

Odero, Elisha Arunga (1905–2005)

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Godfrey K. Sang is a historical researcher and writer with an interest in Adventist history. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Eastern Africa Baraton and a number of qualifications from other universities. He is a published author. He is the co-author of the book *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*.

Elisha Arunga was a pastor and administrator in Kenya.

Early Life and Family

Elisha Arunga was born in January 1905 to Mzee Odero Kisero and Rebecca Awuor Odero in South Nyanza, Kenya. In 1922 he started his early education at the Kanyamfwa Primary School in South Nyanza, a school organized under the Kanyadoto Mission. He completed his education in 1927. He then became a teacher at Kanjira Primary School. He was baptized on December 19, 1927, at the age of 22. In 1929 he enrolled at the Kamagambo Training School under E. R. Warland and did his standard IV and later returned to Kanjira Primary School where he continued to teach.¹

After a year he returned to Kamagambo where he did a year of training to become an elementary teacher, and after obtaining his T4 certificate, he went on to Wagwe Primary School. Arunga taught in various schools, and one of his pupils was Mordecai Awuor, who would go on to become the first teacher at Chebwai, in 1939.

It was at Kamagambo that he met Abigail Nyambuga who would become his wife in 1933. That would be the start of a marriage that would last a record of 79 years. They had 11 children together.

Ministerial Training

In 1939 Elisha Arunga would go on to join the Kamagambo Training School in the first ministerial class that would graduate the first 16 locally trained pastors in Kenya the following year. This historic class included Timotheo Otega, Malki Osoo, Josiah Ngare, Stephen Ngaw, all of whom were from Ranen. From Gendia: Thadayo Nyabwa, Thadayo Nyang'anga, Nathaniel Ochieng, Charles Masio, and Samuel Omondi. From Kisii were Ariel Muturi, Nemuel Olang'o, and Nathaniel Misati. From Central Kenya were Justus Kang'ethe, Benson Ngatia, and from Mombasa was David Dena.²

Seven of those who joined, including Arunga, graduated with a ministerial diploma in 1940 and went on to become prominent Adventist ministers around the country.

Ministry

Arunga was posted to Wire Hill. While at Wire he found that he could not stay there for personal reasons, and so he returned to Kanyamfwa where he continued to teach until 1942, when he was called to serve at Milambo. He served at Kanyadoto, Kwabwuaye, and Kanyamua from 1943 to 1946. He was then called to serve at Gendia as the departmental secretary for the Kenya Lake Field, which covered the South and Central Nyanza. On October 19, 1949, he was ordained as a minister of the gospel, and at the start of 1950 he left for the North-West Mission Field, which was based at Chebwai. He worked at Chebwai serving in Nandi and among the Kabras for five years.³

It was after working at Chebwai that he was transferred to what was known as Island District on Rusinga Island, Suba District. In 1958 he was the host pastor at Rusinga Island Campmeeting, which had the legendary missionary, Pastor Spencer Maxwell as the chief guest.⁴ Arunga was assisted in that station by Evangelist Simon Nyakado, and one of the guests was his old student Mordekai Awuor, who was at that time the Sabbath School secretary of the Kenya Lake Mission.

Pastor Arunga worked in various stations until his retirement on January 1, 1974. His wife passed away on July 11, 2002, and he survived her for three years and passed away on November 21, 2005, just shy of his 101st birthday. Elisha Arunga Odero is one of the graduates of the first ministerial class at Kamagambo having graduated in 1940. He is one of the Kenyan pastors who lived for 100 years and a few months.

SOURCES

Sang, Godfrey K., Kili, Hosea K. *On the Wings of a Sparrow, How the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to Western Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gapman Publications, 2015.

Southern Africa Division Outlook, February 15, 1958.

NOTES

1. From the Obituary read during his funeral in December 2005. In the author's private collection.
2. Ibid.
3. Godfrey K. Sang, Kili, and Hosea K., *On the Wings of a Sparrow, How the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi, Kenya: Gapman Publications, 2015).
4. *Southern Africa Division Outlook*, February 15, 1958, 10.

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