

# Who Are the People in Our Neighborhood?

## #4 Armenians and Ethiopians

### Timeline

10<sup>th</sup> century BCE Queen of Sheba visits King Solomon  
9th century Eldad haDani tells the Jews of Europe about the Ten Tribes  
16<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi David ben Zimra writes a responsum about Ethiopian Jews  
1860 Protestant missionaries try to convert Ethiopian Jews  
1867 Yosef HaLevi from the Alliance Israelite Universelle meets the Jews of Ethiopia  
1984 Operation Moses  
1991 Operation Solomon: 14000 airlifted in 36 hours

### Origin Stories

King Solomon, in turn, gave the queen of Sheba everything she wanted and asked for, in addition to what King Solomon gave her out of his royal bounty. Then she and her attendants left and returned to her own land. (Melachim I 10:13)

Eldad haDani 9th century: And we have received from each other that we, the children of Dan, were at first in the land of Israel, dwelling in tents, and there was not among all the tribes of Israel such mighty warriors as we. And when Jeroboam the son of Nebat rose up against them, who made Israel sin and made two golden calves, the kingdom of the house of David was divided, and the tribes gathered together and said: Arise and fight with Rehoboam and with Jerusalem. They said to him: Why are we fighting with our brothers and with the son of our master David, king of Israel and Judah, God forbid! At that time the elders of Israel said, There is not among all the tribes of Israel such mighty men as the tribe of Dan. Immediately they said to the children of Dan: Arise and fight with the children of Judah. They said to him: As the life of the head of our father's son, we will not make war with our brothers, nor will we shed their blood. Immediately the children of Dan took swords, spears, and bows, and gave themselves up to die, to go out of the land of Israel, for we saw that we could not stand. Let us go from now on and find ourselves a rest and a place, and if we wait until the end, they will lead us. . . . Finally, we gave advice to go to Egypt, and not on the path that our ancestors took, nor to destroy it, but to go and cross the Pishon River to the land of Cush. And this is my name: Eldad, son of Mahli, son of Yehezkel, son of Hezekiah, son of Aluk, son of Abner, son of Shemaiah, son of Hathar, son of Hur, son of Elkanah, son of Hillel, son of Tobiah, son of Pedath, son of Enan, son of Naaman, son of Ta'am, son of Tami, son of Onam, son of Gaul, son of Shalom, son of Caleb, son of Amram, son of Dumm, son of Obadiah, son of Abraham, son of Joseph, son of Moses, son of Jacob, son of Caphar, son of Ariel, son of

Asher, son of Job, son of Shelem, son of Elihu, son of Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, son of Hushim, son of Dan, son of Jacob, our forefather, may God bless him and grant him peace. Amen. "

Ibn Ezra on Eldad the Danite:

And what is written in the Chronicles of Moses do not believe. And in general I say to you, any book that was not written by prophets or sages from the mouth of tradition, is not to be trusted, even if [=and especially if] there are things in it that deny the correct opinion (logic). And so is the book of Zerubbabel, and also the book of Eldad the Danite and similar ones" (Commentary on Exodus 2:22)

## **Reunited**

The Journey to the Land of Israel  
Shlomo Gronich and the Sheva Choir  
Words: Chaim Idisis  
Music: Shlomo Gronich

The moon watches over,  
On the meager food sack  
The desert beneath me, has no end ahead  
And my mother promises my little brothers.

Soon, a little more, to lift my feet  
A last effort, before Jerusalem.

The moonlight holds firm,  
Our food sack is lost  
The desert is not over, the howls of jackals,  
And my mother soothes my little brothers.

Soon, a little more, soon we will be redeemed  
We will not stop walking, to the Land of Israel.

And at night robbers attacked,  
With a knife and a sharp sword  
In the desert, my mother's blood, the moon is my witness,  
And I promise my little brothers.

Soon, a little more, the dream will come true  
Soon we will arrive, to the Land of Israel.

In the moon, the image of my mother,  
Looking at me, Mother, don't disappear  
If she were by my side, she could,

Convince them that I am Jewish.

Soon, soon, soon we will be redeemed  
We will not stop walking, to the Land of Israel

Soon, soon, raise your eyes  
A last effort, before Jerusalem.

## Part of the Jewish World

Here, as you requested, I have come to confirm what you wrote in my name a few years ago regarding the Falashas,' which is known from what is written in Responsa Radbaz (Part 7, Section 9), that they are considered Jews. But it is difficult to rely on this, since it is not clear whether the Radbaz knew the reality about them well, and it is also not clear whether their situation has not changed until our time. But in regard to practical application of the law they are not mamzerim. . . And regarding their Jewishness, we consider it doubtful, and they must undergo real conversion before they are allowed to come to the congregation. But even before their conversion, there is a commandment to save them from destruction and danger, as is the law for all Israel, "when there is doubt in life threatening matters, we ease restrictions," even if our doubt pertains to their Judaism. It is also necessary to know that even if they are not Jews according to the law, **since they think they are Jews and give their lives for their Judaism**, we must save them.

They should not be brought to the Land of Israel, unless they undergo conversion, so as not to promote intermarriage. **But if they convert lawfully, and as I have heard they do, they are considered like any other Jew**, and they are to be assisted and supported in all the necessities of their lives, both materially and spiritually. And I was very sorry to hear that there are those who prevent them from being brought together in spiritual matters, and cause them to be lost from the Jewish religion. **And it seems to me that they do so only because their skin color is black.** It is obvious that they should be brought together, not only because they are no worse than other Jews, and the law makes no difference because they are black, but also because there is a claim that they may be converts, and are included in the commandment "and love the stranger." And I will conclude with the hope that the situation will improve. And thanks to keeping all the commandments, we will all soon be entitled to Kibbutz Galuyot. (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein 1985 (Responsa Igrot Moshe, Part 4, Section 14)

And if so, in this matter, that there was no clear evidence here, and there cannot be such evidence, after the Radb"z and the Maharik"sh explicitly stated that they are from the tribe of Dan, without a doubt, who is this and who is this who could

go out against an entire community to reject them and cast a blemish on the holy people, for the hazaka of their Judaism is strong. . . And all the more so since it is known that according to the custom of the Falashas, anyone who needs to negotiate with someone who is not a fellow Jew (ben brit) will not be able to enter his house and family until he has immersed himself in the river, and as several truth-tellers from the Falashas have testified before us, as they spoke by the way (מסיח לפי תומם). (Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Responsa Yabia Omar Part 8, Orach haChaim, 11)

## **Sigd**

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: The assembly [*atzeret*] of the Festival [of *Sukkot*] should have been fifty days removed, corresponding to the assembly of Passover, but the assembly of the Festival, because [these days] transition from summer to winter, it would not be feasible for them to go and return at this time. To what is this matter comparable? It is to a king who had many daughters, some of whom were married [and living] in a nearby place, and some of whom were married [and living] in a distant place. One day they all came to ask after the welfare of their father the king. The king said: 'Those who are married at a nearby place can go and return any time, but those who are married in a distant place cannot go and return any time. Therefore, while all of them are here with me, we will all make a festival for one day and celebrate with them.' So too, the assembly of Passover, since [the days] transition from winter to summer, the Holy One blessed be He said it is [feasible] for them to go and return at this time. However, the assembly of the Festival [of *Sukkot*], because [the days] transition from summer to winter, and the dust on the roads is difficult and the clods of earth are difficult [for travelers]; therefore, it is not fifty days removed. The Holy One blessed be He said: 'It is not [feasible] for them to go and return at this time. Rather, while all of them are here, we will all make a festival for one day and celebrate.' (Shir haShirim Rabba 7:2)