

NACOEJ CURRICULUM
ETHIOPIAN JEWS ARE PART OF THE WORLDWIDE
JEWISH COMMUNITY

TOPIC 2: WHY JEWS MIGRATED TO ETHIOPIA:
MYTHS, LEGENDS AND HISTORICAL SOURCES*

I. AIMS:

Students will:

- A. learn that the Beta Israel community is a member of the worldwide Jewish community. It maintained its Jewish practices in isolation from worldwide Judaism for over 2,500 years.
- B. learn that we build knowledge of our history by weaving together different sources of information.
- C. trace the possible migration routes of the Ethiopian Jews into Ethiopia during various periods. They will note the mountains, deserts and waterways, which would have helped or hindered these migrations.

II. MATERIALS/RESOURCES:

- A. *Maps of Contemporary Africa, Contemporary Ethiopia and Ancient Ethiopia*
- B. *NACOEJ Informational Chronology and Informational Narrative*
- C. Bible stories
- D. Legend: King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba
- E. Paper and crayons/pencils for a timeline.

III. MATERIALS FOR OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES:

- A. *Journals/Chart/Pre-lesson Focus:*

My Journal: My Journey toward Tzedakah (teacher and student)
Knowledge Chart

Should the teacher choose to have students use the Journal and the Knowledge Chart, briefly tell students how to use them.

- B. *List of Jewish Values*

- C. *Crossword Puzzle*

*Essential vocabulary words are underlined in the lesson plan. A vocabulary list is provided in the lesson for students' use. Advise students to review the vocabulary prior to the lesson.

IV. MOTIVATION: (5 minutes)

- A. Do you know where your family emigrated from to get to the U.S.?
- B. Do you know how they got here?
- C. How do you think they got here?
- D. Today we will examine the history of Ethiopian Jews and how they got to Ethiopia.

(Skip the following activity if it has already been done in a previous lesson.)

- E. Using maps of Africa, Ethiopia and the Arabian Peninsula, briefly help students to locate:
 - 1. Ethiopia
 - 2. Addis Ababa (the capital city of Ethiopia)
 - 3. Gondar (the region where Ethiopian Jews settled)
 - 4. Determine the approximate distance from Ethiopia to Israel (about 1,600 miles)
 - 5. Egypt
 - 6. Arabian Peninsula

V. PROCEDURE: (Time: 1 hour)

The teacher will read the resource material and/or distribute it for student readers. Individual students can be chosen for each activity.

- A. The story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba
 - 1. Choose a student to IDENTIFY the land of Sheba as being in eastern Ethiopia or in southern Yemen.
 - 2. CITE the Bible story in 1 Kings 10:1-13, the story of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
 - 3. ASK: How does the Bible story relate to the Ethiopian legend? Some Ethiopian Jews trace their origins to King Solomon and Queen Makeda of Sheba.
 - 4. PLACE this story on a timeline about 900 BCE.

- B. There is a theory that some Israelites left Egypt and traveled south into Ethiopia (also known as Abyssinia) at the same time that Moses took the main body of Jews into Canaan.

1. Do you think that this theory could be true?
 2. What does the Bible tell us about the exodus from Egypt in 1,200 BCE? Is it possible that, as some scholars theorize, some Hebrews who left Egypt with Moses during the time of the Exodus never crossed the Red Sea, but instead traveled south from Egypt into Ethiopia?
 3. ENTER the date of that exodus on the timeline.
 4. TRACE the possible route from the Nile Delta to Ethiopia.
- C. Israel consisted of twelve tribes. Ten tribes lived in the north. In the 8th century BCE, the powerful Assyrians invaded the north and conquered the ten northern Israelite tribes. They were dispersed to different regions by the Assyrians.
1. DISCUSS the possibility that one of these northern tribes, the Israelite tribe of Dan, didn't go to Assyria, but instead emigrated to Ethiopia to escape from the Assyrians. The tribe of Dan is known as one of the "lost tribes" of Israel.
 2. TRACE the route on the map that a these Jews would have taken from northern Israel to Ethiopia.
 3. ENTER the date of 722 BCE on your timeline.
- D. There is a biblical story that in the 6th century BCE there was an invasion of the south of Israel by Babylonia and the two southern Judean tribes of Israel were conquered. Subsequently, after the fall of the first temple in 586 BCE, the dispersion (or Diaspora) of the Jews began. Many Jews were exiled to Babylonia, which is present day Iraq.
1. Is the theory possible that at that time, some of the Jews did not go to Babylonia, but instead migrated through Yemen and eventually reached Ethiopia.?
 2. TRACE that route from Jerusalem to Ethiopia.
 3. ENTER the date of 586 BCE (the Diaspora) on the timeline.
- E. There were many Jews who lived in Egypt on an island called Elephantine. Many of these Jews were soldiers who served as mercenaries in the Persian army. There was a large, impressive, Jewish temple there. In the 4th century the Egyptians began to persecute this group. The Elephantine temple was destroyed.

1. ASK: Is it possible that these Jews could have escaped along the difficult route up the Nile and along some smaller tributaries to Lake Tana.—the source of the Blue Nile?
2. TRACE their route from Elephantine (near present day Assam) to Lake Tana.
3. MARK the timeline.
4. Could these Jews have met other Jews already there?

F. Other scholars theorize that the Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jews, are descended from a group of black Cushite tribes, the Agaw. These tribes were indigenous to Ethiopia. They were converted to Judaism 2,500 years ago by the Jews of Yemen, many of whom were merchants who traded in the region.

1. How is this theory different from the others? Were these people who migrated from somewhere else or were they already there?
2. SHOW where these Jewish merchants from Yemen may have mingled with the Agaw. Notice how close the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula is to Ethiopia.
3. ENTER your information on the timeline.

G. Ethiopia adopted Christianity in the 4th century CE and although there were times of peace and interchange, there were many centuries of war. In the 17th century, after 300 years of war, the Christians conquered the Jewish kingdom. After a while, the Jews were pushed from their land into less desirable small villages and into the high northern mountains. They were isolated from all other Jewish communities—they didn't even know that other Jews had survived and lived in Jewish communities scattered throughout the world. Some Ethiopian Jews were sold as slaves, forced to be baptized and all were denied the right to own land.

SHOW the possible migration of Ethiopian Jews from Lake Tana to remote villages in the northern highlands

VII. CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES:

Jewish education should make Jews aware of their history--especially with events in the Bible.

DISCUSS the following with the students:

- A. How have Bible stories, traditional oral stories and historical information helped you learn about the roots of the Ethiopian Jews?
- B. How does your general knowledge of biblical events help you integrate the history of Ethiopian Jews with worldwide Jewish history?

VI. OPTIONS FOR CLASSWORK/HOMEWORK:

A. Discuss:

1. Can more than one of these sources of information be true?
2. Which seems likely or unlikely? Why?
3. What questions are raised by one or more of the accounts of the migration of the Jews to Ethiopia?
4. What are the possible reasons that Ethiopian Jews did not know about the survival of other Jewish communities in the world?

B. Debate:

1. A group of students may debate the questions raised by one or more accounts of the migration of Jews to Ethiopia.
2. A group of students may debate the question of “truth” and/or belief in these accounts of the migration of Jews to Ethiopia.

C. *List of Jewish Values*: Teacher and students may suggest appropriate Jewish values inherent in this lesson.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. “All Jews are interrelated with one another.”
 (“Kol Yisrael Areyvim Zeh Bazeh {Lazeh}.”)
2. “Love your neighbour as yourself.”
 (“Ve Ahavta Lereyecha Kamocha.”)

D.. *Crossword Puzzle*

E. Homework: Students write one or two paragraphs indicating why they believe one account (or more) and not others about the Jewish migration to Ethiopia.

F. Research: What historical events were happening in the non-Jewish world in 1,000 BCE, 500 BCE, 1,400 CE, 1,700 CE, 1,900 CE?

VIII. NACOEJ CURRICULUM PROJECT FEEDBACK FORM:

TOPIC 2: Why Jews Migrated to Ethiopia:

Myths, Legends and Historical Sources

Please see the *Feedback Form* and forward it to: curriculum@nacoj.org

IX. VOCABULARY: TOPIC 2: WHY JEWS MIGRATED TO ETHIOPIA

- Abysinnia:** the old name for Ethiopia
- Agaw:** indigenous northeastern Ethiopian tribe
- Arabia:** peninsula between Africa and Asia, largely desert
- Assyria:** powerful empire in ancient Iraq
- BCE:** before the Common Era which began in the year 1 CE
- Babylonia:** powerful Iraqi kingdom in the 6th century BCE
- baptize:** a Christian ritual; to immerse an individual in water, sprinkle or pour water on an individual to symbolize the washing away of sin and spiritual purification; a practice required for admitting a person into Christianity
- Canaan:** ancient name for Israel and Lebanon
- CE:** the Common Era, beginning with the life of Christ in the year 1 CE
- Cushites:** inhabitants of an area in Africa south of Egypt
- Dan:** one of the northern ten tribes of Israel (became the lost tribe of Dan)
- Diaspora:** the dispersion of the Jews outside of Israel from the sixth century BCE when they were exiled to Babylonia, until the present time
- Elephantine:** Egyptian island in the Nile River near the current city of Aswan
- emigrate:** to leave one country or region to settle in another
- Ethiopia:** country in the east-most portion of the Horn of Africa
- immigrate:** to come into a country or region, especially to settle there
- indigenous:** original inhabitants of a place
- Israelites:** ten northern tribes of Israel
- Judeans:** two southern tribes of Israel

- King Menelik I:** legendary king of Ethiopia; supposed son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba
- mercenaries:** soldiers serving for pay in a foreign army
- Lake Tana:** traditional source of the Blue Nile in Ethiopia
- legend:** a story handed down, usually orally, from one generation to another
- Makeda:** name of the Queen of Sheba
- myth:** a story of unknown authorship usually trying to explain why something happened and usually involving the exploits of gods and heroes
- Blue Nile:** a river that flows from Lake Tana in northern Ethiopia to join the White Nile in Sudan—together they become the “Nile River” flowing into Egypt
- Nile Delta:** a deposit of sand and soil formed at the mouth of the Nile River (The Blue Nile flows from northern Ethiopia; the White Nile flows from Lake Victoria flowing **north** through Egypt into the Mediterranean.)
- Sheba:** an area which probably was in southwestern Arabia or eastern Ethiopia
- tributary:** a stream or river flowing into a larger one
- Yemen:** country in southern Arabia

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XI. WEB SITE

WWW.NACOEJ.org