



# Kept by the Power of God

The courageous testimony of a  
Korean minister and his wife  
in the face of brutal Japanese and  
Communist persecution.

*Si-Moon Lee and Ye-Sun Kim*



When twenty-year-old Si-Moon Lee and his eighteen-year-old bride Ye-Sun Kim joined their lives before God, they started out on a forty-six-year adventure in faith and service for Christ. During that time they endured separation and deprivation and often looked death in the eye. At the time of their marriage they were Korean refugees from Japanese oppression (Japan had annexed Korea in 1910 and occupied it until 1945) and had lived in Manchuria for about ten years. There each of them had come under the sound of the gospel and had confessed Christ as personal Saviour and Lord.

As a newly married couple they became busy and successful. They were active in their local Presbyterian church, where Si-Moon Lee was elected an elder when he was just twenty-six years old. The son of an unsuccessful small farmer, he had started his working life as a coal miner. Now he decided to launch his own carpentry business and was soon the proud employer of about fifteen people. A thriving business did not satisfy the heart of Si-Moon Lee, however. He had a great burden to preach the gospel, and so in 1939 he took his family from Manchuria to Chung Jin in northwest Korea with the aim of studying for the Christian ministry.

A year later he went to Japan for seminary training. He spent his vacations from school back in Chung Jin doing the work of an evangelist. In 1944, having successfully completed his seminary course, Si-Moon Lee returned to Chung Jin where after a brief assistantship he became the minister of the large First Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterian Church in Korea, especially in the northern part of the country, had experienced a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early years of the century and was still enjoying much blessing on its ministry. It had withstood both the brutality and the blandishments of the Japanese occupying forces. Now it was about to enter a period of even greater peril and persecution.

As World War II was coming to an end, the armed forces of both the Soviet Union and the United States—then allies in the war against Germany and Japan—were attacking

Japanese positions in Korea. Both Russian and American warplanes bombed Chung Jin. One bomb—perhaps aimed at the nearby harbour—landed right outside the Lees' home but failed to explode. In a similar incident just a few days before an entire block had been destroyed. The Lees saw their escape, not as a matter of luck, but as their gracious Father in heaven preserving them to serve Him in the momentous times ahead.

The Russians and the Americans fought to drive Japan out of Korea and in 1945 liberated the country from a thirty-five year occupation. However, there was scant reason or time to celebrate. American forces occupied the southern part of the country in the name of the United Nations while Soviet troops occupied and took control of the land north of the thirty-eighth parallel. In North Korea the communists promised freedom of worship, but it was a hollow promise as their brutal atrocities soon proved.

In May 1946 the communist authorities required Rev. Si-Moon Lee to address a crowd of 100,000 people to denounce the South Korean leaders and the United States. Instead, he courageously used the occasion to denounce the presence and practices of the Soviets in Korea. From that moment he was a man marked for death. He had foreseen his danger and had made an escape plan. When a well-placed church member tipped him off about his impending arrest, he disguised himself as a beggar and made his escape. Carrying a special cane he had designed—it was hollowed out to hide his money and a number of containers of hot peppers to throw in the faces of any would-be pursuers—he made his way to safety in South Korea.

The frustrated communists tried to scare his wife into betraying his whereabouts.

They interrogated her relentlessly and threatened her life. When they put a gun to her head, they succeeded in terrifying her, but she could not betray her husband, for he had had the foresight not to divulge his plans to anyone.

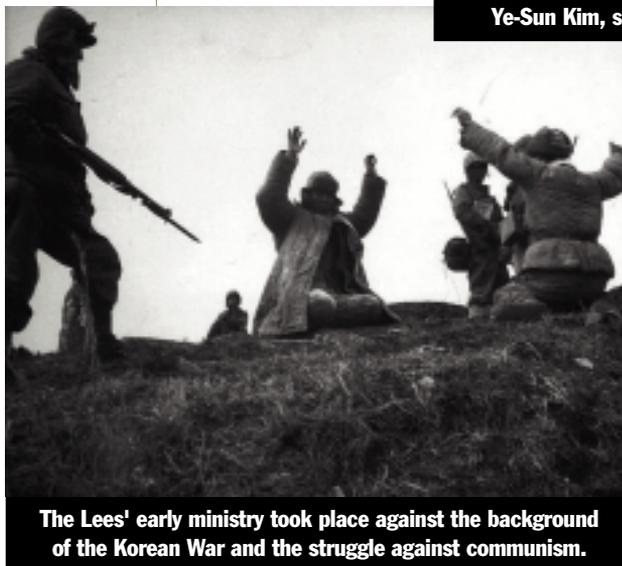
Six months after her husband's escape Mrs. Lee and her four young children received permission to visit her home town, which was near the border with South Korea. In that area guides were available to take people safely across the border to freedom. So the young mother and her little ones set

packed all her family's essential possessions and carried them on her head. She had an even more precious burden to carry on her back, her one-year-old daughter, Sheila. Though she was small of stature, Mrs. Lee

was very strong and for a time was able to keep up with the rest of the party of refugees. However, the weight of her double burden began to slow her progress and the others finally had to tell her that they must press on without her. She entrusted her three older children to their care, and the guides told her the name of an inn where she would find them on her arrival in South Korea.



**A 1933 photo of Si-Moon Lee and his wife, Ye-Sun Kim, shortly after their marriage.**



**The Lees' early ministry took place against the background of the Korean War and the struggle against communism.**

out to make their escape. The first part of the journey was by truck and Mrs. Lee, thinking that they would be able to have this transportation all the way into South Korea, carried her husband's precious books with her. She soon learned that both the truck and the books had to be left behind and the dangerous journey across the border made on foot. So she

Exhausted, she sank down into the soft snow and remained there until she had regained enough strength to resume her journey to freedom. It was a dangerous undertaking for she had to pass through a brightly floodlit area where there were numerous Russian guards with dogs ready to howl at the presence of an intruder. Cautiously she made her way through the danger zone. Her one-year-old baby did not so much as whimper to betray their presence to the nearby guards. And not a dog barked as she crawled her way to safety. Across the border she found her other children and proceeded by train to Seoul, the South Korean capital.

It had been six long months since Mr. Lee had fled south. He and his wife well knew that they might never meet in this world again. The uncertainty of each other's situation drove them both to their knees for the safe reunion of the family. God answered prayer in a marvellous way. Not only did He enable Mrs. Lee and the children to escape to



Seoul, but He so ordained matters that on her arrival at the railway station she “chanced” to meet a friend of her husband’s, a man who knew his whereabouts and was able to lead her to him. That was a joyous reunion.

A church in Seoul invited Mr. Lee to become its minister and he agreed. He did not take up that pastorate, however, for as he was moving to do so, the elders from another church in the city of Jung-Eup, far to the south, commandeered him to become their minister! Ministers from the north were in special demand as men of spiritual power, men with a vital experience of revival. So the Lees moved south to Jung-Eup.

That move probably saved Mr. Lee’s life. On June 25, 1950, the North Korean communists suddenly launched the attack that commenced the Korean War. They quickly overran Seoul and by July 16 had reached Jung-Eup. But Mr. Lee, knowing he was a marked man, had already made good his escape to Pusan, the only large city to escape the North Korean invasion.

Mrs. Lee could not go with him, for she was within a few days of delivering her son David. Those were terrible days. Soon after David’s birth Mrs. Lee received a summons to appear before the communist invaders for questioning. She carried her eight-day-old baby three kilometers to meet her interrogators. As they had done in 1946 they threatened her and tried to terrify her. Once again they put a gun to her head. This time she faced them and their threats without fear.

Mrs. Lee knows why she reacted differently this time. She traces it to a wonderful experience of the Lord’s power that she had in 1949. Then, convicted about her lack of real power in prayer, she had cried to God to fill her with His power. He had answered her in a remarkable way and ever since she had been—and to this day still is—a mighty prayer warrior. So it was no weak, trembling woman the communists faced that day, but one who knew the power of God and did not fear the face of man. While they dispatched others without a thought, they let her go

unharméd, possibly on account of the baby in her arms.

Still, those were times of great peril. Mrs. Lee’s daughter Insun was then just a very young girl, but she remembers vividly how the family was hiding in a neighbour’s house from communist fighters who had attacked the town. Everyone hid in the attic—all except Insun, who had a terrible cough, and a woman with a baby that was crying loudly. So as not to risk giving away the others in the house these three had to remain in the kitchen, obvious to any North Korean killers who would enter. And merciless killers they were. Insun watched through the window as they went to the house next door and brutally killed the family there. Just when it appeared that there was no hope that she could escape the same fate, some American warplanes flew overhead and the communists ran off to the hills. Once again the Lees were safe.

When the North Koreans were finally driven back, the Lees were reunited and moved to take up the ministry in Westgate Presbyterian Church in the city of Jun-Joo. The church was the oldest and largest church in the area and there the Lord blessed Mr. Lee’s ministry, not only as a preacher and evangelist, but also as a stalwart for the faith. When liberalism threatened the church—indeed when the liberals sought to appoint a liberal minister over his head and take over the church by force—he stood firm and delivered the

church from their grasp. Later, when ecumenism threatened the church, he again took a faithful and effective stand against it.

On his retirement from Westgate Church Mr. Lee and his wife moved to Seoul where he pastored a small congregation of about one hundred people right up to his death of lung cancer in 1974. When he was too weak to do anything else, he still preached even though he had to be carried to the pulpit to do so.

The six months before his death were especially precious to his son David. Day by day David read the Bible to his father and prayed and sang for him the great hymns of the faith. Those days brought David face to face with eternity. In his words, “Heaven was very real.” He saw the vital reality of his father’s faith and came under conviction of his own spiritual need. Thus his father’s dying was the means of David’s coming into eternal life by faith in Christ.

Rev. Si-Moon Lee died with his family around him during a special family worship service. Knowing he would die that day, he called his loved ones together and tried to lead their worship. He was too weak so his brother brought the word of God and the family repeatedly sang “The Old Rugged Cross.” Mr. Lee sank back exhausted, obviously near to death. His wife had one last question to ask: “Are you holding on to Christ?” Weakly but definitely he nodded “Yes,” and as the family sang he slipped away from them into the presence of His Lord.

Today Mrs. Lee lives in Greenville, South Carolina, with her son David and his family. Of the seven who survive of her ten children, four live in the United States and three in South Korea. David is the minister of the Korean Free Presbyterian Church in Greenville and so carries on his father’s faithful, separated stand for Christ and His gospel. ■

**Today, Mrs. Lee is a grandmother and great-grandmother and a prayerful support to her son, Rev. David Lee.**

