



### Ethiopia: Ancient Culture Is a New Target for ITEM

*By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director*

The coronavirus derailed my plans to go to Ethiopia to teach “Abiding In Christ” in March 2020. Fourteen months later, I arrived in the capital city, Addis Ababa, where I taught Christ-centered preaching to 35 pastoral students and more than 85 students at Geja Bible College.

Both groups of students grasped how essential it is to preach Christ from every text. God’s great story of salvation can be seen as each text predicts Christ, prepares for Christ, reveals something about God and/or fallen humanity, or results from the finished work of Christ. Student feedback indicated this is much needed.

Evangelicals in Ethiopia comprise about 23 percent of the population; Orthodox Christians account for 44 percent and Muslims make up 32 percent. Most evangelical growth has been in recent decades. But Ethiopia is an ancient land with deep biblical connections.

Some believe the Queen of Sheba came from there. In Acts 8, the Holy Spirit directed Philip to explain Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch, a treasury officer to Queen Candace. After explaining how Jesus fulfills what Isaiah wrote, the Ethiopian eunuch believed and became a follower of Christ.

Christianity grew in Ethiopia, and by 330 AD, the northern kingdom of Aksum was officially declared by the king to be Christian.

During the 20th century, missionaries from the Sudan Inland Mission introduced evangelical forms of Christianity to Ethiopia. Communists controlled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 and persecuted Christians, especially evangelicals. Persecution had the effect of growing the underground church. In the last 30 years, missionaries have been allowed back into Ethiopia.

In 1999, Indigenous Outreach International (IOI) was formed to help indigenous pastors and evangelists. An IOI missionary worked with a Mission To the World missionary who had a connection to former ITEM board member, Rev. Mike McLaughlin.

Through these connections I got to teach the IOI students and others at Geja Bible College. Besides being receptive to Christ-centered preaching, I found my Ethiopian brothers to be warm, hospitable and generous.

It was a good trip, and I hope I can return. Because of this trip, I will recommend to the ITEM board that Ethiopia become a new field for us; we could send up to 10 instructors each year to help IOI in the theological development of indigenous pastors.

### Check us out on Social Media

Staying informed on what ITEM is doing around the world has never been more important. We encourage you to follow us. ITEM is on **Instagram:** @itemmission, **YouTube** (<https://youtu.be/Mc24JfvgOoA>), **Channel:** ITEM-Videos, **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalTheologicalEducationMinistries/>



## India Needs ITEM's Help; Here's How to Give It

*By Will Hesterberg, ITEM Board Chairman*

The deaths, devastation, and dread caused by Covid 19 in India seem so distant, literally halfway around the world. At ITEM, though, they touch us personally as we receive emails from and zoom with our friends there. Here are some statistics and stories.

First the big picture. As of June 1, 303,702 had died in the pandemic. In May 2021 alone, the death toll reached 100,000. Many believe the death figures are actually much higher, but that the government suppresses bad news, and there is insufficient reporting from rural areas. Even the death total does not begin to account for the economic devastation of the deaths, the lockdowns, and curfews in an already impoverished country.

From our friends in South India: "The covid positive cases are increasing rapidly in the three states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Puducherry where the 22 churches of the Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church have served since 2008. Hospitals have no beds. Due to lack of oxygen cylinders, many are dying. Above all we are being threatened by a third wave, expected in October. The churches are closed and people's survival is at stake."

From our friends in Andhra Pradesh, a state in southeast India: "We are allowed to go out for only three hours in the morning to get necessities. No church services, no worship centers, and also no transportation between states or and within the state. Only emergency services are allowed. Please pray for our family and for our neighbors in our apartment where my family is living. One lady died last week, one man died last night, and there are six people in the hospital now."

From a pastor in Manipur, a state in northeast India: "On April 6, after officiating at a wedding, I began coughing severely. A few hours later I developed a fever and headache. I was so scared because as far as I know, no one from our town admitted to the Covid Treatment Center returned alive. In consultation with our family doctor, I received home treatment for three weeks. Today, by His healing grace I am perfectly, completely healed! Praise the Lord! Universities, colleges, schools, malls, churches must close down indefinitely as of today. Twenty people I know in our neighborhood have died of the virus in the last three weeks."

Though not our normal mission, ITEM has been sending aid for the last 8 months to help the families and churches of the pastors who train with ITEM.

If you have been wanting to help Christians in India during this pandemic, giving through ITEM is a great option. In the U.S. send contributions to ITEM, PO Box 31456, St. Louis MO, 63131 or Pay Pal at [www.ITEM.org](http://www.ITEM.org). Contributions in Canada may be sent to ITEM, c/o Action International Ministries, 3105 A, 21st Street NE, Calgary, Alberta Canada, T2E 7T1. Be sure to mark your gift "Covid Aid."

### Prayer Requests

1. Mark Vander Hart teaching the month of June at BRTS in Latvia. Praise God he got through the 10 day COVID isolation and remains COVID free.
2. ITEM will promote the ministry and recruit new instructors at the PCA's General Assembly in St. Louis June 28-July 2.
3. Thank God for a safe and successful trip for ITEM executive director Tom Smith to Ethiopia and Uganda.

### How to Contribute

In the U.S. send contributions to  
ITEM, PO Box 31456,  
St Louis, MO 63131 or  
at [www.ITEM.org](http://www.ITEM.org) through PayPal.  
Email Executive Director Tom Smith at  
[tomsmith@item.org](mailto:tomsmith@item.org)  
or call 717.640.6268

Contributions to ITEM in Canada may be sent to:

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