

Too, Aaron Moiben (1898–1978)

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Aaron Moiben Too was a pioneer Adventist evangelist and pastor in Northern Nandi in Western Kenya.

Early Life

Aaron Moiben araap Too was born in 1898 to the Kapcheptuigong family in northern Nandi. He grew up in the Nandi culture that was fast changing due to the coming of colonial rule and European settlement. Like many Nandi youth, he engaged in cattle theft which was considered a mark of bravery. He soon gained notoriety, was arrested and jailed many times, and his return home was always short-lived. In 1926 he was sent to the notorious Kodiaga Prison in Kisumu. It was here that he first came in contact with Adventism, but he ignored it. In 1932 Aaron was released from Kodiaga Prison, and he made his way back to the Nandi Reserve under strict police supervision. Aaron also had a darker side. He practiced witchcraft and divination. It was not until 1937 that he was converted to Adventism and began attending church at Kaigat. His conversion, however, did not convince everyone of his changed life, least of all the provincial administration who knew his reputation. Chief Willie araap Boit immediately objected to the arrival of Aaron into the Kaigat area. It took a letter from Pastor Matthew Murdoch, the missionary in charge at Chebwai, to convince the district commissioner at Kapsabet that he should allow Aaron to be a part of the Adventist community at Kaigat. The district commissioner wrote to Murdoch stating that Aaron should periodically report to the chief and that the teacher at Kaigat should monitor his whereabouts to ensure he didn't get into trouble.¹

Aaron's conversion was complete and genuine. He was baptized in 1940 at Kaigat by Petero Chetambe and diligently pursued his education at Kaigat as an adult student with the single purpose of becoming a pastor. He was baptized the same day as Musa araap Sino. Those who knew Aaron could hardly believe that he had been made new, particularly because his reputation had spread around the district and beyond. Over time people came to believe that his faith in God was real. Aaron met and married Deborah Jemeli, daughter of Johana of Kabiemit, in 1938 before he left for his mission work.

Evangelism Work

At the Kaigat dispersal of 1941, Aaron Moiben araap Too remained at Kaigat to carry on the work but only for a short time. In 1946 he was assigned to open up the work at Kungurweet some ten miles from Kaigat, situated along the Kabiyet-Kaiboi road in the Lolkeringet area. Aaron intended to move to the Kaplemur area where he would start a school. Those opposing Adventist schools told him he would not be licensed if he planted a school near that of another denomination. At Kungurweet he acquired a plot of land and founded a church and he planned to build a school. However, he ran into strong headwinds that effectively put a hold on his plans. The local administration and the area residents put up a strong fight against him establishing a school at Kungurweet. Aaron repeatedly petitioned the area chief Johana Kiptiony araap Katono without success. He then decided to send his wife to petition the chief. She carried with her a list of four people who were of the Adventist faith at Kungurweet. Her list included Dorcas Kapmboret, Jane Kapsusma, herself, and her husband. The chief looked at the list and asked her why her husband had not come in person. She explained and then presented him with bottled ghee. The chief's heart was not easily melted. He enquired why they could not worship at Chebwai. She explained that Chebwai was in a foreign land (north Nyanza) and was a far walk from Kungurweet, especially with children.² Chief Katono finally agreed and sent her to the headman araap Maiyo with instructions to give them the designated land. The land, however, was claimed by another man who had joined a rival denomination. He strongly objected to the Adventists, but his objection exposed that the land actually belonged to the Kamelilo, a sub-tribe of the Nandi which the man did not belong to. Aaron was a member and the argument was settled.³

In 1954 Aaron went to Bugema Adventist College to take ministerial training. In 1955 he was accorded a Ministerial License. He returned to Kungurweet which became a church district. He planted other churches at Tiriin and Kagarwo, and together with Elijah araap Tiljii, planted churches in Kapsisiywo, Chepyegoris, Nduroto, and Kipsamoite. More churches have since been organized from those churches including Kipyeshi, Kamoywo, Chepnyogoson, Kapkoros, Kapchorua, and Kipkombot, all of which owe their origin to Kungurweet. The Kungurweet Adventist Boarding Primary School is also a part of the denominational development in the area.

Later Life

Aaron and Deborah were blessed with eight sons and four daughters. In his old age, Aaron's sight began to bother him and he had cataract surgery. Afterwards he developed a wound on his leg which turned out to be cancerous. In spite of repeated visits to Kendu Mission Hospital, he failed to recover. Aaron Moiben araap Too passed away on August 21, 1978, and was laid to rest at his Kungurweet home. He was survived by his wife Deborah and their children Elizabeth, Esther, Leah, Lois, Timoteo, Gideon, Timon, Eli, Jerobon, and Judith.

SOURCES

File No. DC/KAPT/1/4/11. Kenya National Archives, Nairobi.

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

NOTES

1. File No. DC/KAPT/1/4/11. Kenya National Archives, Nairobi.
2. Mama Deborah Jemeli neb'araap Too, interview by author, July 8, 2014.
3. Godfrey K. Sang and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017).

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