I mentioned, the gospel came to Ethiopia very early (Acts 8:26-37). & the Christians there are very proud of their Christian heritage. But they are also quick to admit that Ethiopia is full of religion. (S) The Ethiopian Orthodox church is everywhere, but, for the most part, is spiritually dead & based on tradition & legalism & not on the Bible. (S) Services are conducted in an ancient language that the vast majority don't speak nor understand. Ethiopia still needs Philips to bring them the gospel. Currently a 3rd of the population is Muslim with most of the rest being "Christian," which means they are part of the Ethiopian Orthodox church (44%) or some other protestant denomination (19%).

As I've told you before, Pastor Girma (S) had a burden for his people & God has used him to spread the gospel in Ethiopia. Girma was born & raised in Ethiopia & lived under communist rule. He went to college in Russia (& says the Russian language is much easier to learn than English) but eventually found asylum in Germany before migrating to the US. It was during this time that he heard the gospel & came to know Jesus. He went to seminary & began pastoring an Ethiopian church in the Seattle area but had a heart for his people of Ethiopia. He began traveling to Ethiopia to train pastors as he could. Eventually, he realized he couldn't do it all on his own. He began to put an organization together to train pastors & church leaders, (S) thus *Vision Leadership Institute* was born. In 2011 he began working with Joel & *Global Training Network* to do this. He has a 2-year program where pastors & church leaders come together for a week of training, 5 hours a day. This is what we were doing. (S) They then meet weekly for 4 hours with a master pastor to do further study. After completing the 2-year program they graduate & are encouraged to go & teach others & serve in their local churches. During the time they come together they study such things as Hermeneutics (how to study the Bible), Homiletics (how to communicate Scriptural truth),

Foundations 1 & 2 (theology), Character & Integrity, Leadership, Bible Survey, Missions & Evangelism, Church History, & Biblical Counseling. This was done in 6 cities this year: Debre Zeit, Nazaret, & Bekoji the 1st week; Ziway & Shashamene the 2nd, & Kombolcha this past week. In 11 years some 2,000 students have gone through this training & graduated. They have homework each week, write papers, & are given grades. They then return to their home churches & serve & teach others.

3. What I Did With my paperwork all in order, I flew out of Medford Wednesday afternoon & arrived in Addis Friday morning. After meeting up with some other team members, we headed south to Debre Zeit where we checked into the guest house & got some rest. **(S)**

Saturday morning was the graduation for students from Nazaret & Debre Zeit. 63 students had completed the 2-year course & graduated with great joy. **(S)** Unfortunately, because of Covid, the graduates' friends & families weren't able to attend but it was a great time of worship & celebration. **(VIDEO)** Graduation is a time of celebration & worship & a big deal for each of the graduates. As always, the students gave us gifts of appreciation. **(picture)**

After the graduation we returned to the guest house & found out that one member of the team had his flight cancelled out of Seattle without being informed of it. Due to rescheduling, he wouldn't be available to teach until Tuesday. He was to teach in Bekoji, but because of the distance & logistics of getting him there, Joel took me to Bekoji instead & Dan went to Nazaret in my place when he arrived. Joel said this was the trip with the most changes to schedules & teaching of any of his trips. Flexibility was necessary by all involved.

Sunday we split into 2 groups & attended 2 local churches. **(VIDEO) (S)** I was able to attend a new church plant & Phil, a retired pastor out of the tri-cities of WA, now with GTN, preached. After lunch, Joel, Stu, & I headed out to Asella **(S)** where we would stay while teaching in Bekoji. It was only 82 miles but took 3 hours. **(S)** As I told you in my email update, last year they went without electricity & hot water in Bekoji. **(S)** To hopefully avoid that, this year we stayed in Asella, about an hour north of Bekoji. Sadly, they were replacing the water supply lines to Asella & the whole city (100k population) was without running water the whole time we were there. Each day a 5-gallon bucket

of water was placed in our room for our personal needs. It was sponge baths all week long & flushing the toilet once a day. The upside is Asella is at 8k ft in elevation & much cooler than it was in Nazaret where I was scheduled to be.

Monday through Friday Joel, Stu, & I were teaching in Bekoji (S) at 9k ft. Temps were in the high 50s & low 60s all week. Much better than in Nazaret where it was in the 90s. Each day began with breakfast at 6:30 except the 1st day when the power was out & no food or coffee was available. Cold instant coffee in a water bottle just doesn't cut it. (S) We would leave around 7:30 to be in Bekoji at 8:30 to teach. (S) Teaching would go until 1:30 & we'd get back in the van & return to Asella having lunch about 2:45 & then dinner at 6:30. (S) Afternoons & evenings were spent reviewing & preparing for the teaching the next day. (S) We had 56 1st year students. We met in a huge church that was still under construction. (S) Each day we had 3 teaching sessions of an hour & a half each. (S) Using a translator, it was about 45 minutes of material each session. (S) Leadership started off with looking at shepherd leadership as seen throughout the Bible, especially focusing on Ps 23 & Jesus as our Shepherd. (S) The 2nd session focused on Paul & his leadership even while a prisoner in chains from Acts 27. (S) We finished by looking at Miriam as a leader of the Exodus & talked about how every Christian is a leader of others as we all have those who look to us. (S)

I still find it strange that Joel has me teach hermeneutics (how to study the Bible) since I never had a class in it. He assured me I could teach it since I've been doing it for so many years. Anyway, following Howard Hendricks' format, which is what they are taught throughout the year, we focused on observation the 1st day asking, *What does the text say?* Interpretation on the 2nd day asking the question, *What does the text mean?* Followed by application on the 3rd day, asking, *What response is God asking of me?* Js 1:2-4 (S)

In foundations we talked about why we study theology (to know God better so we can worship Him more) & then looked at God, Jesus, & the Holy Spirit, ending each session with a time of worship & prayer. (S)

It was in Bekoji that one of the students told us she'd been a Christian for 17 years & for 17 years she's been praying that she could get some biblical training. She was so grateful to have been able to attend & was soaking up the teaching eagerly & with great emotion. While not getting to know the students real well, although some more than others, we spent a lot of time with our translators:

(S) Jemal, **(S)** Girma, **(S)** Tasso, & another local pastor in Bekoji & I promptly forgot his name. **(S)**

One afternoon we were able to tour & speak with those who ran the Naaman Gospel Service, which is a training center in Asella that brings in new Christians from Muslim areas for a week of training on how to witness to Muslims. **(S)** After the training, they are sent back into their communities & families to be witnesses to them. They train 500 people a year in this way & are seeing God do a tremendous work among the Muslims in these areas.

Friday we finished up the teaching in Bekoji. Although Ziway is only 30 miles as the crow flies from Asella, there is no direct route there. **(S)** We drove back to Nazaret & picked up the team there & then went on to Debre Zeyit & were all together on Friday night. Fortunately, there was running, hot water & I enjoyed a very long shower.

I've been told that most African food is usually very basic & bland in flavor. That's not true of Ethiopian food. **(S)** Though it's often basic (rice, bread, cabbage, other veggies, & occasionally chicken, lamb, fish, or beef) it was all very flavorful & even spicy at times. Lack of food – Ramadan, Orthodox Easter (Lent) **(S)**

Saturday we were up early to all head south to Ziway for a graduation celebration with 19 graduates. **(S)**

Sunday morning, Joel & a team left for Shashamene. **(S)** Our team in Ziway had a relaxing day & were able to have an outing on the lake. **(S)** Hippos, birds, Ethiopian Orthodox church, & the island where the ark of the covenant is located. **(S)** It was good getting to see some of God's beauty in other places. We certainly knew we weren't in Kansas anymore! **(S)**

The training in Ziway started with 4 1st year students & grew to 11 by the end of the week. **(S)** Here I taught hermeneutics & foundations.

Thursday I finished teaching in Ziway as I had to leave Friday to Addis to get a Covid test before flying out on Saturday. (S) Arriving at the Covid testing center we found out they were understaffed & not giving any tests the remainder of the day. Fortunately, there was another testing center not far away & we were able to get tested. The next day we returned to get the results. They took our passports & receipts & returned in a few minutes coming to me & saying, *We've got a problem. Uh-oh! Our computers are down & it'll be 15-20 minutes until your results are available.* (S) We waited & got our negative results & headed on to the airport. (S)

As I reflect on the trip, I feel privileged to have had a small part in God's kingdom work in Ethiopia. Thank you for your prayers on my behalf. The highlight, as always, for me was to see the hunger & eagerness to study God's Word. (S) Again, your prayers on our behalf were vital to our ministry there. The students were thrilled when I let them know you were praying for them & for me. & they prayed for you while I was there. It shouldn't amaze us, but around the world, we have Christians brothers & sisters who we immediately relate to because we are all in Christ.

While in Ziway, I read **Ps 86**, a great prayer of David. There's a sermon, or series of sermons, here. We read it earlier & I just want to quickly focus on just 3 vss, **vss 8-10**.

From vs 8 the greatness of God makes Him greater than all the gods. God is greater than all the so-called gods that aren't really gods. Why? Look at the end of vs 10. Because He alone is truly God. God is great above all gods. He can & will do things beyond what we're able to ask or think. Why is God so great? Look at **vs 9**.

He is greater than all the nations & will exert His greatness to bring the nations to Himself. In other words, the Great Commission cannot fail. This isn't a maybe or a possibility. It's a certainty. **All nations whom You have made will come & worship before You.** That's true, isn't it? Jesus said, **This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, & then the end will come (Mt 24:14).** It will happen. The **psalmist** says, **All the ends of the earth will remember & turn to the LORD, & all the families of the nations will worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD'S & He rules over the nations (22:27-28).** In other words, God is great. & His greatness is so abundant that He cannot lose. He cannot be denied what is His. Jesus said, **I will**

build My church; & the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Mt 16:18). God is building His church around the world with absolute certainty. **All nations whom You have made will come & worship before You, Lord, & they will glorify Your name (9).** There is no nation, no people that will be unreached & unresponsive. The great scene of heaven shows the elders worshiping with this song of triumph to Christ: **Worthy are You to take the scroll & to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, & You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people, & nation (Rev 5:9).** It's going to happen. Jesus will not be denied. We are all privileged to be a small part of something that cannot fail. God is great & does wondrous things. He's more powerful than all the gods & He's more powerful than all the nations. The gods will be defeated & the nations will come & bow down & give Him glory. We can not only trust in that, we can rejoice in it. Whether it's in Ethiopia or in your neighborhood or workplace, we all have a job to do & we know that God will accomplish His purposes.

You may be thinking, is anything really that certain in 2021? After all, 2020 was unprecedented in our lifetimes. Is there really anything we can depend on in the year ahead? People say the only certain things in life are death & taxes. But there's one more. There's one certainty we can count on in the days & years ahead. It's been around for over 2,000 years & it hasn't faded yet. It's the church that Jesus is building. The church has survived plagues & pandemics, genocides & gendercides, persecution & famines, politics & polarization, economic booms & busts, & everything else that's been thrown its way. Generation after generation, the church remains. The church will always stand because Jesus is the One who builds it. Our God is everlasting. Eternal. Beyond time. Before Jesus ascended to heaven He called His disciples to go & make disciples. He designed the church, that we might know Him, serve Him, & shine brightly so others might meet Him. So if you want something to count this year & forever after that, it's the church, Jesus' treasured possession. We aren't going anywhere because He's not going anywhere. I know we're far from perfect. We fail & falter, sin & repent, & try again. But our God is perfect. & He's sovereign. 7 times in Ps 86 David refers to God as *Adonai* (*Lord* with lower case letters), which refers to His absolute lordship & sovereignty & David's sense of submission & loyalty. He gives life & breath & everything. & He's

the one who builds His church. Working with the Spirit, the church is the single most beautiful & humble force for good across all of time & space. If you're a Christian church attender, member, or leader, rejoice! You're part of something that'll never pass away, something as certain as our risen Savior. You are the light of the world (Easter today in Ethiopia). Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds & glorify your Father in heaven (Mt 5:14-16). This year & every year forever we can walk in joy, faith, & rest. Jesus is building His church, & nothing will prevail against it. That's the promise of our risen Savior. Christ & His church are certain. That's why organizations like *Global Training Network* train pastors around the world. It's Jesus' death & resurrection that brings true life to people of all nations. It's His gospel that the world desperately needs. His plan is that all the nations, languages, peoples would come to Him & worship Him.

As we come to the communion table, we come to Jesus because He is who He claimed to be & He did what He came to do. The proclamation of His death & the remembrance of all that He is for us should draw us into deeper communion with Him. Jesus has given us the ongoing object lesson of communion to feed us spiritually with Himself. The Lord's Table proclaims the gospel. As John Piper has said, *Faith is a spiritual feasting on the risen, living Christ so that all that God is for us in Him satisfies our soul & sweetens our love for Him & breaks the power of sin in our lives.*¹ We are saved through Christ's death & resurrection. We are forgiven through Christ's death & resurrection. We are kept through Christ's death & resurrection. When you eat of the bread & drink of the cup today, understand that Christ's death & resurrection has purchased your salvation. Unless you're trusting Christ alone for your salvation, don't bother partaking, because it has no meaning or value for you. But if you've placed your faith in Christ alone for your salvation, then receive the bread & the cup with gladness because by it we proclaim His death & resurrection for us; by it we remember who He is & what He's done; by it we feast by faith on the goodness of our God who has given us His Son, forgiven our sins, & graciously given us eternal life with Him. PRAY

On Jesus' last night with His disciples, while the meal was still in progress, He took some bread, gave thanks for it, broke it into pieces & handed it around to those present while saying these

¹ www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-we-eat-the-lords-supper-part-1

words: **This is My body, which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.** After the meal was over, He took a cup of wine, gave thanks for it, passed it around to His disciples, & said, **This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me** (1 Cor 11, Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22). These are tremendously significant deeds & words. It's a shame that we're so familiar with them they tend to lose their impact on us. By what He did & said, Jesus was dramatizing His death before it took place & giving His own explanation of its meaning & purpose. During this final meal Jesus had with His disciples, He gave them instructions for His own memorial service, which wasn't to be a one-time deal, but to be an ongoing thing. They were to copy what He did, both His words & actions. They were to take, break, bless, & share in the bread & wine. What did these 2 things signify? Jesus said of the bread, **This is My body given for you,** & of the wine, **This is My blood shed for you.** His death speaks to us from both elements. The bread didn't stand for His living body but for His body as it was shortly to be **given** for us in death. The wine didn't stand for His blood as it flowed in His veins while He spoke to them, but for His blood which would be **poured out** for us shortly in death. We celebrate communion not to remember His birth, His life, His words, nor His miracles. It is His death on the cross that is central to Christianity & that is what we remember. Paul tells us in **1 Cor 11**, Bible, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This represents My body, which is offered as a sacrifice for you. Do this in affectionate remembrance of Me" **(Amplified 23-24)**.

We remember Jesus' death on the cross for us as we eat of the bread together.

Paul goes on & tells us, **after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant, ratified and established in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in affectionate remembrance of Me"** **(Amplified 25)**. We drink of the cup together remembering our Lord's shed blood, His death for the forgiveness of our sins. DRINK Only God is truly great, great enough to meet all our needs, great enough to forgive all our sins, & great enough to carry us through into eternity to be with Him forever. So we declare with David, **You alone are great & you do wondrous deeds; You alone are God!** **(Ps 86:10)** Stand & sing as we close, *I Love To Tell the Story*.