

Marecha, Ezekiel Kibwana (1882–1982)

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Ezekiel Kibwana Marecha was one of the most significant indigenous pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania).

Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Ezekiel Kibwana Marecha was born in 1882 in the Kihurio village, Same District in the Pare region of northeastern Tanganyika (present-day Tanzania). Kibwana was the first of two children in the family of Marecha Wandeya and Migayo Manentho. His sister was Kigenda Kibwana.¹ He came from a diverse cultural background: his father originated from Tewe village in the Usambara mountains while his mother was from the Pare Mountains, specifically Mamba Miamba. His father died while Ezekiel was still an infant.²

Despite early life hardships, Kibwana's upbringing within the local cultural setting, combined with early exposure to missionary influence, prepared him for a life of service. Frida Brietly and Chris Wunderlich, missionaries from Germany in 1904, started the first Adventist school at Lukuta in Kihurio, the home of Ezekiel Kibwana.³ In 1905, Ernst Kortz established an Adventist mission station and church building. In the same year, Kibwana started four years of formal education at the Adventist mission school at Lucita, Kihurio, while taking Bible study courses with [Ernst Kotz](#). In 1909, Kibwana was baptized by Kotz and, in the same year, his four-year course qualified him for the teaching profession.⁴

Following his education, he remained at the Kihurio mission school as a teacher. The school at Kihurio gained a strong reputation for excellence, attracting attention even from colonial authorities. In February 1909, the German colonial governor, George Albrecht von Rothenberg, visited the school alongside a local chief and donated 250 books valued at \$150.⁵

In 1910, Kibwana married Ruth Kime. They raised a family of four children: Uzi, Dani (who died in infancy), Susanna, and Rehema. Kime often accompanied Kibwana in mission service, supporting his work in various regions.⁶

Ministry

Kibwana was multilingual, speaking Kipare, Kiswahili, German, and some English—skills that made him an invaluable bridge between European missionaries and local communities. He was first employed as a teacher from 1909 to 1912 at Lukuta School. In 1913, he was transferred to Bwiko Village to render church services and teaching responsibilities there. During World War I, the German missionaries were arrested and became prisoners of war in 1916. Ezekiel Kibwana was among the four capable African men who were appointed to fill leadership roles vacated by these arrests. Kibwana was given charge of the work in Kihurio as well as supervision of three ordained church elders, Petro Sebughe at the Suji Station, Daniel Teendwa at the Mamba Station, and Abraham Msangi at the Vunta Station. Teachers were among the arrested missionaries.⁷ During the World War I, when many missionaries were arrested and forced to leave Tanganyika, Kibwana oversaw church activities and maintained the work across approximately 17 mission stations. He also managed mission properties, including European dwellings, during the absence of missionaries.⁸

In the absence of the missionaries, Kibwana was able to handle church duties within the Adventist church in Pare, conducting marriages and burials, and giving counsel to the churches. In 1921, he was sent from the Pare churches to Usukuma to baptize 120 new converts. Spencer George Maxwell, who arrived at Kihurio in 1921, admitted that Kibwana was a devoted hardworking local leader. He held the work together in the absence of European leadership. He deserved to be set apart for ordination.⁹ In 1924, Kibwana and his wife visited Ntuzu Mission and he was sent to teach at Ikizu in Mara Region where he became a head teacher.¹⁰

Missionary Spencer George Maxwell commented that Kibwana was a Christian of whom any mission might be proud and with whom any missionary might rejoice as a comrade. He spoke Kipare, Kiswahili, German, and some English. He took charge of the whole work of Tanganyika, which originally comprised seventeen mission stations. He held revival meetings in churches, organized the members to work effectively, and had the support of the churches. He also kept the European dwellings properly managed in the absence of missionaries.¹¹

Kibwana was appointed superintendent of schools, overseeing the operation of the fifteen Pare Adventist schools until 1921.¹² Only one of the original sixteen schools closed during the war time. After the war, Kibwana served at Ntusu Mission and in Ikizu (1924-1927) before returning to Kihurio in 1927.¹³

In addition to his ecclesiastical work, Kibwana contributed to civil administration. He served as a court clerk in several locations: Mamba Village (1930), Kirangare (1934), Gonja (1940), and Ndungu (1944). In 1950, he was commissioned by the Same District Commissioner to write about the history of the Wapare people.¹⁴

Later Life

Kibwana's life was not without challenges. In 1936, he married Mfele Shangari as his second wife. This conflicted with church policy and caused him to be disfellowshipped from the church and relieve him of church responsibilities.¹⁵ His second wife gave birth to seven children: two sons, Daudi Ezekiel and Gadi Ezekiel, and five daughters, Mangereza Ezekiel, Tabu Ezekiel, Dina Ezekiel, Miriam Ezekiel, and Hellen Ezekiel.¹⁶ During this time,

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In 1950, after the resolution of his matrimonial case, Ezekiel Kibwana was restored to Church fellowship and resumed his duties as a Church elder.¹⁸ He also continued to serve in various community roles as the chairman of the Kihurio Farmers' Cooperative Society, contributing to local economic development. Eventually, he retired from active service due to old age.¹⁹ He died on March 16, 1982, at the age of 100 and was buried at Kihurio village.²⁰

Legacy

Ezekiel Kibwana's life stands as a powerful testimony of faithfulness, resilience, and dedication. His contribution to the Adventist Church in Tanganyika is immeasurable. At a time of uncertainty, war, and missionary absence, he became a stabilizing force who sustained the work and ensured its continuity.

His legacy is marked by faithfulness to God, leadership during crisis, cultural mediation between missionaries and local communities, and perseverance through personal trials followed by restoration. The history of Adventism in Tanganyika remains incomplete without acknowledging his role.²¹

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NOTES

1. Gadi Ezekiel, the son of Ezekiel Kibwana, telephone interview by Igin John Soka, May 23, 2020, Arusha University Office, Arusha, Tanzania.
2. Oral family traditions and local historical accounts from Kihurio village.
3. Kangalu B. Elineema, Ketto E. Mshigeni, and Jotham A. Lukwaro, eds., *Arise and Shine* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Interpak Books, 2015), 1:127.
4. Early Adventist mission school records, Kihurio Mission (unpublished archival material).
5. German colonial administrative visit records; see also mission school reports, 1909.
6. Gadi Ezekiel, the son of Ezekiel Kibwana, telephone interview by Igin John Soka, May 23, 2020, Arusha University Office, Arusha, Tanzania.
7. Elineema et al., 1:128.
8. Tanganyika Mission reports during the First World War period (1914–1918).
9. K. B. Elineema, *Historia ya Kanisa la Waadventista Wasabato Tanzania* (Dar-es-Salaam: Dar-es Salaam University Press, 1993), 46.
10. Elineema et al., 1:130.
11. Kangalu B. Elineema, *Adventism in Tanzania in the Twentieth Century: A Curse or a Blessing?* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), 43.
12. Ibid.
13. East African Union Mission field reports, 1924–1927.
14. Same District Office archival references, 1950.
15. Church disciplinary records, Kihurio Mission archives, 1934.
16. Gadi Ezekiel, the son of Ezekiel Kibwana, telephone interview with author, May 23, 2020, Arusha University Office, Arusha, Tanzania.
17. Same District Office archival references, 1950.
18. Legal (divorce certificate number 4410, Ref. 352 of 19/11/50) and church reconciliation records, 1950.

19. Local cooperative society records, Kihurio Farmers' Association.
20. Burial and church membership records, Kihurio Seventh-day Adventist Church.
21. Synthesis based on mission histories and oral narratives from the Pare region.

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