



ETHIOPIA



CHURCH PLANTER

Yishak Garto

PEOPLE GROUP

Bodi of Ethiopia

TESTIMONY

Our missionary Yishak Garto was born in 1988 in the Bodi area. He received the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal savior in 2005 and was baptized in 2006. He confirmed us his calling to the mission particularly for the Bodi people who are one of the most unreached people groups of Ethiopia. Yishak Garto is a young, Bodi believer who is working in Bodi churches in different ministries. He is married to Rebika Weybila and they have five children- Adis, Zena, Fasica, Abigail and Beza.

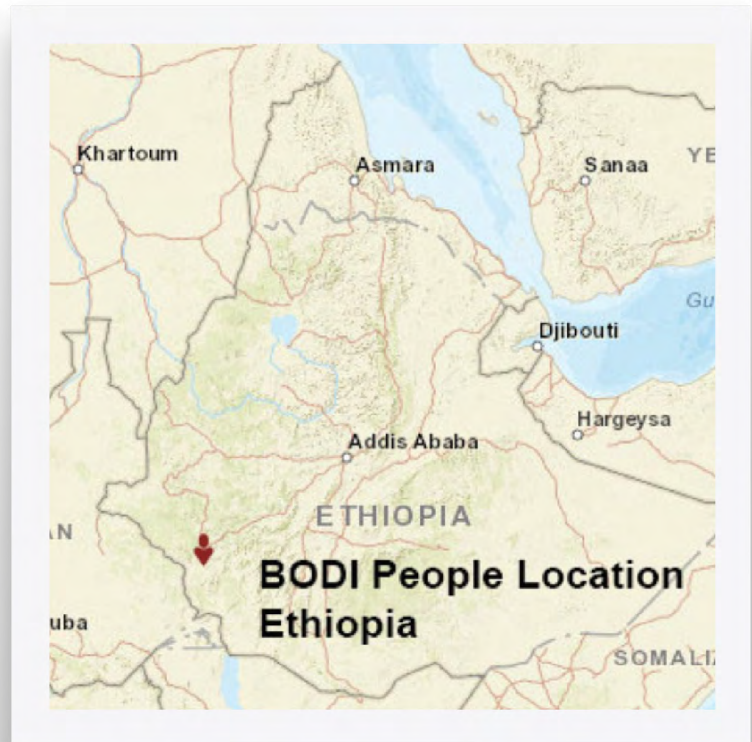


BODI OF ETHIOPIA

The Bodi or Me'en is the name of a semi nomadic tribe living in the Omo valley, about 140 km from Jinka town, southern Ethiopia. The 1998 census lists them as consisting of 56,585 individuals.

The Bodi speak the Me'en language, which is a member of the Surmic branch of the Nilo Saharan language family. The population is subdivided into two groups: The highland Tishena, who are agriculturalists. Along the banks of the river, they will grow sorghum, maize and coffee. The lowland Bodi, who are pastoralists (livestock farmers). They live with their cattle herds and livestock plays a large role in the tribe.

The Bodis are one of the ethnic group in Ethiopia's Omo valley that have refused to change to the modern way of life and prefers their indigenous tribal pastoral life. The Bodi still engages in barter trade system. Bodi people in south Ethiopia walk for hours to reach the weekly markets, where they exchange stuff or buy some.



Similar to the Mursi, livestock plays an important role in marriage, divination, and name-giving rituals. The Bodi classification of cattle is complex, with over eight words to denote different colors and patterns. Bodi dress is simple. The women wear goatskins tied at the waist and shoulder, while men fasten a strip of cotton or bark-cloth around their waist.

Every year, they celebrate their new year, 'Ka`el' (Bodi New year Celebration) between June and July, depending on the full moon, and the rains. This celebration is a bit different than a usual new year celebration's as the tradition is to feed young men from every Bodi village. They are fed with only honey, cow blood and milk during 3-6 months (fattening process).

To celebrate their new year Ka`el, the Bodi tribe in south Ethiopia, kill a cow. They use a huge stone and bang the head, then they open the cow, rip out the intestines for divination, and take the blood to drink it. The feeding on the blood mixed with honey and cow milk enables them to almost double their weight, which makes them ready for the competition. Contestants for this competition are naked to make them eligible to participate.

On the competition day, the contestants and the village folks assemble at the Bode King village. Traditional bodi tribal warrior dances are performed to the delight of on-lookers. After the dance, the bodies of the contestants are measured by the elders who then decide who is the fattest winner. The fattest person is then declared as the winner of the competition and is honored with a great fame in the bodi tribe.

- When a member of Bodi tribe dies. The woman of the tribe shouts to the spirits and chant of his/her death to bring the soul to peace. The Bodi men perform ceremonial death procession and will keep the body of the deceased safe for 3 days. After this, the tribe will gather together and eat as a sign of respect, and to ensure passing into the next world.

Bodi tribe people are threatened by the Ethiopian Government. To achieve its goals, the Ethiopian government planned to displace local population towards settlements areas in new villages; the Omo Valley houses multiple different tribes like Hamar, Mursi, Nyangatom, Bodi, Suri, Karo, Dassanech, Bana, Tsamay, Erfore, Menit with rich and primary lifestyle and practices; these tribes are threaten by the army into giving up the land where their ancestors lived and abandoned their traditional lifestyle; some tribes have accepted to move in the settlement areas; others refuse to leave those fertile lands and drop their culture and traditions, they came into resistance with their limited means at their disposal. The government allocates those lands to foreign companies (Malaysian, Saudis, Indians...) who all rent land at the paltry cost of one euro per hectare a year; the lifestyle of the local tribes are endangered, they depend on the crops and their cattle; without land to graze for their cows, in the settlement area, they will face the inherent problems of urban life.

