



FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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Joon Sup Han

February 5, 1975

He Escaped P.O.W. Camp
To Evangelize Thousands

By Jim Newton
For Baptist Press

The Communists of North Korea may even now be regretting that they ever let Chaplain Joon Sup Han escape from a makeshift Prisoner of War (P.O.W.) camp in the early days of the Korean conflict.

Chaplain Han, more than any other person, has been credited with leading the movement to make Christians of the servicemen in the Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) forces.

And it all started the very day the Communists from North Korea invaded South Korea--June 25, 1950.

That was the day Chaplain Han preached his first sermon as a chaplain in the R.O.K. Army.

A native of North Korea, he had come to the South in 1947 to study at a Protestant seminary. He had become a Christian only two years earlier, in 1945, just a few weeks after the end of World War II at a Methodist church not far from his home. Disturbed about Communist attempts to organize and stir up the poor in North Korea, he went to South Korea to enter the ministry.

"I saw no hope in Communism, but I saw hope in the church," he recalled.

After graduating from seminary, he volunteered for chaplaincy duty in the R.O.K. Army. Almost immediately the North Koreans invaded the South.

During the first year of the war, Chaplain Han was captured and taken to North Korea where he was held in a P.O.W. camp. But security was not very tight and Chaplain Han, along with a few others, managed to escape.

For 10 days, he hid in the mountains of North Korea. He had nothing to eat for a week. He thought he would die.

As he hid in the mountains, he prayed, "Lord, did you lead me to the seminary and into the chaplaincy and then here just to die?" He asked God to spare his life so he could serve Him in the ministry.

Chaplain Han managed to get out of North Korea and eventually down to Pusan, by taking a boat that came in the middle of the night to rescue the chief of police, who already had taken an earlier boat. He rejoined his unit and served the rest of the war as a chaplain.

Chaplain Han worked his way up through the ranks to become chief chaplain for the First R.O.K. Army.

Concerned about the spiritual welfare of his men, he contacted Gideons International and managed to secure enough Korean-language pocket New Testaments to give to all 300,000 men of the First Army.

Then he sought a publisher who would print enough pocket hymnals to give to the men so they could have "a Bible in every pocket and a song in every heart."

He taught the Korean soldiers to sing the great hymns of faith with spirit and gusto. "Onward Christian Soldiers" became his theme song.

Chaplain Han's work came to the attention of Gen. Han-Shen, commanding officer of the R.O.K. First Army who later became chairman of the R.O.K. equivalent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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It was not long until Chaplain Han rose to become deputy chief of chaplains, and later chief of chaplains for the R.O.K. Army, Navy and Air Force.

It was in this role that Chaplain Han made the suggestion that the Communists to the North may even now regret.

It was in 1968, soon after an assassination attempt on President Chung Hee Park. The Joint Chiefs of Staff got word through their intelligence sources that North Korea was considering another invasion to the South.

The generals lamented that the soldiers from North Korea seemed to have a much stronger morale and spirit than the men in the South Korean armed forces.

Chaplain Han suggested that if the Korean soldiers would become Christians, they would be better anti-Communists, patriots who love their country, who love democracy and who love peace.

The joint chiefs bought the idea and authorized Col. Han to beef up the chaplaincy program.

Chaplain Han began immediately to try to recruit more chaplains, to provide them with motorcycles so they could visit the men in the fields and conduct services every day, and to recruit chaplains' assistants in every battalion, company, platoon, and squad.

He set up an intensive schedule of preaching services and evangelistic campaigns among the chaplains, so that every chaplain would preach every day to the men in different areas. He pushed the concept that men don't just worship on Sunday, they worship whenever the chaplain comes, even if it is in the middle of the week.

He secured enough Bibles, more than 3 million copies, to give to every member of the R.O.K. armed forces and almost enough pocket hymnals to give to everyone.

In 1969, when the new religious emphasis in the military began, there were only 40,000 Christians in the R.O.K. services, Chaplain Han said. Now there are more than 200,000.

When the commanding officers saw the benefits of their men becoming Christians, they began to set quotas to encourage the chaplains to win more and more of the men to some religious belief. Some quotas have been as high as 70 per cent.

The quotas are not "orders," but they are considered to be rather strong "suggestions."

With the emphasis on "quotas" for conversion, are these decisions for Christ truly professions of faith, Chaplain Han was asked in an interview.

He admitted he did not know and that no one knows except God alone. He quickly added that he feels it is the responsibility of the Christian churches in Korea to follow up on these decisions and to teach and train these men what Christianity is all about.

Chaplain Han said he believes that the tremendous response to the gospel in Korea is not intended to benefit Korea alone, but that Korea will one day reach out with missions efforts to other lands.

He is especially concerned about the status of Christians in his native North Korea, saying he had not heard from his own family since the 1950 war.

One day, he believes, North and South Korea will be reunited, not by confrontation of force against force. "If we truly become the people of God, this desire of our hearts (for the reunification of North and South Korea) will be fulfilled.

"I do not think that Communism can stand against the force of the gospel," declared the 47-year-old Han, now retired from the military but still active in the reserves.

"This is a great Christian warrior," said Southern Baptist missionary O.K. Bozeman, who translated the interview with Chaplain Han. "He's got a great vision. He has been responsible for thousands and multiplied thousands coming to the Lord."

Clergy Group Condemns
Jailing of Soviet Baptist

NASHVILLE (BP)--The national board of directors of the Academy of Parish Clergy (ACP) voted in a meeting here to "condemn the action of the Soviet government in its repression of religious freedom" and particularly "the action of Soviet authorities in sentencing to five years in prison, Georgi Vins, a Baptist leader in the USSR."

In a board action, signed by the ACP's executive director, Robert W. Croskery of Minneapolis, Minn., the ACP further resolved to "condemn the repression of Jews in the Soviet Union requesting to emigrate" and urged that "they be granted basic human rights."

The ACP, founded in 1968, is made up of 1,100 Protestant, Jewish and Catholic clergy from 49 states of the United States and six foreign countries. Its national president is F. Dean Luking, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest, Ill.

Vins, a leader of dissident Soviet Baptists, according to wire reports out of Moscow, was sentenced by a court in Kiev in the Ukraine to five years in prison and five years more in "internal exile" for "illegal religious activities."

Reportedly in poor health in a Kiev hospital, Vins, 46, was serving as an underground Baptist pastor when he was arrested last March. He is executive secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, a movement considered illegal by the Soviet government. It broke off several years ago from the officially-recognized All Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

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FEB 7 1975

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