

# KING EZANA

The king who made Ethiopia and Eritrea Christian — ten questions and answers

## 1. Who was King Ezana?

The ruler of the kingdom of Aksum in the fourth century, and the first Christian king of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

## 2. When did he rule?

Roughly 320 to 360 CE.

## 3. Who taught him?

Frumentius, a Christian from Tyre who was shipwrecked on the Red Sea and became tutor to the young prince.

## 4. Who came with Frumentius?

His companion Aedesius. Frumentius taught the prince; Aedesius served as the king's cup-bearer.

## 5. Who were his family?

His father Ousanas, whom tradition calls Ella Amida. His mother is remembered as Sofya. His brother Saizana was baptised with him.

## 6. Why did Frumentius go to Alexandria?

To ask for a bishop for the Christians of Aksum. Athanasius consecrated Frumentius himself, around 328–330.

## 7. What proves the conversion?

The coins. His father's carry the disc and crescent — the sun and the moon. His carry the cross. The same mint, one reign.

## 8. Was Ethiopia Christian in the first century?

No. The official baptised in Acts 8 served the kandake of Kush — in what is now Sudan — and went home to Meroë. The highlands had no church before Ezana.

## 9. What else did he do?

He campaigned in four directions, controlled the port of Adulis, and received a letter from the Roman emperor Constantius II around 356.

## 10. What did he leave behind?

A Christian nation, the Bible in Ge'ez with 81 books, and a church that is about 1,700 years old.

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## KEY DATES

c. 270 Endybis begins the coinage · 325 Council of Nicaea · 328 Athanasius bishop of Alexandria · c. 328–330 Frumentius consecrated · 330s the baptism of Ezana and Saizana · c. 350 Meroë ceases to be a capital · c. 356 Constantius II's letter · c. 360 Ezana's reign ends · 5th–6th c. the Nine Saints and the Ge'ez Bible · 1959 Ethiopian patriarchate · 1993/1998 Eritrean autocephaly

## FOR DISCUSSION

Why do you think his name is not taught? What does it mean for a country to be told its history began with somebody else? Where could you go to see a coin of Ezana?