

# Takele Bezuneh (1918–2014)

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MANDEFRO ALEMAYEHU

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Takele Bezuneh was ordained as the first Adventist pastor in Ethiopia in 1954.

## Early Life

Takele Bezuneh was born on May 15, 1918, in the Ambazuria neighborhood, Arbaya/Belsa district, North Gondar zone, Ethiopia. His parents were Bezuneh Tesema and Asayeta Yemer. He had seven siblings: two sisters-- Zertihun and Zewditu, and five brothers--Alemu, Adane, Agedew, Abebe, and Gezahegn.<sup>1</sup>

Young Takele spent his early years in small villages, the first being Ambazuria with his parents and siblings until the opportunity arose nearby to learn to read and write. His father sent him to a Coptic Church teacher (priest) who lived close to their village so that he could learn how to write and read the Geez language. During the Italian occupation, Bezuneh's family moved to Alanegie, interrupting his informal education.<sup>2</sup> Takele married Bezunesh Fentaye in 1938 before he became a Seventh-day Adventist and had eleven children (five males and six females).<sup>3</sup>

## Joining the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Takele accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and was baptized in 1946 at the Debre Tabor Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had been stricken with a disease called Elephantiasis, and because of this, he went to Debre Tabor for medical treatment. During that incident, he became acquainted with the Seventh-day Adventist Christians there. He stayed with them for one year in Debre Tabor, studied the Bible intensely with the Adventist pastors, and was baptized there.<sup>4</sup>

## Joining the Ministry in the Adventist Church

Immediately after his baptism in 1946, he started to serve the church as a volunteer evangelist in the Alange village for one year. Then, Debre Tabor SDA Mission called him with his family to engage in formal education and training in evangelism. In 1947, he was assigned to serve as a traveling evangelist with Alemu Wasihun, Wolde Berhan Kinfu, and Aleka Molalign. During the dry season, the team traveled extensively to places like Dehana and Tarna on one side of the Tekezie River, and to Melza, Belesa, Qualisa, and Ebenat on the other side. Their itineraries covered mostly places with isolated church members, new Christians who had blood relations,

and non-Adventists and interested Orthodox Church members who had extended unique invitations to them<sup>5</sup> During the rainy season, they returned to Debre Tabor and were given refresher courses by Elder Bjaanes (a missionary from Norway). Takele was highly qualified in the Geez language and was helpful when working primarily in an Orthodox area such as Begemeder (North West Ethiopia)<sup>6</sup>

In 1948, Takele was commissioned to establish the Adventist presence among the Bete Israel (the people who had been converted to the Jewish faith) in north Gondar, in the Wogera area. Within one year, 70 people were baptized and joined the church. As a result, a primary school was opened in 1949 in Wogera, where the church was established.<sup>7</sup> During Takele's ministry, the persecutors, especially the Orthodox priests and other people, falsely accused Takele many times. He was taken to court seven times, arrested, and jailed two times because of preaching the gospel of salvation. On one occasion, while preaching at a small town called Chilga in west Gondar, he was arrested and summoned to stand before the district governor and judge to answer the charge. The accusers were Orthodox Christians. The charge was preaching the new doctrine among the Orthodox people, for which he had no permit from the government authorities as that was against the law of the land. The judge asked, "Do you have permission to preach in our district?" Evangelist Takele replied, "Yes, we do," without hesitation. The judge said, "Let me see it." Then Takele turned to Matthew 28:19-20 and read. After reading, the spokesperson of the accusers questioned, "Is that command for you?" In addition, Takele politely answered, no, it is not only for us, but it is for all of you Christians here, including his honor, the judge. The judge and the court laughed and released him without saying any further words.<sup>8</sup>

Takele was ordained as the first ordained Seventh-day Adventist pastor of Ethiopia in 1954. After his ordination, he served churches in Feres Meda, Addisu Ager, and Gondar under the North West Ethiopia field.<sup>9</sup> He established and served the Adventist Church for over 37 years during challenging times before his retirement in 1985. However, while residing in Gondar as a retired pastor, he actively preached and taught members in the church located where he lived, conducted evangelistic efforts, was invited as a guest speaker in different places, and baptized many new souls. He was actively visiting the sick, the poor, the discouraged, and the lonely until his eyes were fading away, finally losing all sight.<sup>10</sup>

On March 11, 2014, Pastor Takele passed away at the age of 97 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where his daughter Menbersh was taking care of him in her house. During his long service to the church, he was much loved and well-respected in all the places he worked.<sup>11</sup>

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## SOURCES

Woldeselassie, Truneh. *Adventism in Ethiopia: The Incredible Saga of the Beginning and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventist Work in Ethiopia* (n.p., 2005).

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## NOTES

1. Gashaw Takele (Takele Bezuneh's son), interview by Mandefro Alemayehu in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 26, 2020.
2. Ibid.
3. Menbersh Takele (Takele Bezuneh's daughter), interview by Mandefro Alemayehu in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 25, 2019.
4. Gashaw Takele (Takele Bezuneh's son), interview by Mandefro Alemayehu in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 26, 2020.
5. Truneh Woldeselassie, *Adventism in Ethiopia: The Incredible Saga of the Beginning and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventist Work in Ethiopia* (2005), 217.
6. Ibid., 217.
7. Ibid., 220.
8. Woldesselassie, 218.
9. Yeneneh Takele (Takele Bezuneh's grandson), interview by Mandefro Alemayehu in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 14, 2020.
10. Ibid.
11. Menberish Takele (Takele Bezuneh's daughter), interview by Mandefro Alemayehu in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 25, 2019.

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