

Biomdo, Stephen Kipruto araap

(1914–1984)

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Stephen araap Biomdo was a pioneer Kipsigis Adventist, teacher, and evangelist from Kenya.

Stephen araap Biomdo was born in 1914, at Kichawir village near Manga on the southern edge of Kipsigis country in western Kenya.¹ His father, Kipyagut araap Mosin, joined the King's African Rifles to fight in World War I and left just as soon as his son had been born. He returned in 1918 after successfully fighting for the British in the Far East. He rejoined his family at Kichawir, but was displaced by the European settlers in 1925 when Stephen was 11. Mosin moved his family to Cheyken, near Kericho, where they settled for a while. Stephen's older brother, John "Bundi" araap Biomdo, joined the Africa Inland Mission at Litein and Stephen joined him there in 1926. It was here that he began his early education. John studied masonry under the legendary Andrew M. Andersen, known to the Kipsigis as Bwana Fundi or Bwana Bundi, which is where John got his own nickname *Bundi*. He left for Kabete Native Industrial Training School near Nairobi, leaving his young brother Stephen at Litein. Both of them had become members of the AIM. After a year at Litein, Stephen left and joined the newly established Kipsigis Native Industrial Training School in 1927 and studied there for four years. The school later changed its name to the Kabianga Government African School and moved from Kericho township to its present location at Kabianga. The school later became a high school and today it is a university. Stephen was circumcised towards the end of 1929 and in 1930 he came out of seclusion and returned to Kabianga for his final year. After completing his education, he was sent to Sitotwet Primary School to work as a teacher. He began teaching in 1931 and lived with his relatives there. His father continued to live at Cheyken.

In 1936 he purchased some land at Kebeneti. He taught until 1938 when he left Sitotwet and returned to Kebeneti where he settled down to start a family with Bornes, whom he had married in 1938. It was while at Kebeneti that Stephen met Nahashon Nyasimi Osebe the brother of a neighbor of his, Kimisoi araap Osebe. Kimisoi introduced Nahashon to Stephen because both were literate and so had something in common. It was from their mutual ability to read and write that they began to study the Bible. Nahashon had become an Adventist in Kisii and so came around to share his faith among the Kipsigis whose language he understood very well.

Another person in Osebe's Bible study class was Martha neb'araap Biomdo who was the wife of Stephen's older brother Bundi. Martha and Bundi had met in Litein and after their education were married. Martha was an educated woman and understood very well the biblical exposition by Osebe. Martha and Stephen faithfully sat with Osebe to study the Bible and it was in 1939 that they were ready to be baptized. On the agreed day, the two took the daylong journey to Nyaiguta Seventh-day Adventist Church where they were to be baptized. As the duo were lowered into the water, they emerged to become the first Kipsigis Seventh-day Adventists.

Biomdo returned and secured land to establish a church. He donated his own land and so immediately they built a tiny church of mud and grass thatch. They later moved, leaving the old church-house to become a school. He then quit government service and began to teach for the church. He taught for a while at Kebeneti before being transferred to Kabokyek in 1943. He taught there until 1950 when he retired and returned to Kebeneti to be with his family and tend the young church. He now became a full-time missionary taking the gospel message throughout Kipsigis country. He preached in Magenche in Soht, Matarmat, Kamolok in Soin, and Kimogoro, and of course in his Kebeneti backyard. The church began to grow tremendously with so many new churches and Sabbath Schools being established.

In the year before his conversion, he married Borness Chepkorir and they had a son the following year. They named him Andrew. He would be the first of a record total of 18 children borne by the same wife. Soon after joining the Adventist church, Stephen araap Biomdo, his wife, and his sister-in-law Martha, as well as the Osebes, became the core of the new congregation at Kebeneti. Stephen, feeling touched by the need to establish the church, gave away nearly two-thirds of his own land upon which the church, school, and dispensary were constructed. Biomdo had hoped a mission station would be established there, but the poor road network made this difficult.

Establishing the church at Kebeneti involved lots of sacrifice. Stephen encountered great resistance from even members of his own family who tried to prevail on him to abandon his new faith. Although a good number of them turned around and joined the faith, it was not without great patience and persistence on the part of Stephen. One time after establishing the school in 1943, the villagers stormed his remaining land, stating that he should have given up everything for the school. They told him that he could live on his mother's land up on the hill at Chepkooi. It took the intervention of the European district officer who arrived and stated that the land that Stephen had given was sufficient to use for the school and mission work.

Stephen constructed a house for the pastor right next to the church. Some of the prominent pastors who served in Kebeneti include Ezekiel Kimenjo araap Maswai, Pastor Enoch araap Keino, Pastor Frederick Wangai, Pastor Johana Keror, Pastor I. Aming'a, and Pastor Patrick Kitio Kania, among others.

Stephen quit teaching to become a full-time evangelist. He traveled throughout the Kipsigis country preaching, teaching, and making new believers. Once while preaching with his friend Caleb Chumo in Bureti, they were confronted by certain people offended by the Adventist message. They were marched to the chief's camp at

Kapkatet and thrown into jail. Instead of mourning at their situation the duo began to sing joyfully, praising God. They sang so loudly that soon the other prisoners learned the songs and joined them in singing. In no time, there was a loud massive choir of convicts that could be heard on the streets of Kapkatet, drawing curious onlookers. Seeing that they were winning souls, the jailers released them and ordered them to leave the area immediately.

Stephen become a respected elder of the Adventist faith in Kebeneti and beyond. The church spread to Kabokyek, Marumbasi, Kamaget, Ngariet, and beyond. In 1983 he was diagnosed with Leukemia and his health quickly deteriorated. He was hospitalized several times and lost the battle in November 1984. He was laid to rest on his farm at Chepkooi in Kebeneti during a funeral that was attended by thousands who knew him. Borness passed away in April 2002, surviving her husband by 18 years. This made her the longest continuous member of Kebeneti with a total of 61 years of membership. She was laid to rest beside her husband.

Source

Sang, Godfrey K. and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017.

NOTES

1. Note

Information in this article has been adapted from the following book coauthored by the author of this article: Godfrey K. Sang and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi, Kenya: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017), 189-197.

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