

REACHING THE BUNNA PEOPLE EAST AND SOUTH AFRICA



The region of East and South Africa includes 27 countries, 24 of which have populations of least-reached people groups. Of the 1,290 people groups in this region, 357 have little access to the gospel which equates to nearly 60 million people in all. The peaceful ending of apartheid in South Africa and the transition to multi-racial democratic government was considered impossible but the miracle occurred in answer to fervent prayer by millions of Christians. Recently, a move to globalize prayer originated here and has resulted in the annual Global Day of Prayer, such that in 2006 over 190 nations participated. God moves on behalf of believing prayer.

One way that prayer desperately needs to move is in regard to the nomadic people groups of the world. Some count their number as high as 50 million. Often their lifestyles are much like that of Bible times—living in goat-hair tents, caring for flocks which provide their livelihood, and moving on a systematic basis to provide pastures and water for their animals. These people are not bound by political boundaries, and nomads present a definite challenge to typical Christian outreach approaches. Their nomadic lifestyle and the lack of Christians among them are major barriers to them hearing and accepting the gospel. Nevertheless, here is one story of a nomad who heard and eventually became a follower of Jesus, and then began sharing with other nomads. It is also a story of a man known as a killer who was transformed into one who releases life through the power of God.

The Bunna people of southern Ethiopia were known as killers. Young men proved themselves worthy to marry by killing large animals or a person. One of the first evangelists among the Bunna was an Ari man named Peter, born with a conspicuous harelip that also affected his speech. Disabled children like Peter were seen as cursed and often left to die, but because Christianity had already reached the Ari, Peter was taken in and raised by a Christian family. Peter knew he had been physically saved by the gospel and he grew up wanting to share its message.

The Ari church trained the maturing Peter as a leader and pastor, despite his speech disability. He met and married a young woman who loved and accepted him. One day their church asked for workers to go to the nearby Bunna people to serve and live among them. As a youth, Peter had learned the Bunna language while herding cattle nearby the Bunna herdsman, so he and his wife agreed to take God's message of love to this tribe known for killing outsiders. Peter received permission to live among the Bunna through the influence and contacts of two other missionaries already working in the area, Ato Mahey and Charlie Bonk. Bonk and Mahey had successfully lived and worked among the Bunna already for several years.

Peter's own family grew. One day, when one of Peter's children was seriously ill, Peter set out on the ten mile walk to Charlie Bonk's clinic for medicine. On his

way home, Peter stopped for the night at the home of a Bunna, as was the custom. The next morning he continued his journey home, accompanied by another young man who had also spent the night in the Bunna home. Halfway home, the young Bunna man pulled out a knife and killed Peter. In their ritualistic manner, he smeared Peter's blood over his body to show the local girls he had made his kill.

When Peter did not return home for several days, his wife and Mahey sent a search party who found Peter's remains. Peter's death caused the Bunna king to ask Charlie Bonk to remove all the outsiders from the Bunna village, fearing for their safety. Despite the danger, Peter's wife stayed for two weeks before her return to Ari to mourn her husband's death with the Bunna women. They were amazed that she did not wail in mourning or want them to weep for her, as was their custom. She spoke of her certainty of seeing Peter in heaven again, and explained to them simply of the hope of eternal life they could have if they knew Jesus as Lord. Then, this brave widow's last opportunity to share with the Bunna was a powerful witness of the love of God.

Ato Mahey continued his work in the area, covering three different mission stations across southwest Ethiopia. On one such trip, he met a Bunna man named Gersho who had been in prison many years awaiting execution for several murders. In his early years, he was miserable there, since no one in his prison could speak his language or saw to his needs. Christian believers imprisoned for their faith befriended him and began to care for him. Gersho soon learned their language and as he did, they shared their faith with him and he readily accepted Jesus Christ. He learned a second language in order to be able to read the only Bible they had. Two years later, when the Christians were released from prison, they left Gersho in charge of both preaching and pastoring the prisoners. He was later released from prison himself when the communist / Marxist regime took over and brought release of all criminals who exhibited good behavior.

God changed this murderer into His messenger, and then sent him back to his own Bunna people. His family was shocked to see him, thinking he had been hanged seventeen years earlier. One of Gersho's family members who welcomed him home was his brother, the young man who many years ago had murdered Peter on his way home from the clinic. God works in mysterious ways!

Through his knowledge of traditional Bunna rituals, Gersho successfully presented the Christian message in a way the Bunna could understand and receive. Seeds that had been planted by Peter and his widow, Ato Mahey, and Charlie Bonk for the past ten years finally took root. God used one from among the Bunna themselves to become a "life giver" to his own people.

Many wonderful things have happened over the past forty years to the Bunna people. This story is just one example of how God is at work, preparing the other people living in East and South Africa to be transformed and to receive His message that changes lives and people groups for His glory. Join us to pray for all these least-reached peoples:

TRANSFORMATION:

Ask God to transform every Least-Reached People into life givers rather than life takers by His power and love as He did with the Bunna.

LIVING SACRIFICES:

Ask the Lord of the Harvest to thrust forth many laborers like Peter who offer their lives daily as living sacrifices, so that in their life or death, the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified among every Least-Reached People.

BRIDGES FOR THE GOSPEL:

Request that God divinely reveal bridges of redemption for the gospel in each of these cultures, as he did to Gersho, in order to effectively present His Truth and good news.

FORGIVENESS:

Seek God to impart the ability to forgive enemies, to overcome evil with good, and to bless those that persecute as believers try to share the gospel with Least-Reached Peoples even like Peter's wife did.

ENDURANCE:

Plead with God for workers with such endurance that they never give up; moved by the great compelling of God to reach even the most remote and difficult Least-Reached Peoples groups such as the nomadic Bunna.

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