

# Too, Job Kibirgen (1902–1994)

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Job Kibirgen Too was a pioneer Nandi evangelist and gospel worker who zealously planted Adventist churches and schools in Nandi and beyond.

## Early Life

Perhaps the person from the Kaigat Dispersal with the most remarkable background was Job Kibirgen araap Too. In his youth, Job was a disaster. He was born and brought up at Kaptiraon in Tarakwa, Burnt Forest in Uasin Gishu county. He later moved to Itigo in central Nandi where he purchased land and settled. He sported a Sikh-style beard that earned him the nickname *Kalasinga*.<sup>1</sup> At Itigo he was the village troublemaker everyone dreaded. A tall and stout person, he would severely beat his wife every time he was drunk. Many women he married abandoned him, fearing for their lives. He drank heavily to mask the fact that after so many years of being married to so many women, he was unable to father children.

## Turnaround

One day after drinking himself to a stupor, he passed out in a trench and it rained on him overnight. He was so ashamed of what had happened to him, but he could not bring himself to change. During one of his drinking sprees around 1940, he picked a fight with a man who was his match in strength. The man struck him so hard that he collapsed at once and was unconscious for a very long time. When he recovered, he told himself he would never drink again.

To maintain his sobriety, he determined to make a decent man of himself by joining one of the Christian missions. He first visited a church which had been established at nearby Mosoriot, but when he realized they tolerated alcohol and tobacco consumption, he felt that they were no better than where he had been. He even met some of his drinking partners in that church, so he just walked away. He asked around if there was another church which was different. As he was still enquiring, Caleb araap Busienei came around and talked with him. Job listened carefully as they studied the Bible together. He told Caleb that he agreed with him, but asked, "Would this God give me what I did not have in my home?"<sup>2</sup>

Caleb replied in the affirmative, and then Kalasinga told him that he did not have a child at home. In 1939 he had married Esther who was 16 years old, but nearly two years into the marriage there was no sign of a child. He knew the situation would be like it was with the previous women. Caleb told him that God would give him anything he wanted. Caleb brought in Elders Aaron Moiben, Philip araap Kogo, and Silvano Kipruto, as well as Anna 'bot Chemarinda, to Kalasinga's house and prayed. Soon after that Esther announced that she was with child. After the answered prayers, Kalasinga felt touched and immediately made up his mind to become a Seventh-day Adventist.

## Evangelism Work

Together with his wife, he began attending the church at Kaigat in 1941, and in 1942 they were both baptized there by Pastor Petero Chetambe of the Chebwai Mission. Soon a daughter was born to them and they named her Elizabeth. When she was born, the same group who had prayed for her birth came together to give thanks to God. By now Kalasinga had organized a Sabbath School at Tuigoin about two and a half miles from his home. Job preached there and Japheth araap Yego joined the faith. Others included Paulo araap Tui, Zakayo araap Chepkitai, and Philemon araap Bwambok. Soon Kalasinga organized another Sabbath School at Kapkonjumoo which was the same distance from his home as Tuigoin. Zephaniah araap Sang and Sawe araap Birir were some of the foundational members. Others included araap Bett Kapkatiya, Johana araap Koech, David araap Samoei, and Kipsugut araap Sitienei, who today are considered fathers of the faith in northern Nandi. Work at Kapkonjumoo picked up faster than at Tuigoin, and the Tuigoin numbers fell so much that it had to be closed for a while. Job returned and soon the numbers picked up and Tuigoin was reorganized. He renamed the place Kipkongorwa and secured a seven-acre plot for the church. He soon brought to the faith Sila araap Chebusiit, Samuel araap Lelgut, and Philemon araap Bwambok, and this time the work in the area picked up fast. Philemon araap Bwambok moved to establish Kipsamoo, yet another congregation not far from there.<sup>3</sup> Within the first five years of becoming an Adventist, Job had organized three new churches.

When the local administration again denied the Adventists use of the Kipsamoo property, mysterious events happened that left the locals awestruck. After a major standoff over the property, lightning suddenly struck the land in broad daylight with a cloudless sky, leading many people to conclude that it was a direct message from God. They left Job alone and he quietly established his church.

## Further Evangelism Work

Now in fulltime self-supporting ministry, Job became a literature evangelist and shared his faith on a house-to-house basis. Job was a courageous man with a gift for oration which he used skillfully to win souls for Christ. He used witty and practical illustrations and expressions to help him make his point. He took most of his books to the town of Eldoret, 12 miles away, where he met people of many different communities.

In 1952 Job worked to establish a Sabbath School at Lelboinet not far from his home. Here he had brought to the faith Musa Kapchemochet, Musa araap Tanui (Kabarsumei), Zephaniah araap Katam, and his brother Mica araap Chumo, three brothers Silvano, Benjamin and Petero Chepkali, and Hosea araap Barng'etuny. Today there is a thriving Adventist community there which has branched out to Kipsasuron. By 1957 Adventism had taken root in northwestern Nandi and the numbers were growing strong. Job continued his preaching and soon his reputation as an effective evangelist had spread. He preached as far away as Eldoret, Laikipia, Thomson's Falls, Olenguruone, and even in Nairobi. Job organized the new congregation in Eldoret and helped establish the Eldoret Central Church. During one of his evangelism tours in Nairobi, he met and preached to a young man named Silas Were who became an Adventist. After a while Silas Were decided that he would become a minister of the gospel and at one time served as the Sabbath School director of the Central Kenya Field (today Central Kenya Conference).

In 1962 Job organized what would become the very first camp meeting at Lelmokwo for the churches in his area. With a thriving congregation, the church spread to Mulango near the border with Uasin-Gishu, then to Aturei and to Lemook near Kipkenyo. At the coming of independence, many of his initial congregants migrated to take advantage of the opening up of the White Highlands in Uasin Gishu and Trans-Nzoia with the departure of the Europeans. Today large congregations of Adventists are thriving because of the pioneers who were converted as a result of Job's work. The first wave of his congregants migrated to the Tarakwa area of Uasin Gishu and took the faith with them. Another wave from the initial Itigo members included Zephaniah araap Sang who moved to the Kipkabus area and Chumo araap Bett who relocated further into the Uasin Gishu area.

## Later Life

Towards the end of his life, Job maintained his faith. His only regret was that the church and school he had started on his own land at Itigo had fallen into the hands of another denomination, and there was nothing he could do. Even then, Job asked and was allowed to conduct the Pastoral Program for the kids in the school there.<sup>4</sup> He was given an hour once each week, and he faithfully taught the children from the Bible during that time. After bouts of ill health, Job died on November 30, 1994. He was survived by wife Esther who died in August 2017.

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### NOTES

1. Kiswahili word for a Sikh.
2. Esther Birgen, interview by author, June 12, 2014, Itigo.

3. Philip Kili, the son-in-law of Job Kibirgen Too, interview by author June 15, 2014.

4. Dr. Nicholas Letting, interview by author, July 8, 2014.

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