

The Berta People

in Ethiopia and Sudan

The Berta live on both sides of the Ethiopian-Sudanese border in one of the least-developed regions of Ethiopia. The largest town in the area has about 20,000 people and only one third of them are Berta.

The region where the Berta live was known by the ancient Egyptians as a gold reserve. Although they now live mostly from agriculture and the sale of the fruits grown on their land, gold is still an important bartering commodity. In the past the Berta were oppressed by the

slave trade. Even their own rulers kept and sold slaves from among their own people.

The Berta language is not related to the official Amharic language of Ethiopia or the Arabic of Sudan. Children who do go to school are therefore taught in a foreign language. Many give up trying after just a few years and just 9.7% of the people are considered literate. It was only recently that the written form of the Berta language was introduced and now, thanks to government efforts and various organizations, Berta children can take lessons in their mother-tongue.

Islam came to this region in the beginning of the 18th century, particularly from Northern Sudan. Until 30 years ago visitors to the region wrote that Islam was very superficial, however, today most Berta Muslims take their religion quite seriously, although it is mixed with indigenous beliefs and practices. There is no local group of Christian believers. The Christian believers in the neighboring peoples are not very open or motivated to witness to the Berta, since evangelization of other peoples can be very difficult.



PRAYER REQUESTS

- ▶ *Christians from other people groups in the region need an outpouring of courage and wisdom to reach the Berta with the Gospel in an understandable and culturally appropriate way.*
- ▶ *Pray for the local believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-20).*
- ▶ *Pray that Bible translation could begin again among the Berta. Pray for more Berta to learn to read so that, when the Bible is completed in their language, they can read it for themselves.*

Also pray for ...

- ▶ *The Christian and animist population in southern Sudan not far from the Berta homeland experienced the horrors of civil war for about 30 years. Even though peace has come to the area the marks of war abound. Pray for the Christians to know how to bind up the wounds of the many years of conflict and suffering.*

"The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn ..." (Isaiah 61:1-2)