The History of Ethiopian Jews

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Ethiopia has a unique and long-standing relationship with Israel, much of which is recorded in the pages of the Bible.

Moses married an Ethiopian wife (Numbers 12:1).

An Ethiopian traveled to Jerusalem to worship and is discovered reading the Jewish Scriptures (Acts 8:27).

Between these two events, Ethiopian Jewish communities emerged, but little is known of their origin. Four main theories exist:

1. Visit of the Queen of Sheba (Cush) to King Solomon of Israel (1 Kings 10:1-13). This tradition, favored by Ethiopian Jews, states that a son, Menelik, was born to Solomon and Sheba, through whom all Ethiopian Jews descended.

2. Jews fled the Babylonian exile during the destruction of the first Temple in 586 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25). They would have traveled to Egypt, then down the Nile River, eventually settling in the hills of Gondar and Tigray, where they remained hidden for centuries.

3. Jews who traveled from the Arabian peninsula (near Yemen) to the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia) and established new Jewish communities.

4. The lost tribe of Dan.

Throughout the centuries, they suffered much persecution at the hands of traditional Christians and Muslims. Yet, they remained the oldest Diaspora community practicing Torah Jewish observance, pre-dating modern Rabbinic Judaism. Their greatest desire throughout the generations was to return to Jerusalem.

After the rise of Christianity in Ethiopia in the fourth century, the Jews who refused to convert were persecuted and withdrew to the mountainous Gondar region where they made their homes for more than 2000 years. In the tenth century, they rose against the Axum dynasty led by Queen Judith who overthrew the "negus" (king) and sought to eradicate Christianity throughout the country. She is not forgotten to this day. Later, with the establishment of a new royal dynasty, the Jews of Ethiopia enjoyed great influence for some 350 years often acting as the balance of power between the Muslims and Christian forces.
The return to power of the ancient Axum dynasty in 1270, marked the beginning of 400 years of war and bloodshed which ended in the 17th century with the final end of Jewish independence. After the final battle when the Jewish forces were finally defeated "Falasha men and women fought to the death from the steep heights of their fortress...they threw themselves over the precipice or cut each other's throats rather than be taken prisoner. (Christian Ethiopian Chronicles) The Jews now faced years of suffering, their lands were confiscated, and for a period were forbidden the practice of their religion. The wars, the bloodshed and the glory were over, but persecution in various forms continued.

Modern Contact

The first modern contact with the now oppressed community came in 1769 when the Scottish explorer James Bruce stumbled upon them while searching for the source of the Nile River.

Missionaries in the nineteenth century drove many to begin a doomed trek to Jerusalem, but over the years others were successful.

In the early years of the twentieth century, only a small trickle made their way to Israel. In 1954, the Jewish Agency (www.jafi.org) sent an educational emissary to Beit Israel with the task of training groups which would eventually travel to Israel for study and return home as teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies in their villages. The first group arrived at Kfar Batya in 1955 and these operations continued for a number of years. Other Jewish groups offered aid, welfare, medical care and education including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (www.jdc.org) which commenced welfare operations in 1983.

During the reign of Haile Selassie (1930-1974) the Jews of Ethiopia were treated with indifference but their inability to own land was coupled with the scorn of their neighbors who attributed to them every misfortune which befell them. In the struggles following the deposition of Haile Saleassie, an estimated 2,500 Jews were killed and 7,000 rendered homeless. From the end of 1977, small groups of Jews began to flee, joining refugee villages on the other side of the Sudanese border. Those caught trying to flee Ethiopia were arrested and tortured.

Claiming that Hebrew was being taught in preparation for emigration to Israel, the governor of Gondar confiscated Hebrew books, the practice of religion was forbidden, Jewish schools and synagogues closed and students caught talking to tourists were questioned and imprisoned. Travel was restricted and a Jew without a travel pass was assumed to be trying to escape and liable for imprisonment. But, the exodus continued. Within three years, there were hundreds of Jews in Sudan living in terrible conditions.

Pressure from world Jewry increased, the government of Israel pledged itself to save the Jews of Ethiopia and the Jewish Agency shifted its policy from quiet diplomacy to call for a worldwide campaign to publicize their plight.
Operations Moses and Solomon

In secret operations beginning in 1980, Israeli operatives were able to smuggle hundreds of Ethiopian Jews through Kenya to Israel. By the end of 1982 there were 2,500 Ethiopian Jews living in Israel and throughout 1983, 1,800 left Sudan over land. Recognizing the need to move more quickly, the Israelis began to use a nearby air strip to land Hercules transport planes which could each bring out 200 immigrants per flight. Utilizing a variety of routes, a total of 8,000 Jews had reached Israel by late 1984.

However, it was clear that the large numbers of Jews crossing into Sudan exacerbated the already horrific conditions in the camps. On November 21, Operation Moses began. Refugees were bused out of the refugee camps to a military airport near Khartoum where they were flown directly to Israel under a blanket of complete secrecy.

When news leaks ended the operation in January 1985, 8,000 Jews had been brought to Israel, leaving behind about 1,000 Jews in Sudan and thousands more in Ethiopia. Initiated by Vice President Bush, a CIA sponsored follow-up mission called Operation Joshua brought an additional 800 Jews from Sudan to Israel.

Operation Moses separated many from their loved ones and more than 1,600 "orphans of circumstances" separated from their families began new lives in Jewish Agency Youth Aliyah villages, learning Hebrew and becoming acculturated not knowing the fate of their parents, brothers, sisters and loved ones. Others took the first difficult steps in Agency absorption centers where they learned to live in a modern society.

The Fulfillment of a Dream

The grim prospect of thousands of Jewish children growing up in Israel, separated from their parents almost became a reality. Nothing could be done to persuade the Ethiopian governor to increase the trickle of Jews leaving Ethiopia in the years between Operations Joshua and Solomon. But, in 1990 the governments of Israel and Ethiopia reached an agreement allowing family reunification, which was gradually broadened to allow others to leave for Israel.

As the news spread that Jews were able to leave, thousands left their homes in Gondar and made their way to Addis Ababa. At the time of renewal of relations between the two countries there were 2,500 Jew in Addis. They were cared for by American organizations such as the JDC and prepared for Aliyah by the Jewish Agency. A school was set up for the children which eventually served as many as 5,000 students. Family heads were offered work and each family was given a monthly subsidy for living expenses. Medical facilities were established.

It became clear that the Ethiopian government had decided to limit aliyah to 1,000 per month. Quotas were determined according to time spent in Addis, in Sudan, the sick, the elderly, religious leaders etc.
By the end of 1990, the economic and political situation in Ethiopia had deteriorated with struggles between rebels and government intensifying daily. Aliyah and aid workers were concerned with the dangers of the transition period if the rebels gained ground. Representatives of the Jewish Agency, JDC, ministries of the government of Israel and the IDF began secret preparations for an emergency airlift and absorption of more than 14,000 Jews.

JDC took responsibility to institute an emergency call-up system, JAFI to organize the collection points and transfer to temporary housing in Israel. The Israel airforce and army would provide logistical support and El Al would also supply staff and airplanes.

In late May, as insurgents closed in on Addis, the plan was put into action. There were very special passengers on the first plane to leave Israel en route to Ethiopia on Friday, May 30, 1991 - 50 veteran Ethiopian immigrants mobilized to help bring their brothers and sisters home. The last plane to leave 36 hours later, an IDF 707 bore the organizers and workers of the operation.

Although the operation was kept secret, rumors of the arrival of thousands of Jews from Ethiopia spread by word of mouth. Thousands of Israelis flocked to the temporary absorption centers set up in hotels and hostels to welcome the newcomers, witnessing the joy of reunion between long separated family members.

The Jews of Quara

Hundreds of Jews from the remote region of Quara were cut off from Addis by the advance of rebel forces and unable to join Operation Solomon. When permission was finally granted, Jewish Agency emissaries made the difficult journey over land to the northern region on the Ethiopian/Sudanese border. As it was impossible to bring the Jews of Quara directly to Addis, an alternate route was chosen. Groups of Ethiopians made their way on foot to a collection point accessible to trucks and then on to Addis and Israel. In Addis, they were provided with medical staff and with financial assistance by the JDC. The first flights left Addis on September 15, 1991, and in the nine months that followed, 4,500 Jews followed this route. Jews from Quara continue to arrive to this day.

The Authenticity of the Ethiopian Jewish Community

As early as the 16th century, Egypt's Chief Rabbi David ben Solomon ibn Avi Zimra (Radbaz) declared that in Halachic (Jewish legal) issues, the Ethiopian community was indeed Jewish. In 1855, Daniel ben Hamdya was the first Ethiopian Jew to visit Israel, meeting with a council of rabbis in Jerusalem concerning the authenticity of the community. By 1864, almost all leading Jewish authorities, most notably Rabbi Azriel Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt, Germany, accepted the community as true Jews. In 1908 the chief rabbis of 45 countries had heeded Rabbi Hildesheimer's call and officially recognized the Ethiopian Beta Israel as fellow Jews.
In reaffirming the Radbaz's position centuries before, Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi, stated in 1972, "I have come to the conclusion that Falashas are Jews who must be saved from absorption and assimilation. We are obliged to speed up their immigration to Israel and educate them in the spirit of the holy Torah, making them partners in the building of the Holy Land."

In 1975, the Israeli Interministerial Commission officially recognized the Beta Israel as Jews under Israel's Law of Return, a law designed to aid in Jewish immigration to Israel, on the basis of a 1973 decision by Rabbi Yossef. The community was ready to come home.

Indeed, the Ethiopian Jews were strictly observant in pre-Talmudic Jewish traditions. The women went to the mikvah, or ritual bath, just as observant Jewish women do to this day, and they continue to carry out ancient festivals, such as Seged, that have been passed down through the generations. The Kesim, or religious leaders, are as widely revered and respected as the great rabbis in each community, passing the Jewish customs through storytelling and maintaining the few Jewish books and Torahs some communities were fortunate enough to have written in the liturgical language of Ge'ez.
Timeline of Ethiopian Jewish/Christian History

4th Century CE — Christianity is introduced into the Axum dynasty in Ethiopia.

7th Century — With the spread of Islam, Ethiopia is isolated from most of the Christian world. The Beta Israel enjoy a period of independence before the power struggles of the middle ages.

9th Century — The earliest apparent reference to the Beta Israel appears in the diary of Eldad Hadani, a merchant and traveler claiming to have been a citizen of an autonomous Jewish state in eastern Africa inhabited by the tribes of Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher.

13th Century — The Solominic dynasty (which claims decent from Solomon and Sheba) assumes control. During the next 300 years (1320-1620), intermittent wars are fought between the Christian kings of Ethiopia and those of the Beta Israel, which finally result in the Beta Israel's loss of independence.

16th Century — Rabbi David B. Zimra, known as the Radbaz, issues a legal response in Cairo declaring that "those who come from the land Cush (Ethiopia) are without a doubt the Tribe of Dan..." He confirms that Ethiopian Jews are fully Jewish.

1622 — Christians conquer the Ethiopian Jewish Kingdom following 300 years of warfare. The vanquished Jews are sold as slaves, forced to baptize, and denied the right to own land.

1769 — Scottish explorer James Bruce awakens the western world to the existence of the Ethiopian Jews in his travels to discover the source of the Nile. He estimates the Jewish population at 100,000.

1855 — Daniel Ben Hamdya, an Ethiopian Jew, independently travels to Jerusalem to meet with rabbis.

1864 — Rabbi Azriel Hildeshheimer, the Rabbi of Eisenstadt, Germany, publishes a manifesto in the Jewish press calling for the spiritual rescue of Ethiopian Jewry.

1867 — Professor Joseph Halevy is the first European Jew to visit the Beta Israel, subsequently becoming an advocate for the community.

1904 — Jacques Faitlovitch, a student of Professor Joseph Halevy, makes his first trip to Ethiopia to visit the Beta Israel. He commits his life on their behalf and actively tries to reconnect the community with the rest of world Jewry. He establishes the first "pro-Falasha" committees in the United States, Britain, and Palestine (under the control of the Ottoman Empire) and takes the first Ethiopian Jewish students to Europe and to Israel to increase their Jewish education.

1908 — Rabbis of 44 countries proclaim Ethiopian Jews to be authentic Jews.

1935-1941 — The Italian fascist army conquers Ethiopia and meets fierce resistance from the Ethiopian partisans, including the Jews.

1955 — Israel's Jewish Agency builds numerous schools and a teachers seminary for the Jews of Ethiopia. Two groups of Ethiopian Jewish students are sent to the Israeli youth village of Kfar Batya to learn Hebrew and other Jewish subjects.

1956 — Israel and Ethiopia establish consular relations.

1958 — Israel sends two public health teams to Ambober in the Gondar Province where most Jews are located.

1961 — Ethiopia and Israel begin full diplomatic relations.

1969 — The American Association for Ethiopian Jews is founded by Dr. Graenum Berger.

1970's — ORT (Organization for the Rehabilitation and Training) sets up schools, clinics, and vocational training centers in Ethiopia.

1973 — Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi, rules, following the Radbaz, that the Beta Israel are from the tribe of Dan and confirms the Jewish identity of the community.

1974 — Emperor Haile Selassie, ruler of Ethiopia since 1930, is overthrown in a coup. A Marxist regime is established and headed by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. This begins a wave of violent acts throughout the country, some severely affecting the Jews.

1975 — Agrarian Reform, meant to benefit tenant farmers, including Jews, creates a violent backlash by traditional landowners and much suffering for all of Ethiopia's citizens. Israel, in an attempt to improve relations with Ethiopia and secure freedom for the Beta Israel, renews military assistance to Ethiopia after Somalia besieges it on the southeastern border. Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren agrees with the 1973 opinion of Rabbi Yosef. Interior Minister Shlomo Hillel signs an ordinance to accept all Ethiopian Jews officially under the Israeli Law of Return. Ethiopian Jews are granted full citizenship and receive the full rights given to new immigrants.

1976 — Approximately 250 Ethiopians Jews are living in Israel.

1977 — Prime Minister Menachem Begin comes to power in Israel. He requests that Colonel Mariam allow Israel to transport approximately 200 Jews to Israel in an empty Israel military jet returning to Israel from Ethiopia.

1977-1984 — Approximately 8,000 Ethiopian Jews are brought to Israel by covert action.

1980 — Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews is founded in Toronto, Canada.


1984 — The massive airlift known as Operation Moses begins on November 18th and ends on January 5th, 1985. During those six weeks, some 6,500 Ethiopian Jews are flown from Sudan to Israel. Attempts are made to keep the rescue effort secret, but public disclosure forces an abrupt end. In the end, an estimated 2,000 Jews die en route to Sudan or in Sudanese refugee camps.
1985 — Secret CIA-sponsored airlift brings 494 Jews from Sudan to Israel.

1984-1988 — With the abrupt halting of Operation Joshua in 1985, the Ethiopian Jewish community is split in half, with some 15,000 souls in Israel, and more than 15,000 still stranded in Ethiopia. For the next five years, only very small numbers of Jews reach Israel.

1986 — The United States Congressional Caucus for Ethiopian Jewry is established with over 140 representatives currently listed.

1987 — The Ethiopian leaders in Israel organize an assembly at Binyanei Ha'uma in Jerusalem, where the Israeli public comes together in solidarity for reunification of Ethiopian Jewry. Prime Minister Shamir, Absorption Minister Yacov Tsur, Knesset Speaker Shlomo Hillel, International Human Rights Lawyer Erwin Cotler, and Natan Scharansky participate in the conference.


1989 — Ethiopia and Israel renew diplomatic relations. This creates high hopes among Jewry for the reunification of Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

1990 — Ethiopia's ruler, Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, makes a public statement expressing desire to allow Ethiopian Jews to be reunited with family members in Israel.

1991 — With Eritrean rebels advancing on the capital each day, Colonel Mengistu flees Ethiopia. Israel asks the United States to urge rebels to allow a rescue operation for Ethiopian Jews. Spanning the 24th-25th of May, Operation Solomon airlifts 14,324 Jews to Israel aboard thirty-four El Al jets in just over thirty-six hours. And, the story continues...
The Church in Ethiopia

Christianity in Ethiopia dates to the 1st century AD, and this long tradition makes Ethiopia unique amongst sub-Saharan African countries. Christianity in this country is divided into several groups. The largest and oldest is the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, an Oriental Orthodox church in Ethiopia that was part of the Coptic Orthodox Church until 1959, when it was granted its own Patriarch by Coptic Orthodox Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa, Cyril VI.

The only pre-colonial Christian church of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Ethiopian Church has a membership of between 40 and 45 million, the majority of whom live in Ethiopia, and is thus the largest of all Oriental Orthodox churches. Next in size are the various Protestant congregations, who include 13.7 million Ethiopians. The largest Protestant group is the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, with about 5 million members. Roman Catholicism has been present in Ethiopia since the 16th century, and numbers 536,827 believers. In total, Christians make up about 60% of the total population of the country.

Although Christianity existed long before the rule of King Ezana the Great of the Kingdom of Axum, the religion took a strong foothold when it was declared a state religion in 330 AD. Pinpointing a date as to when Christianity emerged in Ethiopia is uncertain. The earliest and best known reference to the introduction of Christianity is in the New Testament (Acts 8:26-38) when Philip the Evangelist converted an Ethiopian court official in the 1st Century AD. Scholars, however, argue that Ethiopian (which in Greek means "having a dark skin color") was a common term used for black Africans, and that the Queen Candace served by this official actually ruled in nearby Nubia (modern Sudan).

Matthew Preaches in Ethiopia and later Martyred in Ethiopia

According to church historian Nicephorus, the apostle St. Matthew, later preached the Christian Gospel to modern-day Ethiopia (then called Colchis) after having preached in Judea. Rufinus of Tyre, a noted church historian, recorded a personal account as did other church historians such as Socrates and Sozemius. The Garima Gospels are thought to be the world's oldest illuminated Christian manuscripts.

Matthew was originally called Levi. He was the son of Alphaeus and was by profession a publican, or tax-collector, at Capernaum. On one occasion Jesus, coming up from the side of the lake, passed the custom-house where Matthew was seated and said to him, "Follow me." Matthew arose and followed Christ, becoming his disciple (Matthew 9:9). He changed his name to reflect his new calling. "Matthew" means "Gift of the Lord."

The same day on which Jesus called him he made a "great feast" (Luke 5:29), a farewell feast, to which he invited Jesus and his disciples and probably also many of his old associates. The last notice of him in the New Testament is in Acts 1:13.
After the resurrection of our Lord, Matthew went and preached amongst the Jews. His Gospel was probably first written in Aramaic and later translated into Greek. Eventually Matthew went to Ethiopia to spread the gospel. There he was martyred by Fulvian, the ruler of the region, by being set on fire. After Matthew willingly gave up his soul to the Lord, his body was put in a coffin and cast into the sea. It washed up at the site of the church he had built. Fulvian, Matthew's persecutor, immediately repented of his deed, renounced his position of worldly power, and was made a presbyter by the Bishop Platon (or Plato). Once Platon died, the apostle appeared to the priest (who had taken the name Matthew as well) and told him to assume the bishop's throne.

**Frumentius**

After being shipwrecked and captured at an early age, Frumentius was carried to Axum where he was treated well with his companion Edesius. At the time, there was a small population of Christians living there who sought refuge from Roman persecution. Once of age, Frumentius and Edesius were allowed to return to their homelands, however they chose to stay at the request of the queen. In doing so, they began to secretly promote Christianity through the lands.

During a trip to meet with church elders, Frumentius met with Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria who was second in line to the pope. After recommending that a bishop be sent to proselytize, a council decided that Frumentius be appointed as a bishop to Ethiopia.

By 331 AD, Frumentius returned to Ethiopia, he was welcomed with open arms by the rulers who were at the time not Christian. Ten years later, through the support of the kings, the majority of the kingdom was converted and Christianity was declared the official state religion.

**Isolation as a Christian Nation**

With the emergence of Islam in the 7th century, Ethiopia's Christians became isolated from the rest of the Christian world. The head of the Ethiopian church has been appointed by the patriarch of the Coptic church in Egypt, and Ethiopian monks had certain rights in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Ethiopia was the only region of Africa to survive the expansion of Islam as a Christian state.

**Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church**

The **Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church** is the predominant Oriental Orthodox Christian church in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Church was administratively part of the Coptic Orthodox Church until 1959, when it was granted its own Patriarch by Coptic Orthodox Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of All Africa, Cyril VI. It is not connected with the Ethiopian Catholic Church, a Chalcedonian church.

One of the few pre-colonial Christian churches of sub-Saharan Africa, the Ethiopian Church has a membership of between 40 and 45 million, the majority of whom live in Ethiopia, and is thus the largest of all Oriental Orthodox churches. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is a founding member of the World Council of Churches.
Tewahedo (Ge‘ez ጥዋሕዶ) is a Ge‘ez word meaning "being made one" or "unified". This word refers to the Oriental Orthodox belief in the one single unified Nature of Christ; i.e., a belief that a complete, natural union of the Divine and Human Natures into One is self-evident in order to accomplish the divine salvation of humankind, as opposed to the "two Natures of Christ" belief (unmixed, but unseparated Divine and Human Natures, called the Hypostatic Union) which is held by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia article on the Henotikon: the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and many others, all refused to accept the Dyophysitism (two natures) doctrine decreed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, thus separating them from the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox — who themselves separated from one another later on in the East-West Schism in 1054, although not over Christological views.

The Oriental Orthodox Churches, which today include the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Church of India, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, are referred to as "Non-Chalcedonian", and, sometimes by outsiders as "monophysite" (meaning "One Single Nature", in reference to Christ). However, these Churches themselves describe their Christology as miaphysite (meaning "One United Nature", in reference to Christ; the translation of the word Tewahedo.

The Canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The Holy Scriptures are one of the two great foundations of the faith and here is what our church holds and teaches concerning it. The word of God is not contained in the Bible alone, it is to be found in tradition as well. The Sacred Scriptures are the written word of God who is the author of the Old and New Testaments containing nothing but perfect truth in faith and morals. But God’s word is not contained only in them, there is an unwritten word of God also, which we call apostolic tradition. We receive the one and other with equal veneration.

The canon of the Ethiopic Bible differs both in the Old and New Testament from that of any other churches. List all books. As a whole, books written in the Geez language and on parchment are numerous. The Ethiopian Orthodox church has 46 books of the Old Testament and 35 books of the New Testament that will bring the total of canonized books of the Bible to 81.

The Ethiopic version of the Old and New Testament was made from the Septuagint. It includes the book of Enoch, Baruch and the third and fourth Esdras. In the international Bible studies there are certain books belonging to the class usually designated pseudepigraphic. The whole Christendom and whole-learned world owes a debt of gratitude to the church of Ethiopia for the preservation of those documents.
The Council of Chalcedon

The Council of Chalcedon was a church council held from October 8 to November 1, AD 451, at Chalcedon (a city of Bithynia in Asia Minor), on the Asian side of the Bosporus, known in modern times as Kadıköy in Istanbul, although it was then separate from Constantinople. The council marked a significant turning point in the Christological debates that led to the separation of the church of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century. It is the last council which many Anglicans and most Protestants consider ecumenical.

The Council of Chalcedon was convened by Emperor Marcian, with the reluctant approval of Pope Leo the Great, to set aside the 449 Second Council of Ephesus which would become known as the "Latrocinium" or "Robber Council".[3] The Council of Chalcedon issued the 'Chalcedonian Definition,' which repudiated the notion of a single nature in Christ, and defined that he has two natures in one person and hypostasis; it also insisted on the completeness of his two natures: Godhead and manhood. The council also issued 27 disciplinary canons governing church administration and authority. In a further decree, later known as the canon 28, the bishops declared the Seat of Constantinople (New Rome) equal in honor and authority to Rome.

The Council is considered to have been the Fourth Ecumenical Council by the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church (including its Eastern Catholic Churches), the Old Catholics, and various other Western Christian groups. As such, it is recognized as infallible in its dogmatic definitions by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches (then one church). Most Protestants also consider the concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation as defined at Nicaea (in 325) and Chalcedon to be orthodox doctrine to which they adhere. However, the Council is not accepted by several of the ancient Eastern Churches, including the Oriental Orthodox of Egypt, Syria, Armenia, Ethiopia and India. The Oriental Orthodox teach 'one nature' in Christ, composed of both Godhead and manhood.
Ecumenical council

An ecumenical council (or oecumenical council; also general council) is a conference of ecclesiastical dignitaries and theological experts convened to discuss and settle matters of Church doctrine and practice in which those entitled to vote are convoked from the whole world (oikoumene) and which secures the approbation of the whole Church.

The word "ecumenical" derives from the Greek language (ἡ) Ὠκουμένη (γῆ), which literally means "the inhabited world", but which was also applied more narrowly to mean the Roman Empire. Bishops belonging to what became known as the Church of the East participated in none of the councils later than the second, and further noteworthy schisms led to non-participation by other members of what had previously been considered a single Christian Church. Later ecumenical councils thus included bishops of only parts of the Church as previously constituted and were rejected or ignored by Christians not belonging to those parts.

The first seven Ecumenical Councils, recognized by both the eastern and western branches of Chalcedonian Christianity, were convoked by Christian Roman Emperors, who also enforced the decisions of those councils within the state church of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire Divided

The Roman Empire was divided by Diocletian into the Western and Eastern Empires. This division was due to the growing of the Empire. The government was unable to control such a large area and appointed a ruler for each Empire.

Emperor Diocletian divided the Roman Empire into two parts, eastern and western, in A.D. 284. The eastern empire was controlled by Emperor Diocletian and the western empire by Emperor Maximian but Diocletian retained absolute power over both halves. Emperor Constantine built a new capital, Constantinople, where Byzantium used to be, in the east.

During the years after Diocletian. the Roman Empire was reunited and redivided on various occasions. Constantine reunited it, and then divided it among his sons. The final division was in 395 AD, when Emperor Theodosius I died, leaving it to his sons Arcadius and Honorius.