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# Babalola, Joseph Ayodele

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**Babalola, Joseph Ayodele**  
**1904 to 1959**  
**Christ Apostolic Church ([Aladura](#))**  
**Nigeria**

Joseph Ayodele Babalola was born on April 25, 1904 to David Rotimi and Madam Marta Talabi who belonged to the Anglican Church. The family lived at Odo-Owa in Ilofa, a small town about ninety kilometers from Ilorin in Kwara State. His father was the *Baba Ijo* (“church father”) of the C.M.S. Church at Odo-Owa. Mysterious circumstances allegedly surrounded the birth of Babalola. On that day, it was believed that a strange and mighty object exploded and shook the clouds.

Babalola started school at Ilofa and got as far as standard five at All Saints' School, Osogbo. However, he quit school to become a motor mechanic apprentice before joining the Public Works Department. He helped construct the road from Igbara-Oke to Ilesa, working as a steamroller driver.

### **Babalola's Call to the Prophetic Ministry**

Just like the Old Testament prophets, Babalola was called by God into the prophetic office. His strange experience started on the night of September 25, 1928 when he suddenly became restless and could not sleep. The climax came one day when he was working on the Ilesa-Igbara-Oke road. Suddenly the steamroller’s engine stopped, to his utter amazement. He was in this state of confusion when a great voice “like the sound of many waters” called him three times. The voice told him that he would die if he refused to heed the divine call to go into the world and preach. Babalola did not want to listen to this voice, like many of the biblical prophets, so he gave in only after he had received the assurance of divine guidance. He resigned his appointment with the Public Works Department.

The same voice came to Babalola a second time asking him to fast for seven days. He obeyed, and at the end of the seven days, he saw a great figure of a man in a dazzling robe who resembled Jesus. The man spoke at length about the mission he was to embark upon. The man also told him of the persecutions he would face and assured him of God's protection and victory. Babalola received a prayer hand bell as a symbol. He was told that the sound of the bell would always drive away evil spirits. He also received a bottle of “life-giving water” to heal all manner of sicknesses. Consequently, wherever and whenever he prayed into water for therapeutic purposes, effective healing was procured for those who drank the water. Thus, Babalola became a prophet and a man with extraordinary powers.

### **The Itinerary of Prophet Babalola**

During one of his prayer sessions an angel appeared to him and gave him a

big yam that he then ordered him to eat. The angel told him that the yam was the tuber with which God fed the whole world. He further revealed that God had granted him the power to deliver those who were possessed of evil spirits in the world. He was directed to go first to Odo-Owa and start preaching. He was to arrive in the town on a market day, cover his body with palm fronds and disfigure himself with charcoal paints.

In October 1928, he entered the town in the manner described and was taken for a mad man. He immediately started preaching and prophesying, warning the people of an impending danger if they did not repent. He was arrested and taken to the district officer at Ilorin for allegedly disturbing the peace but was later released. However, it was said that a few days later, there was an outbreak of smallpox in the town. The people then quickly sought out the man whose prophecies and messages were once rejected. He went around praying for the victims, and they were all healed.

Babalola organized regular prayer meetings in a C.M.S. church in Odo-Owa that many people attended. Information reached the bishop that the parishioners were seeing visions, speaking in tongues, and praying vigorously. Babalola and the visionaries were allegedly ordered by Bishop Smith to leave the church, but Babalola did not leave the town until June 1930.

While he was at Odo-Owa, a warrant for his arrest was issued from Ilorin. He was arrested for preaching against witches, a practice which had caused some trouble in Otuo in present Bendel State. He was sentenced to jail for six months in Benin City in March 1932. After serving the jail term, he went back to Efon Alaaye.

On an invitation from Daniel Ajibola of the Faith Tabernacle, Babalola went to Lagos, where all the leaders warmly received the young prophet into their midst. Babalola had not yet been baptized by immersion and Senior Pastor Esinsinade emphasized that he needed to go through that rite. Pastor Esinsinade baptized him in the lagoon at the back of the Faith Tabernacle Church building.

### **Oke-Oye Mighty Revival**

In spite of all his success, Babalola's intention was not to start a new church. He persuaded his followers to become members of the Faith Tabernacle. To facilitate this, he went to Lagos to confer with the leaders, especially as he was not yet well acquainted with the doctrines, tenets, and administration of the church. A controversy among the leaders of the Faith Tabernacle in Nigeria (over some doctrines) prompted them to call a meeting to discuss the issues. Babalola was introduced to the whole conference. During the meeting, a mighty, sweeping revival broke out when Babalola raised a child from the dead.

The result was that thousands of people, including traditional religionists, Muslims, and Christians from various other denominations,

were converted to the Faith Tabernacle. Revival meetings were held in an open field to accommodate the numbers. Members from the Anglican and Wesleyan churches transferred their allegiance to the revivalist and all the patients in Wesley Hospital, Ilesa, abandoned their beds to seek healing from Babalola. Many of the schools belonging to the Wesleyan, Anglican, Baptist, and the Roman Catholic churches closed down altogether.

The tidal wave of Babalola's revival spread from Ilesa to Ibadan, Ijebu, Lagos, Efon-Alaaye, Aramoko Ekiti and Abeokuta. No greater revival preceded that of Babalola.

### **The Birth of the Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria**

Babalola's spectacular evangelism brought with it a wave of persecution. The mission churches allegedly became jealous and hostile, especially as their members constituted the main converts of the Faith Tabernacle. The Nigerian government was alerted to the activities of the movement.

At this time, the leading members of the movement explored associations with Faith Tabernacle in the United States, Faith and Truth Temple of Toronto, Canada, and the British Apostolic Church, to which it was eventually ceded. Consequently, the name changed from Faith Tabernacle to the Apostolic Church.

Doctrinal differences between the two groups soon began to appear on issues of divine healing, and the movement subsequently split. One faction of the church made Oke-Oye its base and retained the name the Apostolic Church. The other larger faction in which Babalola was a leader eventually became the Christ Apostolic Church.

Today, the church is reputedly one of the most popular Christian organizations in Nigeria. The church opened up several primary and grammar schools, a teachers' training college, a seminary, maternity homes, and a training school for prophets. The years between 1970 and 1980 saw further expansion of the church to England, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

The C.A.C. believes that the spiritual power bestowed on Babalola placed him on an equal level with Biblical apostles like Peter, Paul, and others who were sent out with the authority of, and in the name of Jesus.

Joseph Ayo Babalola slept in the Lord in 1959.

### **David O. Olayiwola**

This biography is abridged from an article written by Dr. David O. Olayiwola, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, as a chapter of the book *Makers of the Church in Nigeria*, edited by J. A. Omoyajowo (Lagos, Nigeria: CSS Bookshops Ltd., 1995), pages 137-149.

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