



Walter and Frieda Ising
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Ising, Walter Konrad Wilhelm (1881–1950) and Frieda (1884–1966)

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Walter and Frieda Ising were German Adventist missionaries to the Middle East.

Early Life and Marriage

Walter Konrad Wilhelm Ising was born March 30, 1881, in Danzig, Germany. At the age of eight, he was sent by his mother together with his sister to the United States, where he attended a Lutheran school in St. Joseph, Missouri. Six years later he returned to Germany. In the summer of 1903, after he participated in a camp meeting and had a

personal conversation with William Spicer, he decided to become a pastor. At the beginning of 1904 he was baptized by Emil Frauchiger in Berlin. Immediately afterwards he began studying at the Mission Seminary in Friedensau.

Frieda Schlegel was born January 29, 1884, in Vohwinkel, Germany. She was the third of nine children born to Swiss Adventist parents. After learning French at the French Worker's Training school at Gland,¹ she became a governess to a family in Leipzig, Germany. She then went to Friedensau Missionary Seminary to become a nurse. It was here that she met Walter. In 1904 Walter proposed to marry Frieda by asking the school band to serenade her. When she concluded her studies, Frieda began working as a Bible worker, and in August 1907 she and Walter were married.²

From Military Service to Church Service

At the end of 1904 Walter was enlisted into military service in the Imperial Guard of the Kaiser.³ He refused to serve on the Sabbath. This refusal brought lengthy negotiations before the military authorities and finally led to his arrest. However, the military authority was quite helpless in this case; after repeated interrogation, they decided to end the case on the grounds that his feeble feet rendered him unfit for the imperial Guard of the Kaiser. Hence, he was released from military service. Immediately after this he was appointed as Ludwig R. Conradi's personal secretary.⁴

From 1905 to 1908 Walter was secretary of the German Union, which also covered Russia, Austria, Hungary, and the Eastern Balkan states.⁵ Around the end of 1905 he began serving as editor of the Adventist German church paper *Zions-Wächter*.⁶ In 1908, after a mission center was established in Beirut by Ludwig Richard Conradi, the then vice-president of the General Conference and leader of the unofficial European division,⁷ someone was needed to lead the new mission in the Middle East. Ising was chosen for this task. A major reason was that Conradi wanted a close associate who he thought would further his mission ideas.⁸ By virtue of being Conradi's secretary, Ising was the assistant secretary of the unofficial European division. He had been to the United States and he had traveled with Conradi, and in the process he had become acquainted with the Adventist Church in Europe. In addition, his association with Conradi helped him understand the aspirations of the leader of European Adventism.

Missionary Work in the Middle East

In April 1908 Walter Ising, who had just turned 27, was sent with his wife, Frieda, and their baby daughter to the Levant Union Mission (covering Greece, Crete, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, parts of Northern Africa, and Persia)⁹ Its headquarters was in Beirut, Lebanon, where the Isings settled and began to lead the Adventist mission in the Middle East. At that time the Adventist presence in the Arabic countries was minimal. Ising himself reports that work had started in Beirut, Haifa, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, with a membership of "only about twenty, including the workers themselves."¹⁰

Things turned out quite difficult for the missionary couple. According to David Trim,

"Hardly had Walter and Frieda arrived when both contracted typhoid fever. At the advice of other Westerners, they were moved out of Beirut into the hills. Left prostrate, Walter could no longer dream about how to transform the work; instead he devoted himself to prayer and reflection. He earnestly asked God to help them 'find His people among the inhabitants of this land.'"¹¹

With a conviction to do God's work, he moved back to Beirut and started offering Bible

classes. "In 1909, he baptized a group of men. Several were from the Ottoman province of Mesopotamia—today's country of Iraq."¹² Upon getting to Beirut, he labored to study Arabic and enrolled in the Syrian Protestant College. Then he began Bible studies at his home specially geared towards the students at the college. According to Baldur Pfeiffer, historian of early Adventism in the Middle East, Ising noticed that the students from the Christian communities of northern Syria and Iraq were interested in religious matters. Some of these students, already Protestants, became his first converts.¹³

Soon afterwards Ising began mission strategizing. He approached the work in three ways. First, he began working by building on what was already done by the workers there. In this vein, it is reported that he traveled widely over his field, in Syria, Palestine, Arabia, and Mesopotamia, reaching isolated brethren and opening the fields for workers. Through all the dangers and discomforts of Oriental travel in that time—on foot, on horseback and camelback, on coastwise trading vessels, and crude native river boats, and even in the first few automobiles to appear in the East, he made himself familiar with the conditions and the prospects for the gospel through this wide area. In Mosul and Baghdad he found and established faithful members, prominent among whom have been the Hasso brothers, merchants.¹⁴

In Lebanon, Ising located Elias Zarub, who had been working as a pioneer preacher and colporteur in Alma el Shaab. However, Ising and Zarub had different ideas on how to approach mission. Ising was a Western missionary who was interested in church unity and mission organization. On the other hand, Zarub's ideas centered on following an independent course like establishing an indigenous Middle Eastern Church. With such differing concepts, the two men could not work in harmony. As a result, Zarub left the Middle East and immigrated to Brazil with his family, where he continued to be a loyal and active member.¹⁵

Second, Ising focused on German communities. He did this because he found that he was not knowledgeable of the culture, language, and people of the Arab world. When Ising first arrived in Beirut, he was forced to rely on the German community there. Unfortunately, he found limited interest.¹⁶ In Haifa, he visited Mrs. Müller, an Adventist

German nurse, who was working among the German settlers and colonists. He used the contacts created by Mrs. Müller by visiting “a number of the colonists, and holding interesting Bible readings with them” in hopes that there would be an interest in the Adventist message.¹⁷

Third, aside from studying Arabic, which he pursued earnestly, he labored for the transition of the mission to indigenous leadership. However, plans for this were only realized beginning in 1928.

Egypt and Back to Europe

Around 1913, when the territory of Egypt was divided, Ising became the superintendent of the mission in Lower Egypt with a combined membership of 50 people.¹⁸ Soon after Ising decided to make a trip to Iraq. The aim of the trip, which lasted about a year, was to organize the Adventist work there. While he was in Iraq, Frieda Ising and her little daughter went to London, where she studied midwifery. In 1914, when World War I broke out, Frieda took care of wounded English soldiers, while her husband, who at the time was living in Egypt, a British territory, was interned throughout the war. As a German citizen, he was sent to a concentration camp on the Island of Malta, where he spent 61 months without sufficient food or water.¹⁹ Ising remained the official president of the Syrian-Egyptian Mission, with George Keough acting as supervisor of the mission during this period.²⁰ With Ising interned, work in Lower Egypt was stopped. After the Armistice on November 11, 1918, Frieda went back to Friedensau to work as a midwife. A year later the family was finally reunited when Ising came back to Europe.²¹ He taught temporarily at the Mission Seminary in Friedensau, and for six months he directed the Home Missionary and Sabbath School departments of the West German Union Conference.

Following the War, the mission in Europe was reorganized. In July 1920, Ising was elected secretary of the European Division. His family spent two years in Denmark and six years in Berne, Switzerland.²² While he served as secretary, he used the opportunity to visit the Middle East and survey the work there. During this survey he renewed contacts with a group of 120 men from As-Salt in Transjordan, who before World War I had requested to join the Adventist Church if educational support was provided. The group had a disagreement with their own denomination. Ising did not approve of the request when it was made, since it did not present a true picture of conversion to Adventism. After the War, Ising rethought the matter and resumed contacts with the As-Salt group. Pfeiffer argues that Ising “saw the moment opportune for the operation of an outpost on the periphery of the desert under supervision of a national pastor.”²³ This type of engagement appears to be the first attempt of Adventists to work in the desert. In the end, the survey helped Ising to strategize for a better plan for mission outreach in the Middle East.

Middle East Again

In December 1928 the Isings were called back to the Middle East Mission. Ising “returned in 1929 to the Near East, as the director of the Arabic Union Mission (territory of the former Levant Union), and there continued for seven years more.”²⁴ Ising’s focus this time was the support of indigenous leadership and ministers. Soon he convened a general meeting of all missionaries and national pastors. The two-week conference saw exchange of experiences from missionaries as well as insights from those who had been sent to the School of Oriental Studies in Cairo. The latter especially stimulated the sessions: “The discussions drew out the convictions that more preparation was necessary” as well as highlighting the need for similar meetings.²⁵

In 1930, while Ising was in Palestine, the first conversion and baptism in this region took place.²⁶ In 1935²⁷ Ising conveyed another workers’ meeting. This time, the attendees decided to devote themselves to greater awareness of Islam as well as prepare themselves better for its challenges. According to Pfeiffer, to encourage independent studies and foster systematic research, a working group was organized. Its main duty was to find ways for approaching Islam from a Muslim point of view. For this reason, an understanding of the Muslim’s religious thought pattern and his historical background with its problems and aspirations was the basic prerequisite. In approaching this task, each participant was encouraged to acquire a fundamental knowledge of Islam and to study two books in the field of Islam within one year.²⁸

Later Life

It was in the Middle East that Walter and Frieda Ising’s son Konrad was born after they had waited for another child for 20 years. In 1937 the Isings returned to Europe. Ising became the secretary of the Central European Division. In 1938 he began working at the General Conference as associate secretary in charge of the Sabbath School department. The family moved to Takoma Park and built their home on Sycamore Avenue. From 1946 to 1950, Ising was a field secretary of the General Conference. During those four years, he was responsible for the accommodation of about 250 displaced persons in the United States.²⁹ Before his retirement he was an active General Conference staff member, who appeared in several committees as member, chair, or secretary. He retired in 1950.³⁰ His wife Frieda was involved with Dorcas work, was an avid gardener, and was a life member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) She won a ribbon from the Horticultural Club Takoma Park and received a plaque from the Red Cross as a result of her humanitarian activities. On September 23, 1950, Walter Ising died. Soon after her husband’s death Frieda’s health deteriorated. She died July 11, 1966.³¹

Contribution

Walter and Frieda Ising's lives were a vivid portrayal of sacrifice, dedication, and zeal for the denomination where they found the gospel. As a pioneer missionary, Walter Ising's dynamic leadership led to establishing Adventism in parts of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Jerusalem. He encouraged the missionaries there to let indigenous leaders take up the affairs of the church. As an administrator and mission strategist, he ensured that policies that favored the mission efforts of the denomination were carried out. He also surveyed the mission fields to that effect as a GC field secretary.

Ising's leadership in the Middle East was a dynamic effort aimed at gospel proclamation to reach the average Muslim. He also engaged in scholarly activities, which included publishing *Among the Arabs in Bible Lands* and *Naturwissenschaft und Schöpfungslehre* (1925),³² his translation of George McCready Price's *Q. E. D., or New Light on the Doctrine of Creation*.³³

Walter Ising was also a missiologist in his thinking. His book *Among the Arabs in Bible Lands* was the fruit of his first-hand encounter of Palestine, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Damascus, and Babylon. This book contains a positive condensed explanation of Islam and its adherents. Ising's account of the culture, society, geography, and plants and animals of some parts of the Middle-East qualifies his book as an anthropological work in its own right. In it, he accounts for Muslims' happy and hospitable family life as well as their medicine and education. Such work coming from an Adventist in the 1920s was exceptional.³⁴ His account of the people was mostly positive.

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NOTES

1. It functioned at Gland from 1904 to 1921. Then it was transferred to Collonges-sous-Salève.?
2. See full obituary by Dorothea Ising Boyd, "Obituary: Mrs. Frieda Schlegel Ising," *Middle-East Messenger*, January-February, 1967, 11, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/MEM/MEM19670101-V16-01.pdf>.?
3. See S. C. "Ein Vater in Israel Entschlafen," *Adventbote*, December 1, 1950, 366.?
4. Ibid.?
- 5.

Ibid.?

6. See "Hamburg Publishing House," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1906), 104.?
7. "In reality, a European 'Division' had already existed since 1908/1909, the official founding came however only in 1913." See Seventh-day Adventist Church, Inter-European Division, "History," accessed October 25, 2018, <https://eud.adventist.org/en/information/history/>.?
8. Baldur Ed. Pfeiffer, *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East 1879-1939* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978),?
9. "Levant Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1909),112.?
10. See Walter K. Ising, "Palestine," *ARH*, August 6, 1908, 17.?
11. David Trim, "Where the People Are," *Ministry*, January 2016, 9.?
12. Ibid.?
13. Pfeiffer, *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East 1879-1939*, 69.?
14. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Christ's Last Legion*, vol. 2. (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1949), 451.?
15. Pfeiffer, 70. Zarub wanted to raise an independent Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon. Hence, "he printed his own literature on the Seventh-day Adventist church and its message and baptized a few followers with the aim of establishing an indigenous Middle Eastern church according to local culture and customs." See also Manough. Nazirian, *The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Lebanon 1897-1997* (Beirut: The East Mediterranean Field of Seventh-day Adventist, 1999), 12.?
16. See Shukri Nowfel, "A Synopsis of the History of Seventh-day Adventism in Lebanon and Syria," unpublished manuscript, 1-2 as quoted in Pfeiffer , *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East*, 68.?
17. Ising, "Palestine," 17.?
18. Spalding, 451.?
19. S. C. "Ein Vater in Israel Entschlafen," 366-367.?
20. Pfeiffer, *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East*, 79.?
21. Dorothea Ising Boyd, "Obituary: Mrs. Frieda Schlegel Ising," 11.?
22. Although some documents may report his appointment as of 1922, by December 1921, he already signed an article with his name as Secretary of the European Division. See Walter K. Ising, "Gebets und Fasttag," *Zions-Wächter*, December 1921, 193.?
23. Pfeiffer, 81.?
24. Spalding, *Christ's Last Legion*, 451.?
25. Pfeiffer, 85.?
26. "The first Arab convert in Palestine, a woman teacher from Ophra, was baptized in the river Jordan in July 1930. Another baptism of three, among them a native Bible woman from Bethlehem and two brethren from Ophra, was administered by G. W. Schubert at the place where John the Baptist baptized 1900 years ago. This was in the spring of 1931." See H. L. Rudy, "Central European Division, Section II," *ARH*, December 29, 1938, 29.?
27. This was the same year he visited Jerusalem. "While in Jerusalem Mr. Ising landscaped the old mission compound which they helped build in 1935." This gave reason for opening a new mission center in that city. Ising Boyd, "Obituary: Mrs. Frieda Schlegel Ising," 11.?
28. Participants were encouraged to collect relevant materials pertaining to current events in the Islamic world, and the findings of all the research of other missionaries were collected and made available for exchange. Later a supervisory committee was appointed with Ising as chair, and Erich Bethmann and Wilhelm Lesovsky as members, in preparation for material to be presented in the next meeting scheduled for 1936. The next meeting was never held since Ising returned to Europe because of the events of pre-World War II. See Pfeiffer, 86.?
29. S. C. "Ein Vater in Israel Entschlafen," 367.?
30. "Report of the Nominating Committee," *ARH*, July 16, 1950, 82.?
31. Ising Boyd, "Obituary: Mrs. Frieda Schlegel Ising," 11.?
32. George McCready Price, *Naturwissenschaft und Schöpfungslehre*, trans. Walter K. Ising (Hamburg: Advent Verlag, 1925).?
- 33.

George McCready Price, *Q. E. D., or New Light on the Doctrine of Creation* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1917).?

34. The 1920s were known as a decade of prosperity, progress, and invention in arts, technology, economics, and politics or as the "Golden Age Twenties." In the United States, they were referred to as the "Jazz Age" or the Roaring Twenties.?

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