

Ackah, Christian Abraham (1883–1912)

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Christian Abraham Ackah was a founding member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana. In addition to his work in literature evangelism, he founded two churches and two schools, and was the first Ghanaian to be ordained a church elder and to serve on a union mission executive committee.



Christian Abraham Ackah

Photo courtesy of Kojo Polley-Kwofie.

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Ackah was born in 1883 at Kikam, a town seven kilometers west of the River Ankobra and founded in 1500. His father was Egya Ackah. After completing his formal education at the castle school in Axim, which was built in 1515 by the Portuguese,¹ C. A. Eckah became a teacher and businessman. His business took him to Cape Coast in 1903 where he married a Fante woman in 1907 when he was 24 years old.

Ackah and his wife had only two boys before he traveled abroad. His eldest son, C. A. Ackah, Jr. (1908-1998) became the first principal (now vice chancellor) of the University College of Cape Coast. Their second son, David Theodore Ackah (1910-2002) was the first managing director of the Diamond Marketing Corporation in Ghana.²

Conversion and Baptism

Ackah was a leading member of the Methodist Church in Cape Coast before his conversion to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1903.³ C. A. Ackah first heard the advent message at Cape Coast around 1900 through some friends who had earlier studied a tract found by Francis I. U. Dolphijn in Apam. He was baptized in 1903 by James M. Hyatt in Cape Coast. Five years later, Ackah wrote to the General Conference in the United States, "I was known by the public as a Sabbath-keeper in the year 1903 when James M. Hyatt and his wife (Marion) were in town, but now I am known by individuals as a minister while I am not."⁴

Ministerial and Missionary Work

Fulfilling the adage, "Charity begins at home," Ackah began to share the Advent message with his relatives and friends while continuing to study the Sabbath. It is on record that a month after his baptism in 1903 "a voice was heard in the town hall of Kikam addressing the people of the town. The voice was clear with an unmistakable tone like a Hebrew Prophet, modulated towards a Crescendo for the urgency of the Advent message." It was the voice of C. A. Ackah.⁵

Within, few years, Ackah established the first three Adventist schools in Ghana at his own expense. He established the first school in Cape Coast in February 1907, the second at Kikam in June 1908, and the third at Axim in 1909.⁶ All three schools included elementary departments for children and evangelism classes for adults.

Ackah also helped D. C. Babcock to establish the first two organized Adventist churches in Ghana, one in Kikam and the other at Axim. Ellsworth Olsen reported, "Early in 1909, urgent requests have come from the Gold Coast, C. E. F. Thompson went to Kikam and Axim and conducted a series of meetings among the Nzema people. That year D. C. Babcock visited these points, held further meetings with the people, and baptized about fifty believers, organizing churches at Kikam and Axim."⁷ D. C. Babcock organized Kikam church on Tuesday October 19, 1909. On that day C. A. Ackah who was the first literature evangelist in Ghana was ordained as a church elder, the first-ever ordained elder in Ghana, as part of the church organization.⁸ The second organized church in Ghana also located in the same district. On Sabbath October 23, 1909, Babcock organized the second Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana, that of Axim, the Nzema Capital.⁹ The organization of Kikam church made Adventism the second organized denomination in the whole of West Africa following that of Waterloo church in Sierra Leone, which was organized in 1906.

C. A. Ackah became an executive committee member of the West African Mission in 1909.

C. A. Ackah and C.E.F Thompson, a Sierra Leonean SDA missionary to Ghana then stationed at Axim, were the two delegates that represented Ghana at the very first general meeting of SDA workers in West Africa held in Sierra Leone for some nine days (October 10-18, 1910). Their reports at the session focused on their two mission bases in Nzema land, Kikam and Axim, and their environments. Kikam and Axim had about 100 Sabbath-keepers.¹⁰

In his report to the 37th General Conference Session in Washington, DC, on June 6, 1909, D. C. Babcock also touched on Ackah's labor for Seventh-day Adventism in Ghana, acknowledging his utility and dynamism for God's cause and Adventism there: "Brother C. A. Ackah took up the book work at Cape Coast, Gold Coast, and other points, and has disposed of \$500 worth of books and other literature. He also held some meeting in his native village, among the Nzema people, and reports forty-three Sabbath-keepers."¹¹ The finale of Babcock's visit to Ghana in October 1909 was the deal the pastor struck with Ackah on the complete the transfer of the Kikam Adventist church and school assets or property from Ackah's control, management, and ownership to that of the General Conference.¹² In one of Babcock's reports to the General Conference, he remarked, "I am glad to say that I have just returned from the Gold Coast and have had a settlement with Brother Ackah and have taken over the property he has for the mission so that all orders will be made through the office at Freetown from this."¹³

Ackah was a trainer of teachers. Some teachers who served at the Kikam Adventist School during the early years of its existence included J. D Hayford, Francis Dolphijn, J. A Bonney, Samuel Duncan Morgue, and John Kwabena Kaipro Garbrah. Garbrah later became the first Ghanaian ordained minister in the Adventist Church. Among Ackah's students who later became ministers were Solomon Benjamin Essien, Isaac Ackah Benson, and James Awurade Miezah Arloo. In 1911, C. A. Ackah felt that D. C. Babcock and other foreigners who succeeded Babcock did not understand the Ghanaian culture and customs. He decided that at the beginning of 1912 he would visit the General Conference headquarters to explain to the higher body how things work in Ghana. While in Great Britain en route to the United States, he suffered from "acute pulmonary tuberculosis." He died on April 25, 1912, at the age of twenty-nine.

Legacy

C. A. Ackah's achievements were instrumental to the development of the Adventist Church in Ghana. He was the founder of the first two organized churches in Ghana, located in Kikam and Axim, around 1909. He also founded the first two Adventist schools in Ghana, located in Cape Coast and Kikam in 1907 and 1908 respectively. All of this property was acquired at Ackah's own expense and gifted to the Adventist denomination when D. C. Babcock arrived in 1909.¹⁴ The first indigenous Ghanaian literature evangelist in the Adventist Church, Ackah also became the first elder to be ordained in Ghana on October 19, 1909.

In 1909, he also became the first Ghanaian executive committee member of the West African Union Mission, which gave him the responsibility of representing Ghana at both general and executive committee meetings at WAUM headquarters in Sierra Leone.

Ackah was also a mentor who trained influential evangelists such as J. D. Hayford, Francis Dolphijn, J. A. Bonney, Samuel Duncan Morgue, and John Kaipro Gabrah, who later became the first Ghanaian ordained a minister in the Adventist Church. The youth he trained as evangelists in Ashanti and other regions were, among others, S. B.

Essien, J. A. M. Arloo, I. A. Benson, and others. These three were later among the pioneer pastors ordained in the Gold Coast area.

The stature and influence of Ackah's contributions led Kofi Owusu-Mensa, historian of Adventist history in Africa, to remark, "If however, I had the power and the right to do so, I would rename Valley View University, founded seventy years later in Ghana in 1979. . . "Ackah University" in honor and memory of Christian Abraham Ackah of Kikam."¹⁵

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3. Isaac Ayaim Ansah (1910-2002), elder of Kikam church, interview by author, 2002.
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5. Kojo Polley-Kwofie, *The Beginning of Seventh-day Adventism in Ghana: The first 50 Years (1888-1938)*, vol. 1 (Accra: Agape Publishers, 2010), 34; Isaac Ayaim Ansah (1910-2002), elder of Kikam church, interview by author, 2002.
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7. M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association. 1925), 509.
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