

Kim Ku's Conversion in 1904

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Kim Ku (金九, 1876-1949) was born in Haeju, Hwanghae province, and studied Confucian classics in his boyhood. When he failed at the national examination in 1892, he began to read Taoist books and military classics. In 1893 he joined the Tonghak and became the youngest captain in northern Korea. In September of 1894, his troops were defeated in the attack of Haeju and scattered by the raid of another Tonghak party. Kim fled and hid himself for several months, and then traveled to Manchuria. In March 1896, he killed a Japanese officer at Anak as a revenge of the assassinated Queen. He was arrested and confined in the Chemulp'o Prison, where he read books on the history and geography of the world. King Kojong's phone call saved Kim's life just before his execution in September of 1897. Kim broke out of the jail in March 1898 and wandered all corners of the country and once he became a Buddhist monk. The imprisonment and a long "pilgrimage" of the country led Kim to believe that the awakening of the people, not by old Confucianism but by new learning, was the way to the national independence. His father died in 1900 and his fiancé in 1903. U Chong-Sŏ who had been a military adviser of Kim's Tonghak troops and became a Presbyterian helper, visited Kim and exhorted him to believe in Christianity. Kim read the Scriptures and tracts and decided to join the Christian Church. He attended a Bible class held by W. M. Baird and W. B. Hunt's in Haeju in November of 1903, and baptized by W. B. Hunt.

Kim Ku attended the Bible class held in the P'yŏngyang Presbyterian Church on December 31, 1903. Kim began to study the Christian scriptures and doctrines intensely for two weeks. He returned to Haeju and moved to Changyŏn in February of 1904 and stayed at the house of O Jin-Haying, a local gentleman, who supported Kim to open a school (Pyongyang School) at his guest room. Kim taught the children of Mr. O's family and other pupils.

He also preached the gospel to the town's people with his younger brother O Sun-Hyŏng, who was a student of Sungsil School of P'yŏngyang. Then he had to return to his home on account of the Russia-Japan War.

Kim Ku and O Sun-hyŏng gathered a group of about 40 Christians and led the Sunday services. Two young men went to P'yŏngyang in the summer of 1904 to attend a teachers' training class and helpers' class. Kim Ku received the leadership training for a month. He stayed at Pang Ki-ch'ang's house. Two former Tonghak captains—Kim and Pang—studied Christian doctrines and church ministry together for a month! In 1894 they were military revolutionists with rifles in their hands; in 1904 they were Christian leaders with a New Testament in their hands. They regarded Christianity as the alternative for the regeneration of the nation. When Kim and O returned home, Ch'oi Kwang-Ok (崔光玉), a graduate from Sungsil School and a young leader of the church, accompanied them. Ch'oi's protracted evening meetings at Mr. O's house resulted in the conversion of O's family and others.

a. "Country Evangelistic Work: From Annual Report of Pyeng Yang Station, September 1904," Korea Field (Nov. 1904): 217.

The Anak circuit reports two young men, Kim Kwi and O Sunhung, converted during the past year and already widely known both by reason of their work for souls and for the inspiration they are to others. They are men of good families and in comfortable circumstances so that they can give much time to study and to preaching. Mr. Kim was converted last autumn, and put in several months at classes; including the Pyeng Yang Winter Class. In February he moved from Haiju to the magistracy of Chang Yung, where he has been untiring in teaching and preaching. Mr. O is a resident of Chang Yung, and last fall for the first time entered the Academy. He was not then a professing Christian, but was interested and was reading the Bible. His Academy work was good, and from the first he took an active part in religious exercises. During the evangelistic campaign in the city, he made his first attempt at street preaching. When the Japanese army came into Pyeng Yang he returned to his home, and with Mr. Kim began teaching what he knew of the Gospel. He opened his own house for the work, besides preaching in the markets, on the street corners, and to the groups of farmers as they were resting from their work. It was not long till others were interested, and they began to gather in Mr. O's house for Sunday services. The meetings have an attendance of about 40 persons and Mr. O considered the work too important to leave, even that he may attend the Academy next fall, though he hopes yet to be able to complete the course.

b. "Progress at the Academy: From Personal Report of Dr. W. M. Baird, September 1904," Korea Field (Nov. 1904): 229.

I might give many encouraging instances, but have space for but one. A student named O, from Whang Hai Do, entered school as an inquirer last fall. He belonged to a wealthy family of country gentlemen. He became convinced by the general influence and teachings of the school that Christianity was the truth, and after returning preached it earnestly to his home neighborhood. The war prevented his return to school but he remained at home to preach to his friends and neighbors in his own sarang and out on the streets to the crowds on fair days. The result is a group started and meeting in his house. He and a friend in his who had become a Christian started a school in the neighborhood. They both attended the normal class for teachers and remained through to attend the summer class for leaders. Upon their return home they asked Choi Kwang Ok, one of the tutors of the Academy, who graduated this year, to accompany them home and preach to their neighbors. He went, and they preached to their companions on the boat on the way home. Two of these, from the county of Sin Chun, professed to accept Christ. On reaching their home Choi preached every night in the sarang, strengthening the

believers there, and after a while returned home rejoicing with the report that five new persons at the home of young O had professed conversion.

c. Samuel A. Moffett, “An Educated Ministry in Korea,” Men and the Modern Missionary Enterprise (1907), 139.

Elder Bang, now 55 years of age, is the oldest man in the “seminary.” He is preeminently the traveling evangelist, and has had to do with organizing more country groups than any other man. In 1894 he was a leader of a band of Tong Haks—revolutionists who tried to overthrow the government and expel foreigners. Fleeing for his life, he came to a little village where Mr. Lee and I were preaching and followed us to Pyeng Yang.

Further References

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