

# DR. KYUNG-CHIK HAN'S EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY: A MODEL FOR KOREAN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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Rev. Kyung-Chik Han is a pastor who has embraced the entire Korean race. Dr. Nak-Jun Baek said, "He has faithfully done exactly what has been needed to bring the gospel to this country." (Byung-Hee Kim, Kyung-Chik Han, 128) Rev. Hyang-Rok Cho evaluated the emeritus pastor by saying, "He has been a pastor that included the whole race and the nation in the realms of his ministry." (Byung-Hee Kim, Kyung-Chik Han, 159) The basic foundation of Rev. Kyung Chik Han's life has been to love God and to love his country. The goal of his life has been to bring the gospel to the nation.

## I. Formation of His Thought

### 1.1 Birth and Growth

As a farmer son Rev. Kyung-Chik Han was born on December 29, 1902 in a farming village Northeast of Pyung Yang known as Kan-Ri, Kong Duk-Myun, Pyung Won-Kun, Pyung An Nam-Do. There had already been a church started by the villagers in that place. The church was started by villagers who had accepted Christ when Rev. Samuel A. Moffet and (Cho Sa Ka) Suk-Jin Han had visited there.

From an early age Rev. Han had attended church and studied the Bible. Rev. Han's father had not sent him to a traditional school, but had him studying in Jin Kwang school which was being operated by the church. There he was learning the modern sciences. From an early age he had learned about Christianity faith and thinking at both church and school. The study of modern science was learning with Confucianism and Chinese characters.

His path to school lead him by the front gate of a rich family's house that had John 3:16 written on it. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So Rev. Han had naturally memorized that verse and that verse had a very significant impact on the shaping of his foundation of faith. Later in the elder years of his life that verse was still planted deep on his heart. (Youngnak Church 35 Years, 49)

When Rev. Han was ten years old, his mother passed away. Rev. Han's father set in his mind, "Since I got married late, my son must marry early and since I wasn't able to study then as much as feasibly possible my son will have the opportunity to study." Therefore when Rev. Han was thirteen years old and he married the sixteen year old young lady, Chan-Bin Kim. (Byung-Hee Kim, Kyung-Chik Han, 10)

### 1.2 Studies in Korea

Upon graduating from the Jin Kwang School he entered into the Osan School. This was a school that the patriot Nam Kang Seung-Hoon Lee founded and Ko Dang Man-Shik Cho was the principle. Finishing Jin Kwang School Rev. Han went into Osan School and started the second year class because his entrance test scores were so high. Rev. Han learned three things in particular at Osan School. First, a sense of patriotism standing upon the vision that since the nation had fallen in despair then Korean youth must bring the nation back to its feet. Second, if they were going to revive the nation then they must learn modern technology, especially science. Third, it doesn't matter how patriotic one is or how much scientific common sense one has, without believing in Jesus Christ a person will never be able to be the

person they were created to be. (Kyung-Chik Han, *Korean Christianity and History I*, 137-138) That is to say, he learned to love his nation and the gospel.

After graduating from Osan School there was a short period that Rev. Han was teaching in the Young Sung School which was operated by the Pyung Yang Bu Gun, Nam San Kol Church. It was during this time as a teacher that Rev. Han, an elder and a group of others from the Nam San Kol Church became involved in an independence movement and they were captured by the Japanese Military Police. They were given the third degree for a few days before being released.

Rev. Han worked as an assistant with secretarial work under missionary William N. Blair in order to make his tuition. This allowed him to enter into the Soong Shil University for studies. He studied science in Soong Shil University. Rev. Han felt like through studying science he would be able to serve the nation and the people.

In his hard studies in Soong Shil University Rev. Han was able to be on the honor role. He was also able to win a prize in the National University Students' Speech Contest. Each vacation Rev. Han would be involved in the Christian Students' Association and go out on evangelistic trips as a witness preaching and sharing the gospel.

During the summer vacation in his third year of studies Rev. Han went with missionary William Blair to the missionary resort site at Kumi Port at the Yellow Sea to assist in the translation of a book. Rev. Han said his time was devoted to a prayer, "How can I ultimately serve the people the uttermost?" (*Korean Christianity and History I*, 138) He described how he spent one day just walking and praying. He feels that during this time of pray his plans in life were changed as God called him giving him a new vision and purpose in life. Rev. Han believes this was when God chose to use him as a vessel and the time that he was called by God. He received a new way of thinking. In his words, "It was good to study science and serve the people, but there is a need to see a fundamental renewal of the people. In order to see a renewal the Gospel must be spread." (*Korean Christianity and History I*, 139) All of a sudden his life's direction changed. Instead of studying science he felt sure that he should study the Bible. (theology)

### 1.3 Studies in America

With the help of missionary William Blair, Rev. Han was able to leave Korea in 1925 and go study liberal arts in Emporia College located in Kansas. In preparation of his studies in theology Rev. Han studied also Philosophy and Psychology.

From 1926 to 1929, Rev. Han studied theology in Princeton Theological Seminary. He worked hard in his theological studies, but he didn't find that so interesting. The topics were focused on the hot theological issues of that time. At that time there was a struggle for what was to end up being a division, fighting and testing within the denomination. The seminary ended up dividing the summer of Rev. Han's graduation. Professor G. Machen split off and started Westminster Theological Seminary. Rev. Han was not interested in joining a party in the division. Rather he focused on studying the scriptures and fundamentals of theology and also, chose a place for spending time in prayer. This became a time where his theological views were developed firmer. Even though he developed a gospel theology he didn't embrace the open views that lead toward a split and division.

Upon graduating from seminary Rev. Han was moving toward going to Yale University for a Ph.D. in Church History. However, while working to make money for tuition he became ill with tuberculosis which changed his plans. At that time he was not able to find treatment for his tuberculosis. He was told to try to find a place to live and relax allowing a natural recovery with time. Rev. Han went to a treatment center in New Mexico for two years trying to recover from the tuberculosis.

This was a time of prayer and reading of many books. He was feeling that it would be a sin to spend the last days of his life just studying without paying the debts he owed to so many kind people. He had a great idea. Rev. Han prayed, "If I just go back to Korea and spend my last days, even if it is only three years, I'll die thankfully." It was after this

decision that Rev. Han experienced the grace of God taking place in a gradual recovery. His prayer had two requests. He confessed his sin. He didn't believe it was a sin to do so much studying, but rather it was the ambition that he had as a student. He was driven with the desire for his name to be known and he wanted a very successful life. This was a false drive and a pursuit of a love of the world. He confessed this sin. The second prayer request was for the opportunity of ministry. His desire to study was taken away. He thought it would be a waste to take the seventeen years of study and just die with his books. His prayer was, "If God would just give him health to allow him to go back to Korea and spend two or three years crying out his faith of the gospel, then God could call him home." (Pastor's Ministry and Theology, September 1992, 197) He died to self and committed his life to God. In the experience of death he became absolutely humble and tenderhearted.

After another time of recovery in Denver, Colorado Rev. Han was able to return to Korea in 1932 with his experience of preparing for death and a heroic commitment.

## II. Han's Early Ministry in North Korea

### 2.1.1 Chaplain and Teacher in Soong In Industrial High School.

After returning to Korea Rev. Han sought out his former teachers and greeted them with his thankfulness. Nam Kang Soong Hoon Lee had passed away, but he was able to meet Ko Dang Man Shik Cho. This teacher Mr. Cho had become the President of the Soong In Industrial High School and when he meet his former student, Rev. Han, and saw his academic and theological maturity, he asked Rev. Han to come and teach English and Bible in his school. Rev. Han had committed his life to being a pastor, but culturally he was unable to avoid the request of his former teacher so Rev. Han agreed to teach at the school. One year later he was invited to Soong Shil University as a professor, but the Imperial Japanese Government blocked giving him the position as a professor saying he had a threatening attitude. That is when Rev. Han was free to begin the ministry that he had committed himself before God to do.

### 2.1.2 Ministry of Second Shineujoo Presbyterian Church

Elder Ki Bum Kim came and invited Rev. Han to be the pastor of the Second Shineujoo Presbyterian Church and Rev. Han accepted beginning his ministry as pastor. This church was a very poor church and they didn't have a sanctuary for worship. However it was a church with a lot of young people and a church with a lot of work to do. Rev. Han was diligent in his ministry. They were able to build a sanctuary and they saw a lot of people come into the church. The church grew larger.

Rev. Han became a model pastor and scholar in this ministry. He was refined, humble and tenderhearted and he gained the respect of all the members of the Sineujoo Church. His ministry was built upon the foundation of evangelism, education and service. His focus was not just a ministry to the believing members of his church, but he saw the poor, pitiful orphans and the elderly to be a part of his ministry so the church started the Borinwon. (an orphanage)

The Japanese Government demanded the Koreans to worship the shrines. The General Assembly and the Presbyteria was forced to make a resolution to the worship of shrines as a national precedent. This was when the persecution of the church got underway. All different denominations were brought together and put under the Japanese Denomination. Rev. Han was clearly against the worshiping of shrines instructing people that this was the worship of idols and he told everyone that they should not do it. He emphasized to the church members that they should pursue a love for country and race. The Imperial Japanese said that Rev. Han had studied in the states and had an anti-Japanese mentality and they forced him to resign from the church.

### 2.1.3 Borinwon

From resignation from the church up to Korea's independence of 1945, Rev. Han was involved in Borinwon taking care of orphans and poor people. This was a period of praying and researching the scriptures as he had withdrawn. Many churches and church members got involved offering help to see the survival of the Borinwon ministry and life went on. During this time he was able to experience the love of Christ in his ministry of the orphans and the elderly. Honesty in poverty, hard work, service and prayer were the assets acquired through this life.

The Japanese surrendered in 1945 and the Japanese governor met Rev. Han. He asked him to be a peace maker in the local area during the time that the Japanese were leaving. He said that the hatred of the Japanese was very sever and he requested help to see that sinister actions wouldn't occur. He cordially requested it saying that Rev. Han was the only person that could possibly be the responsible person to see that peace was maintained in that area during the transition of power. On the spot Rev. Han brought together a gathering of people to begin the process of self-government. The leaders in the church also constructed a self-government board to maintain peace and order.

However, the Russian soldiers came into North Korea and settled. They brought in communism and seized control with their own decisions. On one hand in South Korea the American soldiers stayed and began control with military power. The country was divided the North and the South. Rev. Han and colleagues desired to organize a Christian Democratic Society, but they didn't have any military power behind them. Several colleagues were arrested and taken away. October 1945 Rev. Han running from the persecution of communism and escaped to South Korea. Under the rule of the imperialism of Japan and then under the rule of Communism was an experience being cut to heart learning how precious one's own country really was. The gospel was the only thing that could meet their needs for an uplifting of their own country and people.

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