

ESN WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION
ELLEN G. WHITE-SDA RESEARCH CENTRE
Sabcock University
PIONEER OF THE MONTH

AS ONE OF OUR PUBLICATIONS, PIONEER OF THE MONTH
BRINGS TO YOU FROM TIME TO TIME
BRIEF ACCOUNTS OF SOME OF OUR PIONEERS WHO HAD
LABOURED IN GOD'S VINEYARD.
THIS MONTH, WE PRESENT A SERVANT OF GOD,



**ELDER ZACCHAEUS SALAWU
OYELESE BAMIDELE**

(1922 Till Date)

EARLY LIFE:

Salawu Oyelesi Zacchaeus Bamidele, was born in 1922, to the family of Pa, Bamidele Lawani Somefun, and Mrs. Olabumiyi Omeyin Idowu, of Alase Somefun kindred, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria. Growing up, Salawu Bamidele spent greater part of his childhood time in Ilisan-Remo, until a time when his father offered the children an outing to his business site at Egba, in Ajebo-Ibadan Road. Egba was the centre of Iroko tree farm, where his father's business flourished. Paying a visit to Egba was life fulfilling experience to Zacchaeus at that stage in his life, especially, as he spent about two years at Egba, community. The visitation remains remarkable event to Salawu up till date. Having visited his father's business, Zaccheaus took to farming following his parents' footsteps, which formed his first occupation in life. Like some other children, Zacchaeus Bamidele faced life storm and challenges when he lost his father in 1950, even though his mother lived till 1985.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

His career was limited due to life challenges and background. His formal education ended in standard one after he excelled in Yoruba I and II classes during his visit to Egba, in Ajebo where his father's business was located. Interestingly, despite his informal educational status, Zacchaeus speaks English language to a reasonable extent. English language was the Lingual Franca for soldiers under West Africa Volunteer Force, due to the various participants from all over Africa.

WORK EXPERIENCE

While life challenges rolled by, it became imperative for man to survive. In a bid to make ends meet, Mr. Zacchaeus, joined West Africa Volunteer Force at his age 20, in 1942. Upon the resumption of his job, he was posted to Kaduna State. One year into the newly secured job, Oyelesi was selected to further his military training and service in Egypt. As duty called, they left Kaduna to Lagos and from there, all ways led to Egypt through the sea with a big ship. The four years training programme accommodated one week leave entitlement yearly for every participant. Meticulously, Oyelesi accumulated four weeks of his leave period and visited Jerusalem, Cairo, and Ismailia in Egypt within 1944. These exposed him to wealth of knowledge that is not commonly acquired from any class room. Upon his return to base from the leave, their programme ended. Oyelesi, being a Rank II Officer, had the privilege to extend his service back in Egypt, but to no avail, rather, he opted to return to Nigeria, his home country. To this end, he tendered his resignation letter from military service right from Egypt and returned back to his home town Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria in 1945. All of these took place just shortly after the World War II. As soon as he settled down in Nigeria, Oyelesi went into transportation business, and did it for about two years. Later, he engaged in several other business ventures as he progressed in life. He was a successful farmer through which he was able to see his wards through higher institutions. Above all, he had the opportunity to serve the Most High God.

FAMILY LIFE:

Three years after Zacchaeus returned from Egypt, he met his wife, Sikiratu Adesanya who hailed from Itun-Apena, area of Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State. The young girl came from a muslim background. Soon after their marriage in January 15, 1949 both of them became Adventists in 1967 God blessed their union with four children, though only two of them survived. However, Elder Zacchaeus lost that union and later married another woman who gave birth to two more children. To the glory of God, his children are reasonably educated and are doing well both in the faith and the society.

Religious Experiences

Judging from Mr. Zacchaeus Oyelesi Bamidele's background, one could have concluded that he may not become a Christian. This is because his family is remarkably known to be the custodian of *Agemo deity*, with the mandate to regularly produce and groom the priest for the deity. His family hosts, and is customarily in charge of *Agemo* festival, known as *Agbala*, in Ilishan-Remo. This has remained one of the main festivals celebrated all over Remo land, in Ogun State. This was the mere reason why Zacchaeus, being true 'son of the soil', traced his way back to the deity for membership maintenance as well as retention and worship commencement, after his returned from Egypt. However, when the Lord chooses a servant, no obstacle can stop His will. Within first two years of his return, he became so dissatisfied with the traditional religion and in a bid to express the disapproval; he denounced the deity, and embraced Islamic religion. While in Islamic religion, he felt spiritually empty, thirsted and hungered for spiritual fulfillment. He kept searching for truth and right way of serving his Creator God. For these reasons, Oyelesi opted to join the Jehovah's Witness movement, but the conviction was farfetched.

In the midst of his religious encounters, Zacchaeus came across Pastor Nwosu, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, in the neighbourhood. Pastor Nwosu visited his neighbors regularly and prayed with each of the families. This practice of his drew Mr. Bamidele close to Pastor Nwosu. They became friends and close acquaintances. Interestingly, the long awaited and expected spiritual satisfaction was received through the relationship. Day after day, new dimensions were introduced to the relationship, and at the appointed time, Pastor Nwosu, extended invitation of worship to Oyelesi. With the already existing closeness, he responded promptly, honoured the invitation and worshipped with Pastor Nwosu's Church at Oke-Ogba (an indigenous way of refereeing to the Church at ACWA campus). As it pleased God, he accepted the message of salvation and, got baptized by Pastor Jan Paulson, in 1967. To the glory of God, Elder Zacchaeus is a member of Seventh-day Adventist Church in good and regular standing, with many of his family members sharing the same faith.

His Testimony about Ilisan Seventh-day Adventist Church, No. 1

As one of the founding members of Ilisan SDA Church, No. 1, Elder Oyelesi Zacchaeus Bamidele, acknowledges that the growth of the church has really been challenging. He also emphasized that through it all, the church kept experiencing the mighty hands of God. Recalling the origin of the first SDA Church in Ilisan town (Church No. 1.) Oyelesi acknowledged the tremendous contributions of Pastor Joel Dada Awoniyi, who happened to be one of the first

seven ACWA students. According to Oyelesi, it all began when Pastor Joel Awoniyi, visited Oke-Ogba Church at ACWA after his second degree programme abroad. Before then, he had served for some years as a minister of the everlasting gospel. On that fateful day, he observed numerous Ilisan indigenes at worship, among these were Idowu jinadu, Segun Oyenuga, Folarin Oyenuga, Sofowora, and Mrs. Awosanya. Pastor Awoniyi immediately seized the opportunity and translated their presence into church expansion. With the expansion conviction within him, he shared his idea with the concerned members. They enthusiastically responded and became zealous to serve God, especially in their indigenous language for better understanding of the word of God. Without wasting time, the suggestion was voted, carried and gave birth to the first SDA Yoruba-speaking Church in Ilisan-Remo community. They commenced church worship at Owoduni's house in Ilisan town.

To the glory of God, Ilisan SDA Church, No. 1 grew to the point of expansion. At this point in time, there arose the need for permanent place of worship and church organization. In view of this, Elder Zacchaeus Bamidele, encouraged the church leadership to request for a portion of Land from Oke-Ogba – that is the mother Church. at ACWA compound. The suggestion was accepted and voted by the management of Oke-Ogba Church. A piece of land was given to the Ilisan SDA Church No. 1, up the hill on the way from the college to Ilisan town, where the church members worship till date. Pastor J. D. Awoniyi, Elder Zacchaeus Bamidele and other members made outstanding contributions in the building of Ilisan SDA Church No. 1. until recent years; it was the only Yoruba-speaking SDA Church in the whole of Ilisan town.

Remarkably, Elder Zacchaeus Bamidele, maintained that Pastor J. Awoniyi's spiritual, material and physical support to the development of Ilisan SDA Church No. 1. cannot be over emphasized. Recalling the Church's leadership, he mentioned that it all started from Pastor Adeniji, who organized the Church with Zacchaeus Bamidele as the first elder, at Owoduni's house, to the time of Pastor Akintunde, Pastor Adewusi, Pastor Bajepade, Pastor Adebawo just to mention but a few. Through this order, he mentioned some of the servants of God who led out at one point or the other, until the church expanded to Sagamu, Iperu, Irolu and other places in Remo land, to God be the glory.

Conclusion

At age 96, Elder Zacchaeus Oyelesi Bamidele, has remained an active member of Ilisan SDA Church No. 1. Some of his children are leading elders, with some grandchildren serving in various departments of that same Church and beyond. He is blessed with grandchildren, and great grandchildren many of who have maintained the membership in Ilisan SDA Church No. 1. till date.

Elder Bamidele enjoys and sings many Adventist hymns. But his favourite song remains SDAH No. 334.

***Come, Thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,***

***Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of God's unchanging love.***

Verse 2

***Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Hither by Thy help I come.
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger
Wand'ring from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.***

Verse 3

***Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.***

Verse 4

***Hither to Thy love has blest me;
Thou hast bro't me to this place;
And I know Thy hand will bring me
Safely home by Thy good grace.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Bought me with His precious blood.***

He so much loves and memorized this number to the point of recording a mistake-free off-hand performance of all stanzas of the number in his local language (Yoruba) during our interview with him, in his late 90s. What a wonderful gift of God.

Though very old, Elder Zacchaeus Oyelesi Bamidele has lives in good health when compared with some of his age mates alive today. His life is a reflection of God's promise for His servants as expressed in His words that,

“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I [am] the LORD that healeth thee.” Exodus 15:26, and “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.” 1 John 3: 2.

To God be the glory.

Source: Retrieved from a live interview with Elder Zacchaeus Oyelesi Bamidele on November, 2018 by Pastor A. F. Adetunji, Taiwo Olawuyi and Chinwe Chinanu-Akpuh

Translated and transcribed by Taiwo Olawuyi

&

**Edited and Arranged by;
Chinwe Comfort Chinanu-Akpuh**

Published

By

Ellen G. White-SDA Research Centre

Mailing Address: PMB 21244 Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria

E-mail: egwsdarc@babcock.edu.ng

***Director: Adelowo Felix Adetunji, Ph.D. Tel.: +234 8033705097;
80720290189***

***Research Assistant: Chinwe Comfort Chinanu-Akpuh, Tel.:
+234 8034969753***

***Administrative Officer: Taiwo Olatunde Olawuyi, Tel.:
+2347032551339***

Photo Album



Young Zacchaeus in the Military



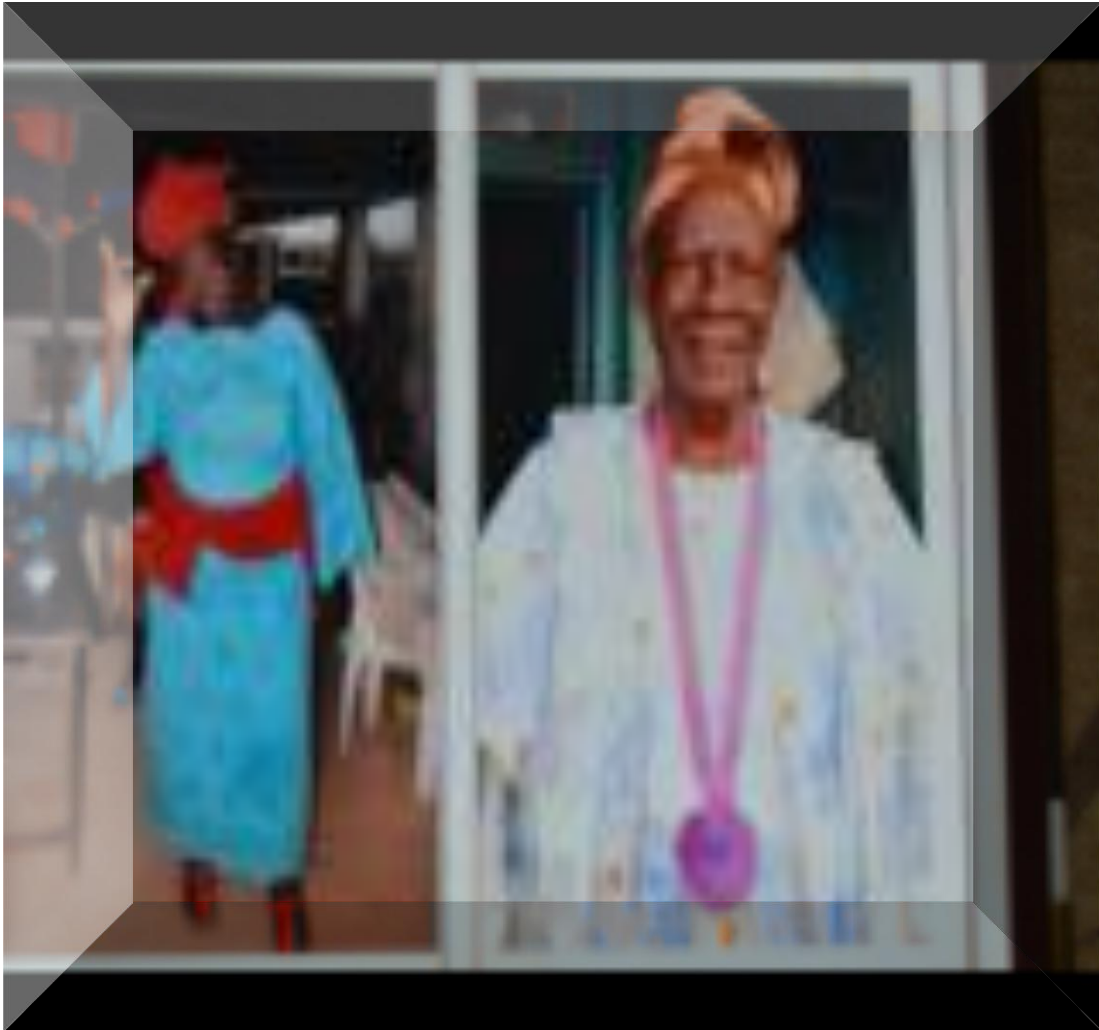
Pa Zacchaeus Bamidele while being celebrated in the Church



Elder and Mrs. Z. S. Bamidele



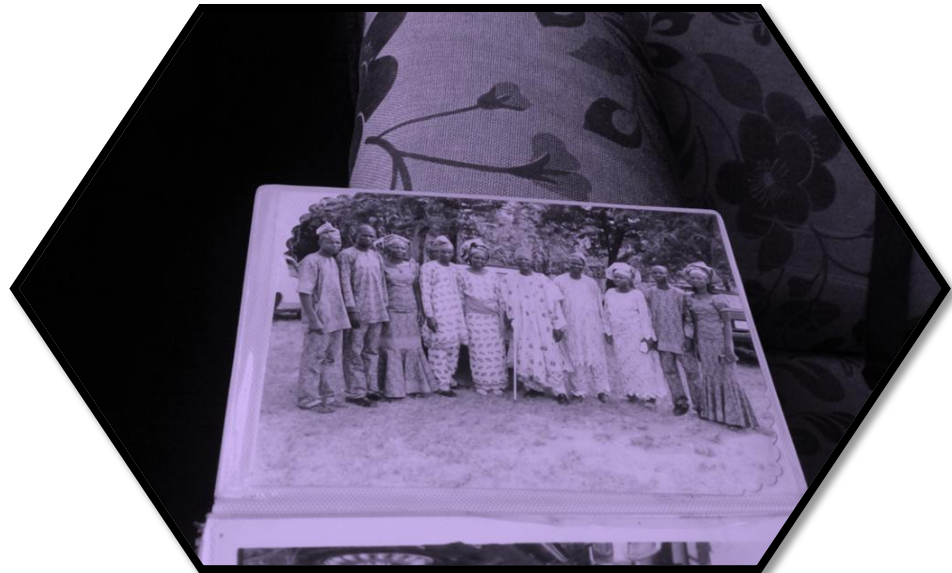
Pa Bamidele, his two sons with their wives



Baba and his first daughter, Mrs Omotokę Sotinalu



Baba's first son, F. F. F. Bamidele and his newly wedded love, receiving their marriage certificate



Baba, his two sons, their wives and some of Baba's grandchildren



Baba's Family Celebrating his first son at his 60th birthday



Still on the 60th birthday of Elder F. F. F. Bamidele



Baba and Wife blessing their son Tobi Bamidele, on His wedding day



Tobi and Wife on the wedding day



Elder Bamidele while receiving an award from the Ogun Conference SDA President



Elder Bamidele witnessing the Last child's wedding



Baba with his relations on a family deliberation



Elder Bamidele in action



Baba's ground daughter's traditional marriage ceremony