



The Church in Korea—

GOSPEL LIGHT
SHINES THROUGH
HARDSHIP

Early Korean Church members laid a foundation of faith on which tens of thousands of today's members have built.

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Missionary work began in Korea in the 1950s after the Korean War. But the first Church contact with Korea was in January 1910, when Alma Owen Taylor, recently released president of the Japan Mission, and Elder Frederick A. Caine, a missionary who served in Japan, spent several weeks visiting Korea and China. The First Presidency approved their trip to those countries to evaluate the possibility of missionary work. President Taylor observed that Koreans had a growing interest in Christianity while their country was collapsing under Japanese rule. However, he wondered whether Koreans were more interested in Christianity for political reasons than for accepting Christ as their eternal Savior.

Conversion of Dr. Kim Ho Jik

In the decades following President Taylor's visit, Koreans endured fiery trials, including the Japanese colonization and military occupation, the Asia-Pacific War, oppression from Russia and China, the communist takeover of North Korea, and the Korean War.

Yet, thanks to divine providence, an ember of hope for Koreans began to grow in New York, USA. Syngman Rhee, president of Korea, sent Kim Ho Jik, director of the Suwon Agricultural Experimentation Station, to the United States to learn how to improve nutrition in the Korean diet. Ho Jik chose Cornell University, which had an excellent graduate study program in nutrition. In 1949 he started to pursue a doctoral degree—as well as attend various church meetings around Ithaca, New York, to find the “true church.”¹

Ho Jik made friends with a man named Oliver Wayman. Unlike Ho Jik's other acquaintances, Oliver did not drink or smoke and never swore. He also never worked on Sundays. One day Ho Jik asked Oliver, “What makes you live that way?” In answer to that question, Oliver gave him a book titled *The Articles of Faith* by Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Ho Jik read *The Articles of Faith* within a week and then read the Book of Mormon. He believed both books and told Oliver the Book of Mormon was “more complete and easier to understand than the Bible.”² Ho Jik accepted the



As an Apostle and director of the Church's servicemen's group, Elder Harold B. Lee (center, without hat) visited Korea in 1954.

THE CHURCH IN SOUTH KOREA*

Membership:

85,628

Missions: 4

Wards and

branches: 128

Temples: 1

**As of January 2014*



gospel message like dry ground receiving long-awaited rains. His faith grew day by day. He started to receive the missionary lessons and decided to be baptized.

On July 29, 1951, 46-year-old Kim Ho Jik was baptized in the Susquehanna River—he wanted to be baptized near where the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were baptized over 100 years before. When he was coming out of the water, he heard a clear voice saying, “Feed my sheep.” That impression led him to devote the rest of his life to helping the gospel take root in Korea.

By September 1951 the Korean War had reached a stalemate, so Dr. Kim returned to Korea. He had a strong desire to preach the restored gospel. He attended church in a U.S. military camp in Busan, where he taught the Gospel Doctrine class and shared his testimony with Korean visitors. U.S. soldiers taught the gospel in English to the youth, and Dr. Kim interpreted for them. This was an effective way to share the gospel, and because Koreans trusted Dr. Kim, his example influenced many.

After suffering much from the Korean War, the people eagerly welcomed the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Dr. Kim’s devotion finally bore fruit on August 3, 1952, when the first four people were baptized in Busan, Korea.

Dr. Kim later told a group of Saints, “I wouldn’t care if I had to give up my life, or my money, or my title, as long as I could be with my Savior.”³ His life evidenced this commitment to serving God.

Even without a mission in the country, the gospel spread rapidly in Korea. The growth was remarkable to the Brethren. In September 1954, upon returning to Utah after a trip to Korea, Elder Harold B. Lee (1899–1973) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles expressed his hope that the Church would soon begin officially preaching the gospel in Korea. He described the faith and enthusiasm of the Korean Saints.⁴ On April 7, 1955, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles split the Japanese Mission into the Northern Far East and Southern Far East Missions. Korea was included in the Northern Far East Mission. The Korean Latter-day Saints wanted missionaries to be sent to Korea, but they knew the political situation in Korea was unstable, so they waited and prayed fervently.

The Beginning of Missionary Work

On August 2, 1955, standing on the beautiful Jang-Choong Dan hill in Seoul, President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972), then-President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, dedicated Korea for the opening of full-time missionary work and prayed for the country to regain peace and prosperity.⁵ That evening he organized the Korea District, with Kim Ho Jik as president. Later he visited Busan to organize the Busan Branch.

In April 1956, even though the political situation in Korea was still unstable, the newly called president of the Northern Far East Mission was inspired to send Elders Richard Detton and Don Powell to Korea. American Latter-day Saint soldiers and the 64 Korean members, like Dr. Kim, had opened the way for the sunlight and the water, and the missionaries provided the nutrients. Numerous people were converted, and the Church began to grow.

The Faith of Early Members

The faith of the Korean Saints grew constantly but was often tested. Brother Chun Nak Seo, who after his baptism

Brother Chun served as a full-time missionary in Korea and later as a bishop of the Alameda Ward in Maryland, USA.

Brother Jung Dae Pan was also among those who learned the gospel from the first missionaries to serve in Korea. He had dropped out of the Seoul National University to attend a theological college. His dream was to become a pastor and to lead the Christian community in Korea.

One day a friend gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon in English because a Korean translation hadn't been published yet. He was drawn into reading the book. He even read it during a class. When his classmates asked him what it was, he said that it was a book like

1910: Japan Mission president Alma Owen Taylor visits Korea



◀ 1951: Kim Ho Jik is baptized in Pennsylvania, USA

1952: First Koreans baptized in Korea



◀ 1955: President Joseph Fielding Smith dedicates Korea and organizes the Korea District

1956: Kim Ho Jik works with the government to allow the first missionaries in Korea

joined the army to fulfill his military duty, recalled some trying times: “During the three years of military service, my faith and testimony were tested. One day the company commander was drunk and brought a lot of liquor and pressed it on the company members. Because my colleagues knew that I was LDS, they always emptied the cup for me. But on that evening, the drunken commander was watching me carefully and commanded me to drink from the cup. I said that I didn't drink alcohol, but he ordered me to do so. But I disobeyed again. He took out his pistol and aimed at me and ordered me to drink. Everyone was holding his breath and watching. I once again clearly said, ‘I do not drink alcohol, sir.’ I felt that moment was very long. He finally said, ‘I give up’ and put down the pistol. Everyone sighed with relief and came back to the barracks. The next morning, the company commander came to me and apologized for what he had done the previous night. Later he used to come to me to get advice on personal matters.”⁶

the Bible and recommended that they purchase one.

In the end Brother Jung got in trouble at the college. Administrators summoned him and said that he was succumbing to Satan's temptation to fall into heresy, and they forced him to choose either the school or the Book of Mormon. The decision was not difficult for him because he already knew the Book of Mormon was true.

However, after Brother Jung joined the Church, he suffered social and economic difficulties. The scholarship from the college and the financial support from the previous church discontinued, and all his friends left him. Dr. Kim took good care of him. Later, Brother Jung contributed greatly to the growth of the Church in Korea by translating the Doctrine and Covenants and editing the hymns. The beautiful lyrics he translated still touch the hearts of Korean members.

The number of strong members gradually increased. In July 1962, the Korean Mission was officially organized. Gail E. Carr, a returned missionary who had served in Korea,



was called as the new mission president. This new president made the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon in Korean one of his top priorities. After much pondering and prayer, he assigned the translation work to one of the full-time missionaries, Elder Han In Sang. Elder Han, after reviewing two previous translations,⁷ successfully completed a new translation, and the Book of Mormon was printed in Korean for the first time in 1967.

With the Book of Mormon in their language, many Koreans began to investigate

Korea's First Stake and Temple

In 1973, many Korean Latter-day Saints began to hope that they would soon have a stake. On March 8, 1973, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985), then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, organized the first stake in Korea. About 800 people attended the meeting. The historic first stake in Korea was organized with eight wards and two branches. Church members in Korea could now follow Jesus Christ under the stake leadership of Korean Church leaders

PHOTOGRAPH OF PRESIDENT SPENCER W. KIMBALL COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY

1960s: Branches organized in Seoul, Busan, Incheon, and Kwangju

1962: Korea Mission organized

► 1967: Book of Mormon published in Korean



1973: First stake in Korea—and on mainland Asia—organized in Seoul

1974: The Church's first visitors' center in Kwangju



◀ 1980: President Spencer W. Kimball is the first Church President to visit Korea



the Church at the invitation of their friends. Visitors were so plentiful that the missionaries did not need to seek out investigators, and some missionaries taught all day long.

The zeal of the Korean Saints for missionary work also played a great role in the growth of the Church. One great member missionary was Lee Sung Man of the Jamsil Ward, who joined the Church in his 50s. He had many ups and downs in his life; however, he always had a positive attitude in his religious life. A shoe repairman, he piled up copies of the Book of Mormon in his shop and invited customers to take one for free if they would read it. Over 50 people, including his relatives, joined the Church because of him. He read the standard works dozens of times. They were found beside him when he died.⁸



Mormon Helping Hands volunteers help make tons of kimchi, a traditional Korean dish, at a festival in Seoul. The kimchi is distributed to the poor by churches and civic organizations.

and receive blessings from an ordained Korean patriarch.

Missionary work became even more fervent. Almost 1,200 people were baptized in 1973. The total membership in Korea soon exceeded 8,000, including more than 700 Melchizedek Priesthood holders in 31 wards and branches.

Twelve years later, after constant growth, the Korean Saints were blessed with a long-awaited temple. On December 14, 1985, President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), then the First Counselor in the First Presidency, dedicated the Seoul Korea Temple. This temple was especially meaningful for President Hinckley, who had a special bond with the Korean Saints. He said, “The Korean

Friday of each month, a chartered bus picked up members in the cities of Jinhae-gu, Changwon, Jinju, Sacheon, and Geoje on its way to Seoul. The bus arrived at the temple at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., and the members took a nap for a couple of hours before participating in initiatory ordinances at 5:00 a.m. Then they attended endowment sessions until late in the evening before returning to their homes after 10:00 p.m. The next day they attended church and visited members all day. Brother Kim Choongseok, then stake president, recalls, “They were exhausted but happy.”

Now decades old, the Church in Korea has matured. Local Church leaders strongly support family values and

► 1985: Seoul Korea Temple dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley



1988: Folk Dancers from Brigham Young University perform in the opening ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games, in Seoul



◀ 1991: Elder Han In Sang is called as a General Authority; the one millionth copy of the Korean Book of Mormon is sold in Korea

2001: Elder Dallin H. Oaks meets with South Korean prime minister Lee Han-Dong

people have suffered from a war of aggression, but they love peace and they are a kind people. I shed tears in Korea more than any other place in the world.”⁹ President Hinckley offered the dedicatory prayer, and many who attended were in tears. It was a cold winter day, but the warm Spirit of the Lord dwelt in the temple that day and touched everyone’s hearts.

One of the paintings in the temple depicts Sister Ho Hee Soon, who was baptized in August 1970. She began doing temple work in her 80s. She performed endowments for at least 1,500 people. In 2007 alone, she performed vicarious ordinances for more than 600 people. One American painter, touched by her service, painted her portrait and donated it to the Seoul Temple to commemorate her unceasing efforts to help save souls.

Many other Korean Saints were dedicated to temple work. The Masan stake (now Changwon stake), for example, started regular visits to the temple in 1995. The second

other prophetic priorities. More Korean members are recognizing the importance of worshipping together as a family—holding family home evening, family prayers, and family scripture study. And more teenage Koreans are serving full-time missions than ever before. Thanks to the gospel light, Korean members are building a future that is as bright as their faith. ■

NOTES

1. See Denny Roy, “Kim Ho Jik: Korean Pioneer,” *Ensign*, July 1988, 18; *Liahona*, Feb. 1989, 8.
2. Kim Ho Jik, in Denny Roy, “Kim Ho Jik,” *Ensign*, 20; *Liahona*, 11.
3. Kim Ho Jik, in Denny Roy, “Kim Ho Jik,” *Ensign*, 22; *Liahona*, 14.
4. See Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Oct. 1954, 125–31.
5. See Robert H. Slover, “Korea Dedicated to Preach the Gospel,” *Church News*, Sept. 10, 1955, 4.
6. From the journal of Chun Nak Seo.
7. The Book of Mormon was first translated into Korean in 1961 by Hong Byung Shik, and a selection, the book of 3 Nephi, was published in 1962. Some considered that translation too stiff and literal, so Chung Dae Pan, who was set apart by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley, commenced and finished a new translation in 1964.
8. As related by Brother Lee’s bishop at his funeral on Apr. 8, 2011.
9. From the author’s notes at the dedication of the Seoul Korea Temple on Dec. 14, 1985.