

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN KOREA

Excerpts from a talk given by Pres. Hawkins at a Military Retreat, Nov. 17, 1978

I believe that this Land was opened for missionary work in three different ways. I would like to mention those three ways.

The first one involved a young man who was educated in Japan, had a Doctor's Degree, had been the President of the Su Won Agricultural Experimentation Center, and was one of the leading men in this country on the growth of food products, nutrition, etc. As he was working in Su Won, which is not far south of here, a number of professors and others came from the United States and began to work with him. They told him that they felt that he ought to go to the United States and study. That even though he had a doctor's degree already, the advanced learning that could be afforded to him there would be extremely important to him in the development of his country. He decided to do this and in the late 1940's he went to University, which at that time was, and still is, one of the leading universities in this field and in the world. When he went he was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church. During his early life he was a Buddhist and, of course, had been imbued with elements of Confucianism which is part of traditional Korea.

When he was about 30 years of age his third son took ill one morning and passed away by late evening. This was a great shock to the young man and it so touched his heart that he decided that he ought to find some way to give answers to life's great questions, which at that time he did not know. So, he investigated, became a Christian, joined the Presbyterian Church, became an Elder in that Church. It was as an Elder that he went to Cornell University. As it happened he was put in an office with Brother Oliver Wayment who was a member of the Church. As the Korean War broke out in 1950, Brother Wayment and Dr. Kim began to discuss his family situation. The war had been raging for six months before he heard anything about what had become of his family, whether or not they were even alive. In his great anxiety for the safety of his family, he began to discuss with Brother Wayment some of the purposes of life, family unity, how important they are, and how much he felt that importance at this time when he was unable to be with them.

One day he turned to Brother Wayment and said, *"Can you tell me a little something about your church? I have observed that you do not smoke or drink and you appear to be a very upright and fine man."* Brother Wayment told Dr. Kim that he was a Mormon. Dr. Kim, of course, like many people in the world, had never heard of the Church and did not know anything about it. Brother Wayment gave Dr. Kim a copy of Articles of Faith by James E. Talmage. Within about four days Dr. Kim was back having read the Articles of Faith and told Brother Wayment that this was the most complete presentation of gospel principles that he had ever read, and that, inasmuch as he was involved in the reform of the Presbyterian Church he was going to take these principles that he had read in the Articles of Faith and see if they could not put those into the reform movement within the Presbyterian Church.

Brother Wayment gave Dr. Kim a Book of Mormon and within just a few days he had read it completely.

He said, *"That is God's word. There is no question about that and the only difference between the Book of Mormon and the Bible is that the Book of Mormon is easier to understand".*

Brother Wayment relates that on the last day that he ever saw Doctor Kim, *"I have never before nor since felt more strongly impressed to bear my testimony than I did at that time to that man. And I said to him, 'God has raised you up to do a great work among your people. And if you do not repent and are not baptized God will raise up another in your stead.'"* With that Brother Wayment and Doctor Kim parted.

Dr. Kim began to attend the meetings in Ithaca and it worked out that he could attend opening exercises and part of the Church services there before he would slip out the back and hurry off to the Presbyterian services. Someone pointed out to him one day that it was impossible to put new wine into old bottles, as the Lord had said. That he could not persist in trying to take the things that he was learning or studying and put them into some other organization. Gradually Dr. Kim's heart softened and on July 29th of 1951 he was baptized in the Susquehanna River at the place it is felt that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery baptized each other. He wrote in the back of his Triple Combination that as he came out of the water, *"I heard, very distinctly, a voice say to me 'feed my sheep'".* He said, *"I know that meant that I was to take the gospel to my people in the land of Korea."*

I think this is the opening phase of the mission. He was the first Korean to be baptized into the Church and, even to this time, politically, he is the most influential Asian to ever have been baptized into the Church anywhere. It was later on that he became a cabinet level minister in the government.

In the meantime, the war had begun and the servicemen were here, as you know, servicemen like yourselves, bless your hearts, can not be in one place very long without rubbing shoulders with the next and saying, "what do you know about the Mormon Church, and would you like to know more?" The same was true of the servicemen who came here then. They began to hold meetings together, they began to touch the lives of the people. They taught people and Koreans were baptized into the Church under the influence of these good servicemen.

These servicemen were, then, the second necessary aspect of the opening of this mission. And as we will see someday I am sure, when the histories are all written, that though the Lord abhors war, and war is hell and of the Devil, all things work together for good to them that love God.

Through this terrible war, good things came to pass.

The third aspect in the opening of the mission occurred in (I think it was) 1955, when a young man was appointed to be the Mission President of the Northern Far East Mission. He was about thirty years old, his name was Paul Andrus. He was set apart to be the President of the Northern Far East Mission in Honolulu, which at the time was his home. Brother Stapley, who just passed away, set him apart. After he set him apart Brother Stapley spelled out for him where his mission was. The Northern Far East Mission was headquartered in Tokyo at that time and included Okinawa and Korea.

President Andrus said to Brother Stapley, *"Are we free then to send missionaries to these other places?"* Brother Stapley said to him, *"If I were you I would send them."* The thought had been entertained by the Mission President prior to President Andrus and he had determined not to send them. The war had not long been over and destruction was everywhere.

President Andrus visited Korea and that same year President Joseph Fielding Smith came, and not far from this spot on this same mountain, dedicated the land of Korea to the preaching of the gospel. President Andrus came and met with Doctor Kim and the servicemen and asked them the question, *"Can we send missionaries here?"* And the answer, of course, from the servicemen was, *"Please send them! We have people here to be taught."*

The answer from Dr. Kim, which was always so true of him, *"Oh, absolutely!"* President Andrus said, *"We will have to find a place for them to stay"* and Dr. Kim said, *"Done"*.

"We will have to make sure that we can get things sent in there."

"We will do it."

We used to have things sent over here and at that time customs made it very hard to bring things in. We would get a letter from Japan saying these things have been sent long ago. So we would go down and talk to them and they would say, *"We have not gotten to it yet, I suppose it is back there somewhere. When we find it we will send you a little card or something."* So we would give Dr. Kim a call Dr. Kim would go down and take out one of his business cards and give it to them saying, *"I have such and such an item here."* And they would immediately go into the back and out it would come.

I think these were the three necessary aspects of the beginning of the mission.

1. **Dr. Kim**

(without whose influence I think that the Mission President would have felt very nervous about trying to send people in here even though we had these good servicemen who wanted to help things out) and,

2. **The good servicemen**

Though alone, they were still not enough. They were not the contact with the government, with the way of life, with the things as they were in Korea. But they were an important influence.

3. A Mission President who is desirous to have the work begin

These three things, I think, fit together so that in early 1956 the first two missionaries were sent. President Andrus said that he felt that he ought to send the very best missionaries that he had to Korea. He had not been the mission President very long and he said, *"Now who are the very best missionaries that I have?"* And so he called Richard Detton and Don Powell as the first two missionaries to Korea. In Japan Elder Detton was the Senior companion and Elder Powell was the Junior. When they came to Korea, President Andrus decided that Elder Powell would be the Senior and Elder Detton would be the Junior. A very interesting situation. Elder Powell was a little older, he was married and they had both been on their missions the better part of three years.

Their first house was not far from the capital building. The work began. They could speak Japanese well, but the Korean people at that time, as is true now, to some extent, resented speaking Japanese because they had been subjugated by the Japanese for a long period of time. So, those who did not mind were taught in Japanese. Where that was not possible, they took a group of young members who could speak English and used them as translators where needed.

When I arrived the following year, 1957, we had a fireside at the Mission home in Tokyo with the Mission President and his wife. The Mission President told us that two missionaries of our group would be sent to Korea. He told us that *"Korea is a land that has been devastated by war and what you will not have by way of physical comforts the Lord will make up for with spiritual blessings."* By the time he was finished, everyone wanted to go to Korea. I was grateful that I was one of those who got to come.

We were met at the airport by Elder Carr who was the Presiding Elder here. His companion was one of the servicemen driving a large military truck, our luggage was put in the back, we were put in the back with it and we road the dusty road from Kimpo on into the city, across the bridge and up behind the capital building to Sam Chung Dong, which, at that time, was the district headquarters. I remember that day very well because one of the most significant things that happened to me happened on that day. This man in an overcoat and a brown hat came up embraced me and said, *"Thank you for coming to Korea, and please write and thank your parents for letting you come."* He introduced himself as Kim Ho-jik. I have had occasion to reflect on this moment when a cabinet minister humbled himself by embracing a boy and thanking him for coming to his country. I was very impressed.

In 1958 there were a dozen missionaries who were in Pusan and Seoul. I was in Pusan with three other missionaries. The other three all had hepatitis at the same time. I was the only one who did not have it. I remember one of them, Elder Kimball, had measles at the same time and being jaundiced he made for quite a spectacle. He looked like a beetle of some kind, yellow with red spots all over him. Some of the missionaries in Seoul also had hepatitis.

President Andrus came, and he was very concerned because more than half of us who were here had hepatitis at the time. He called us to a meeting in Seoul. I can remember at the time the Elders in Pusan were all three bedridden. The doctor cautioned them about making a trip to Seoul on the slow train, so we blessed one another, got on the train and went to the conference in Seoul. It was one of the greatest meetings that I have been to in my life. The President said, *"Many of you are ill. It is hard on you, it is too hard on your parents, it is hard on the Brethren who feel responsible for you, and it is hard on me. I am in Japan and cannot keep track of you. How do you feel?"* Each one was given the opportunity in that little room to stand and express himself. As I think about that now, I suppose whatever terms I put it in that it would turn out quite dramatic. It was dramatic, watching every missionary stand and say, *"If the Lord wants to take my life it is alright, I want to give it serving him in this land. I know that he called me here and that God intended that we should be here. I want to stay."*

When we finished the Mission President stood up and he was crying, we all were crying. He said, *"The scriptures say that he that is not willing to give up his life for my sake is not worthy of me."* We were willing to give our lives because we knew we wanted to be worthy of Him.

The Lord prepared this land in many ways for the preaching of His gospel. The Lord intends for the work to go forward here. I am happy to have been a part of it. This is a blessed land. Those who have labored here may have been more blessed than anybody else.